

Worrying that so many private univs with none at helm

THE Private University Act 2010 appears to have been more honoured in the breach in that 29 of the 94 private universities have none of the three top-ranking academic and administrative officials — the vice-chancellor, the pro-vice-chancellor and the treasurer. While only five of the total number of private universities have all the three officials, vacant is the position of vice-chancellor in 47 of the universities, of pro-vice-chancellor in 78 universities and of treasurer in 61 universities. The figures paint a bleak picture as while this is illegal, it also harms both the academic and administrative environment as well as oversight functions as, according to the chair of the University Grants Commission who is quoted in the report as saying, the presence of the full-time vice-chancellor, the pro-vice-chancellor and the treasurer is a must for smooth functioning of any university. This is a bad situation as the vice-chancellor is the authorised signatory of certificates given to the students, although the pro-vice-chancellor can carry discharge the duty in the absence of the vice-chancellor, and the treasurer is responsible for financial and administrative issues.

While the absence of one of the three is enough for university activities to falter, the absence of two or all the three of the top officials could further compound the situation. In the situation that has come about, it is left for all to wonder why the University Grants Commission has not so far taken any step in this regard while many of the universities not having all, or one or even two, of the top three officials have passed so many years in operation. There have been allegations that many owners and boards of trustees of private universities conveniently avoid appointing people in these positions full-time deliberately so that they do not need to lose their control of recruitment, education and daily activities of the institutions. This calls for an inquiry followed up by appropriate action by the University Grants Commission although the Association of Non-Government Universities sought to brush aside any such allegation of ill-intention. The association however gave two reasons regarding no recruitment in these positions — the universities do not find academics qualified enough to fill in the positions and many of them are not financially able to appoint people to these positions while some avoid such appointments to avoid any conflict between the vice-chancellor and the pro-vice-chancellor, as experienced earlier. The arguments appear to be lame and hardly hold water as these appointments have hardly ever been issues with public universities.

The University Grants Commission and other relevant authorities, under the circumstances, must not overlook the issues while the private universities barely have reasons to gloss over the situation. The authorities, therefore, are well advised to sit with private university authorities, owners or boards of trustees to sort out these issues and take effective steps in case of any breaches.