

## UGC should take steps against aberrant universities, instead

IT IS indeed disturbing that many private universities outer campuses in Dhaka and different districts in violation of the Private University Act 2010 that clearly prohibits the operation of outer campus of any private university in any part of the country. What's worse, the University Grants Commission, the regulatory authority for public and private universities, has of late appeared either unable or unwilling to take immediate steps against the aberrant private universities. The commission, according to a press released on Monday, as quoted in a report published in New Age, on Tuesday, has advised students that they should not take admission to these universities. It also asked students, and their guardians, to 'check and recheck' whether a particular campus has its authorisation before they submit any application for admission. Notably, the commission is yet to make public the list of universities that have its approval.

In the absence of an adequate number of public universities, private universities have begun operation since early 1990s to accommodate a growing number of students pursuing higher education. They were expected to play a crucial role in the expansion of higher education and research. Unfortunately, most of the private universities that mushroomed over the past two decades have failed to meet the required standards. Moreover, their tuition and other fees still remain unaffordable for a majority of the students, particularly those belonging to low and even middle income groups, while many of them lack permanent campus and even teachers. Yet, other than enacting the law, the authorities concerned have thus far generally shown inexplicable indifference to taking any steps to streamline these universities. That is, perhaps, why a number of private universities have not hesitated to open unauthorised campuses, especially outside the capital, and do lucrative business cashing in on the increasing competition between thousands of students who dream of pursuing higher studies.

Meanwhile, certificates issued by a number of these institutions have hardly any value in the employment market. It would thus be not an exaggeration to suggest that by allowing the aberrant private universities to continue with their unauthorised campuses, the government may actually be perpetuating an illegal practice. Overall, the University Grants Commission in particular and the government in general cannot shirk the responsibility for the mess certain private universities have created. Hence, they need to take effective steps to make these universities comply with relevant rules to the letter and in spirit.