

Delicate case of public university affiliation

THE move for placing the 281 government colleges, for bachelor's and master's courses, back under public universities has been stuck for about two years since the prime minister asked the education ministry in August 2014 to arm up public universities with the authority to affiliate colleges. The decision was intended to do away with prolonged academic life of students that they are beset with under the National University. The colleges, both government and non-government, offering bachelor's and master's courses, were taken away from public universities — Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi which were then in control — and were put, along with degree conferment issues, under the National University when it was founded in 1992. The decision on putting them all under the National University was then made to do away with the prolonged academic life of students that they all faced under public universities. The same reason now prompts the government to undo what it did — partially though, as non-government colleges offering higher education would still remain under the National University — about 25 years ago, all to the benefits of the students. This time, only the government colleges are supposed to get back under 20 public universities, to make the situation less complicated.

The proposition, despite all this, calls attention to certain issues. As for transfer of the affiliating authority of government colleges to public universities, there have still been some issues for the government to attend to. Seventeen of the 20 public universities that could get back the authority to affiliate colleges need to have offices of inspectors of colleges — the remaining three, Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi, already have such offices as they still have limited affiliating functions. Apart from creating 837 positions in such offices, as recommended by a committee set up to oversee the task, the University Grants Commission needs to assess which colleges to be affiliated to which university and gather information on manpower and financial aspects of relevant universities. There is also the budgeting issue as each of the 17 universities would need to spend money on creating the offices. The most important task that remains is to have the laws that govern the 17 universities amended to empower them to affiliate colleges. While all this would take some time, another issue that remains to be looked into is that the government would need to routinely shelve out money both for the affiliating universities and the National University. The National University now has 2.2 million students enrolled with 2,200 colleges and with 1.2 million students, enrolled with 281 government colleges, moving back under the public universities, the self-reliance of the National University, which has so far not needed any money from the government for its functioning, could be a little precarious.

Moving all the colleges under the National University entailed, along with prospects, some risks, with the one on prolonged academic tenure of students still remaining unresolved, moving some of them back under public universities may not be easy. It is, therefore, wise for the relevant authorities to move cautiously so that students would not get mired in the same problem again.