

Pvt universities need to be streamlined

FOOT-DRAGGING by some private universities to move to their own campuses after they have missed five deadlines is unacceptable. Education ministry, as New Age reported on Monday, would send letters to these universities seeking explanation of why they failed to move to their permanent campuses in seven years and carry out audit in line with the law. If they failed to provide a satisfactory reply, the government would stop enrolment of students at the universities, the ministry officials said on Sunday. The Private University Act 2010 requires private universities to move to their own campuses in seven years after establishment. The law also stipulates that they must own permanent campuses each on an acre of land in the capital or two acres outside the capital. There are 95 private universities and of them 51 were set up between 1992 and 2003. University Grants Commission officials said that 19 out of 51 universities, older than seven years, had so far shifted to their permanent campuses. The latest UGC report 2016, submitted to parliament during the second week of February, says that 25 universities submitted their audit report in line with law in that year while 31 universities submitted audit report in 2015. Controversy, however, has never left the private universities since the Private University Act presented the opportunity to open higher education matrix to the private sector in 1992.

The act was generally hailed as a step in the right direction. With the number of public universities having proved inadequate against the increasing demand for higher education, the private universities were viewed as an important alternative in the higher education network. However, most of these private universities seem to have become money-making entities for their investors, as the UGC, tasked with regulation and monitoring of the higher educational institutions, is hard pressed to keep these institutions in a tight leash and make them comply with the law. The prevailing chaos in private-sector higher education has clearly been the result of accrued enforcement failures by the authorities concerned. The authorities have talked tough but failed to translate their talks into demonstrative actions. Even, in many cases, they have appeared unduly lenient with the aberrant institutions. For example, the Awami League-led government issued an ultimatum in December 2010 that it would impose an embargo on student enrolment if the non-compliant universities did not move to their own campuses by October 2011 but eventually, in January 2012, decided to grant them a year's extension. Against such a grim background, the government's assertion that the ministry would take action against the non-compliant universities sounds anything but assuring.

Although a few private universities do try to abide by the law, it is a large number of the aberrant universities that are bringing the entire private-sector higher education system into disrepute. The incumbents, therefore, need to look into the matter and take the aberrant ones to task in no time to set a prohibitive legal precedent.