

Govt to review private univ laws with stakeholders

Says education minister at APUB event

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The government will review the legal and regulatory framework for private universities in consultation with stakeholders, rather than taking top-down decisions, said Education Minister ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon yesterday.

He said a committee will examine the Private University Act and related frameworks from 1992, 2010, 2022 and 2025, along with current demands from the sector.

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“We will sit, sort it out, and then announce it. If needed, we will go to parliament,” he said at a views-exchange meeting held by the Association of Private Universities of Bangladesh (APUB) at a city hotel in Dhaka.

The minister said regulation should not mean constant pressure. “The government will listen to your problems and assist you in how you can advance,” he added.

He said private universities should have operational freedom but warned that they must not create space for militancy. “Such freedom must not lead to another Holey Artisan,” he said.

He said the government does not want to shut institutions or harm investments, adding that private universities can contribute to human capital, foreign currency earnings and intellectual property.

He also said Bangladesh should learn from countries like Malaysia and Singapore, citing Malaysia's success in reversing brain drain under Mahathir Mohamad.

At the event, APUB Chairman Md Sabur Khan presented proposals on taxation, UGC reform, research, industry linkage, and cross-border higher education.

He said private universities have expanded access to higher education, but policy and administrative barriers limit their potential. Despite receiving no government grants, they pay taxes and VAT, which increases tuition fees and pressurises students, he added.

APUB proposed dividing private universities into profit-making and non-profit categories, with tax and VAT exemptions for non-profit institutions. It also proposed forming endowment funds to support meritorious and underprivileged students and student-led innovation, said Sabur.

The association called for a more supportive UGC, with file disposal within 30 days and automatic approval within 45 days.

It also suggested a KPI and ranking system based on research, patents, innovation and graduate employment rates.

On cross-border education, APUB urged encouraging international collaboration while ensuring quality.

UGC Chairman Mamun Ahmed said the commission is open to criticism and aims to work with all universities.

He said there should be no demarcation between private and public universities, as all universities and students fall under the UGC's responsibility.

Prime Minister's Education Adviser Mahadi Amin said the government believes there should be no VAT on higher education at higher universities.

Private universities can help turn brain drain into brain circulation by engaging expatriate academics, he added.

North South University VC Prof Abdul Hannan Chowdhury called for a dedicated student visa process to attract foreign students and easier access to foreign research grants.

He said NSU lost over Tk 20 crore in research funding due to approval complications under the Public Procurement Rules 2025.

Prof Hannan also called for student loans and PhD approval based on faculty strength, not university type.

East West University VC Shams Rahman said private universities should have representation in the UGC.

Members of boards of trustees and vice chancellors of various private universities were also present.