

Recipe for further chaos in higher education

THE Awami League-Jatiya Party government's permission on Tuesday for eight new universities, sponsored by mostly people linked to the ruling party, seems to have raised concern among educationists that such partisan consideration would ultimately compromise the quality of higher education. The concern, suffice it to say, is justified. According to a report front-paged in New Age on Thursday, Hamdard University, which has been granted permission to open its campus in Narayanganj, is the only one among the eight that has no apparent link with the ruling party.

First and foremost, it is eminently arguable if there is actually the need for any new universities in the private sector at the moment. According to the latest report of the University Grants Commission, 54 private universities in 2009 enrolled 52,161 students, although they had 65,312 seats. In such circumstances, the only valid reason for addition of eight new universities to the higher education matrix could be that they would offer quality education along with standard facilities for students and teachers. It does not appear to be so, especially when the permission has seemingly been granted not on academic but partisan consideration.

Then, of course, comes the question of regulation. As a former vice-chancellor of Dhaka University said, the new universities could create a 'chaotic situation' in the higher education. His apprehension may not be quite unfounded. The University Grants Commission is apparently struggling to regulate the existing private universities. Except for 11, the private universities have failed to move into their own campuses in 15 years or more. Moreover, there have been niggling questions about the quality of education that many of these institutions offer. Allegations are rife that many of these universities largely run their courses with part-time teachers and do not have the requisite number of full-time faculty members. The least said about laboratory and library facilities and other requisite services the better.

It is conceivable that the addition of eight more, that too sponsored by mostly people linked with the ruling party, could prove to be a veritable nightmare for the University Grants Commission in terms of streamlining the private universities and making them institutions for higher education in the true sense of the term. Most importantly, it will be the students who will suffer the most.