

UNB Report

As the cost of higher education in private universities in the capital is increasing day by day, the government is thinking of introducing a strict law to check their profit motive apart from a plan to approve private universities only at local level.

Students from distant areas have to bear huge expenses in the Dhaka-based private universities while the maintenance cost of the universities is also going up to a great extent due to higher rate of lands in the city, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid told.

Referring to the increasing trend of tuition fees in private universities, he said the government has repeatedly cautioned the authorities concerned in this regard and is planning to formulate a law to rein in the profit motive.

Before taking steps against the errant universities, the Education Minister said, they will try to convince the authorities concerned not to consider their institutions as profit machines.

He added that the maintenance cost of private universities in the capital is going up due to the increasing land price.

Besides, the city's perennial traffic congestion has prompted the government to go for the option of setting up new universities at district and upazila levels instead of cramming them into the capital, he said.

Nahid observed that the benefits of having private universities at local levels are twofold -- it will reduce the maintenance cost and facilitate easy access of poor students to higher education at lower costs.

Mentioning that there is no private university in many upazilas and districts outside Dhaka, he said the government will give importance to opening new universities at local level.

Applications seeking approval for setting up private universities at local levels will be prioritized, the Education Minister added.

He also noted that no fresh approval will be given to any private university in the capital as many private universities are operating there.

Nahid said the number of private universities in the country is two times higher than that of public universities. "About 61 percent of the university students are from private universities."

Asked whether the government will provide financial support to the private universities, he answered in the negative, but noted that they will take steps to make sure that the authorities cannot use the universities as profit-making institutions.

Echoing Nahid, UGC chairman Prof AK Azad Chowdhury said once the private universities are set up at villages and district levels, students from lower class families will be able to study at low cost. "Currently, a private university student has to spend about Tk 70,000-80,000 a year as educational expenses."

Prof Nazrul Islam, a former UGC chairman, said some 350 colleges providing honors courses have been set up across the country to provide higher education to the students of general families.

The colleges should be modified and qualified teachers should be appointed there to ensure quality education for the students.

Terming the number of private universities in the city 'excess', Nahid recommended slashing down the figure to ensure quality education.

Sources at the Education Ministry said there are 36 public universities across the country, including five in the capital while the number of private universities in the country is 79.