

## Pvt univs need to be streamlined

MOST of the private universities seeking more time to move to their own campuses after they have missed three deadline and after some of the universities have shifted to own campuses is unacceptable. These universities have, as New Age reported on Thursday, sought time between one year and five years to move to their own campuses as they are supposed to submit reports to the University Grants Commission. 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, at least, in the capital or two acres outside the capital. There are 83 private universities and 52 of them have completed seven years in operation. What is disconcerting is that only 11 universities have shifted to their own campuses. Controversy 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. As has been reported in the media, time and again, most of these universities have flouted, sometimes with a sense of impunity, different provisions of the law that regulate their operation.

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 University Grants Commission, tasked with regulation and monitoring of the higher educational institutions, is hard pressed to keep these institutions on 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 regulatory, monitoring and enforcement failures over the years 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 assertion by the education minister on August 13 that the ministry would take action against the non-compliant universities sounds anything but assuring.

Although a handful of private universities do try to abide by the law, it is a larger 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 prohibitive legal precedent.