

Time to ensure permanent campus compliance

THE law requires private universities to move to their own permanent campus after seven years of operation. Regrettably, however, as New Age reported on Thursday on the basis of a University Grants Commission report placed at a meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on education ministry on Wednesday, out of 52 such private universities, only 17 now have their own campuses while nine others partially operate on their own campuses. Hence, most private universities are set to miss yet another deadline for having a permanent campus. What is more regrettable is that only two of them have so far met all the criteria set by the commission to get permanent certificates as private universities. Moreover, as the acting chairman of the committee is quoted to have said, they are going to suggest extension of the deadline once again. It can be recalled here that in January 2014, the education ministry asked the universities already missing two deadlines to move to their own campuses by September 15, 2015. Additionally, while extending the deadline, the minister repeated his promise to take stern action against the private universities for further missing the deadline.

The government's failure to take the promised stern action against the errant universities, that too on several occasions, indeed, reinforces the widespread public perception that it is virtually unwilling to streamline the offending universities. It is all the more so because reports have it that owners of private universities, in general, enjoy a huge clout, financial and political, while many of the errant universities are owned by people directly linked to the ruling party. It is important to note that the government has even failed to live up to its words given on several occasions on closing down the illegal campuses of a good number of universities casting uncertainties over the academic lives of thousands of students, in particular. There are still a number of private universities, allegedly involved in crimes such as selling higher degree certificates under the nose of the ministry leaving the sector's image, national and international, severely tarnished. No doubt, many of those universities continue with operation because of stays from court in case of any punitive government action against them. But it is also true that the education ministry, in many cases, has till date failed to take serious steps to have the stay vacated.

The permanent campus of an educational institution with adequate manpower and logistics, in particular, is important for various reasons that include ensuring proper academic atmosphere for teachers and students. The government needs to realise that the sector involves a huge number of students, a large number of whose families belonging to the middle-income groups have to struggle to manage the education expenses. Overall, there is little scope for any compromise on the compliance with the existing private university law, crucial for ensuring at least a minimum level of quality education in the sector.