

## Effective steps to streamline private universities called for

THE University Grant Commission in its annual report for 2015 has revealed a number of worrying facts about private universities. As New Age reported on Tuesday based on the commission's report, 39 out of 52 private universities founded more than 10 years ago have yet to move to their own campuses although the law requires them to complete such relocation in seven years of their establishment. Fifty-four out of 85 private universities did not submit audit reports to the commission for the year while those which submitted audit reports did not comply with the provision of enrolling three per cent of the students from freedom fighters' children and providing them with free education. Eighteen of the universities have unauthorised vice-chancellors, pro-vice-chancellors and treasurers as they are not approved by the chancellor while there are similar kind of vice-chancellors in 47 private universities, pro-vice-chancellors in 78 and treasurers in 61 universities. Twenty-eight of the universities spent nothing on research and 14 private universities held no meeting of their boards while the syndicates and finance committees in 13 others failed to meet even once and the number of private universities where trustee boards, syndicates, academic councils and finance committees faced a similar situation was three in the year.

In fact, one has little reasons for surprise at the sorry state of the compliance with the Private University Act 2010 as the government has largely been anything but serious about the enforcement of the law in the period. One can recall here that the education ministry has extended the deadline for private universities to shift to their own campuses on repeated occasions so far apparently under pressure from their owners most of whom allegedly enjoy huge political clout. Additionally, the incumbents like their predecessors allowed private universities to mushroom in rental buildings and, in most cases, without any permanent and qualified teachers in Dhaka in particular because of the same reasons since their assumption of office in 2009. Overall, one has also no reasons for surprise at the UGC failure so far to make the highest seats of learning comply with the 2010 act that clearly requires them to run only on a non-profit basis.

In any case, the UGC has proposed an amendment to the law so that it can appoint observers either from its members or university teachers with 20 years' experience in teaching, research and administrative duty in all private universities to end irregularities there. It can, indeed, be a step in the right direction if the observers to be appointed sincerely discharge their stipulated duties without any disregard for the institutions' academic freedom. However, it is also true that, for this to happen, the commission should select the observers without any partisan bias while the government should come out of flawed partisan policies on the operation of educational institutions, many of which have huge potential to address the deficit the country is now facing in producing adequate and quality professionals.