

Handwritten: 26/11/07

Act-drafted to remove 'unholy practices' in pvt universities

SURANJITH DEABNATH

The interim government is going to formulate the Private University Act, 2007 making it mandatory for each private university to have a single campus, a deposit of Tk 25 crore as FDR, less than one-fourth part-time teachers, and stop offering medical degrees.

The Act is being formulated in the wake of allegations that many private universities are involved in unholy practices like selling certificates and offering sub-standard education.

According to the draft law, authorities of the universities violating the law will be sentenced to a five-year simple imprisonment

or a fine of Tk 10 lakh or both.

"We've already prepared the draft of the Private University Act, 2007 and forwarded it to the education ministry," said Prof Nazrul Islam, chairman of University Grants Commission (UGC).

"The education ministry has also sent the draft to the law ministry, which may change some rules and regulations before placing it to the advisory council meeting," Prof Islam added.

"At any day the draft is likely to be approved at a meeting of the advisory council," said a high official of the education ministry.

Private universities came into operation in the country in 1992 under the Private University Act,

1992. Later, the law was amended in 1998.

Exploiting the loopholes in the existing Act, 1992 and the Amendment, 1998, a number of dishonest people established some private universities where certificates of different degrees are allegedly sold without imparting quality education.

In light of the proposed Act, the UGC has already declared illegal branches of 56 foreign universities, around 100 outer campuses and 40 private medical colleges. The UGC has also asked them to stop enrolling students from this year.

The BNP-Jamaat alliance government first formed a six-member

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

FROM PAGE 1

committee led by present Law Adviser Mainul Hossain in 2003 to probe irregularities of the private universities.

The committee placed several recommendations including shut-down of eight private universities. However, most of the recommendations were shelved due apparently to political pressures by the then ministers, legislators and bureaucrats.

The caretaker government has taken several measures aimed at promoting a sound learning atmosphere and quality education, especially higher education.

The move to form a new Act for private universities is an effort in this direction, sources in the education ministry say.

BAN ON MEDICAL FACULTY

Huge allegations, especially about selling medical certificates, have been raised against the private universities so far. Following these allegations, the proposed Act bans operation of any medical faculty in private universities.

As per the proposed law, no private universities will be entitled to offer medical degrees.

CAMPUS

According to the proposed Act, no outer or external campuses, even in the name of study or admission centres, can be set up.

Under the new law, a private university has to maintain only one campus, whether in Dhaka or elsewhere.

However, the proposed Act relaxes the restriction on possession of campus land. Now a private university has to have minimum two acres, which was five acres previously.

But the universities will have to get permission from the government and deposit an extra Tk 2 crore before expanding the campus, if necessary.

BAN ON PART-TIMERS

The Act also restricts the number of part-time faculty members. Part-timers should not exceed 20 percent of the faculties of a private university. Besides, a public university teacher is not entitled to work as a part-timer or consultant in more than one private university.

UGC sources say around 2,000 public university teachers are

engaged in part-time activities with different private universities.

"Both the public and private universities are being affected as one can be a part-timer in more than one university. Those who are doing part-time jobs in several universities cannot give sufficient time to their mother institution," the UGC chairman observed.

FIXED DEPOSIT RECEIPT

Previously, only Tk 5 crore had to be deposited as FDR (fixed deposit receipt) for operating a private university. But the proposed Act increases the amount to Tk 25 crore.

ADMINISTRATION

According to the new Act, the president will be the chancellor of all private universities. A professor having 20 years of academic experience is eligible to become the vice-chancellor.

Besides, private universities will have to hold regular meetings of syndicate, academic council, curriculum committee, financial committee and teachers recruitment committee. All of these bodies will have to be formed according to the rules of Dhaka University.

PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES SAY

Leaders of the Association of Private Universities of Bangladesh have meanwhile strongly protested against the government move, saying some of the rules in the proposed Act will change the basic structure of the private universities.

"We welcome the caretaker government if they make the move to amend the Private University Act, 1992 and Amendment, 1998. There is no need to formulate a new Act for operating the private universities," said Abu Quasem Haider, vice-president of the Association and founder chairman of Eastern University.

"The government should withdraw the proposed Private University Act, 2007," he added.

Prof M Alimullah Miyan, vice-chancellor of International University of Business Agriculture and Technology, shot down the idea of the new law.

The caretaker government is going to make the law without consulting the representatives of the private universities, which is not right, he added.