

PRIVATE UNIVERSITY Education to suffer as ordinance axed

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The government decision not to ratify the Private University Ordinance 2008 promulgated by the immediate past caretaker government will allow continuation of imparting substandard education and sales of certificates by a section of private universities, experts believe.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) strongly persuaded the education and law ministry not to drop the ordinance but owners of private universities lobbied against the move of the UGC.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid yesterday told The Daily Star that general view about the ordinance was that it would be made law but owners of the private universities are continuing to oppose the move.

"At present the ministry is not thinking about it as the expert committee formed to scrutinise ordinances did not pick the private university ordinance for placing before the parliament," he, however, said that they would work on it later, if needed.

The caretaker government promulgated the ordinance following a proposal of the UGC to bring private universities under strict discipline but the government decided not to place it before the House under the excuse of having no recommendations from the parliamentary special committee.

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Interestingly the government, however, decided to ratify both Bangladesh University of Professionals Ordinance - 2008 and Rangpur University Ordinance - 2008 promulgated during the interim government.

UGC chairman Prof Nazrul Islam on Friday night told The Daily Star that he met education minister and law minister and urged them to ratify the ordinance. "The ordinance was an important step to bring private universities under strict discipline," he added.

He also urged the government to formulate a similar law if the present ordinance could not be ratified due to constitutional obligation.

Owners of private universities, in contrast, think no new law is needed for the private universities as previous laws can be amended, if needed.

"New laws will stand in the way of development of private universities," Abul Quasem Haider, vice president of the Association of Private Universities of Bangladesh, told The Daily Star.

He also said government can amend previous laws on private universities formulated in 1992 and 1998.

The new ordinance stipulates that private universities cannot open their outer campus before permanent registration, they cannot strike a deal with foreign universities and the ordinance even bars them from providing distant learning failing which will be a punishable offence.

As per the ordinance, one must have 20 years teaching or administrative experience or 10 years teaching and 10 years administrative experience to be eligible to become a vice chancellor (VC).

The provision was made to prevent owners of universities from assuming the post of VC as most of them are businessmen and without any required academic qualification.

The legislation also suggests formation of a Trustee Board for every university that includes representative from the UGC, educationists and professionals.

It also stressed the need for adequate number of regular teachers where temporary teachers must not be over one third of the regular teachers. UGC sources say around 2,000 public university teachers are engaged in part-time teaching with different private universities.

The ordinance also includes a provision for 'accreditation council' to improve the quality of education and it suggested raising the amount of fixed deposit receipt (FDR) for the universities to Tk 25 crore from the earlier Tk 5 crore for operating a private university.

As per the UGC report 2007, at present the number of students in 51 private universities is 1,70,410.