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UGC wants power for terror watch

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The University Grants Commission wants power to appoint observers to the boards of trustee of all private universities to increase its supervision on them following allegations of militant activities in some private universities.

The UGC has already recommended to the government to amend the Private University Act 2010 and incorporate a provision in the act to allow it to appoint observers to the trustee boards.

UGC Chairman Prof Abdul Mannan said this at a briefing at its office in the capital's Agargaon yesterday.

At present, there are at least 95 private universities in the country.

Talking to The Daily Star, Sheikh Kabir Hossain, president of the Private University Association of Bangladesh, said he didn't agree with the UGC proposal.

"I don't think there is any logic behind appointing UGC observers to the trustee boards as there are government and UGC representatives in a university's syndicate committee that runs the institution," he said.

He, however, said it is for the government to decide what is good for the country.

At the briefing, Prof Mannan also announced formation of a three-member committee which will closely watch whether any militant activity is going on in the 134 private and public universities across the country.

UGC Member Prof Akhtar Hossain will act as convener of the committee, while Jesmin Pervin, deputy director of

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the Private University Division of the UGC, and Shahin Siraj, its deputy secretary, will act as members of the monitoring team, said Prof Mannan.

The committee would make surprise visits to the universities any time. It would report to the education ministry and law enforcement agencies for taking action if it finds proof of militant activities in any university, added the UGC chairman.

About the allegations of militant activities at some higher educational institutions, Prof Mannan, quoting recent media reports, said the problem appears to be more serious in public universities than in private universities.

Formed in 1973, the primary objectives of the UGC are to supervise, promote and coordinate university education. It now has five members.

The UGC is also responsible for maintaining the standard and quality in all public and private universities across the country.

The issue of alleged militant activities at educational institutions, especially at the universities, came into the spotlight following the July 1 terror attack on the Holey Artisan Bakery in the city's Gulshan area. Twenty-two

people, including 17 foreigners, were killed in the attack.

One of the café attackers was a student of North South University, a leading private university in the country.

Mannan said a UGC investigation team visited the NSU main campus in the city's Bashundhara area following the Holey Artisan attack.

"The team found books and other written materials of the banned militant outfit Hizb ut-Tahrir at the university library. Besides, we also found financial, administrative and academic anomalies of the university," added the UGC chairman.

He also warned the authorities of all private universities that the UGC would cancel approval if any university was found involved in any anti-state or militant activities.

Mannan said the UGC would organise human chain programmes at all universities and colleges at 11:00am today to create awareness against militancy and terrorism.

If any university doesn't have adequate space to form human chain on its campus, it would hold the programme at any nearby open space, he added.