IN spite of the fact that the government promulgated the new Private University Act-2010 on July 18, 2010, there has been the occasional and unnecessary sabre-rattling by some quarters and a section of the media with its version of incomplete information or facts based on either half or no truth. Such actions create unnecessary confusion amongst the founders, students, guardians and faculty members of private universities.

The last such sabre-rattling was done on August 18, exactly one month after the promulgation of the Act. In a meeting at the Education Ministry, presided over by the Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid M.P., himself, and attended by the Chairman of the University Grants Commission (UGC) and a few representatives of the private universities, quoting the UGC Chairman, it was reported in a section of the local media that all private universities located in Dhanmnodi will have to be shifted soon or they will face closure.



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However, in the official minutes of the meeting, nowhere had it been mentioned that any such decision was ever taken. It was only decided that the government could restrict the establishment of any private university in particular areas or places in the interests of the environment and security and public interest. This sounds more logical and rational. It would be more rational if this decision is made enforceable only to those universities that will be established after the new Act comes into force.

On the subject of Dhanmondi, many residents of this area (I am one of them) will perhaps express a sigh of relief if Dhanmondi regains its original residential character through removal of, first, all the shopping centres, shops, hospitals, diagnostic clinics from the area; and then the educational institutions, beginning with about two dozen schools and innumerable private coaching centres.

Many of these were established long before the private universities came. However, one will acknowledge that this is neither practical nor feasible. Wherever you have a hundred families living, you will need schools and other educational institutions, along with windows providing the basic utilities like health care. Dhanmondi area has about a dozen private universities, some on their own premises, of which at least three have custom made state of the art buildings with built-in high quality facilities (UIU, SUB and ULAB). The new Act makes it compulsory for a private university in Dhaka to have at least one acre of one-piece land (I still wonder why the measurement is not in square metre per student) to function, but in reality it will be practically impossible to have one acre for each of 47 odd universities operating in Dhaka.

The government should think of coming out to facilitate the private universities by creating a zone for setting up private universities like it often does for certain types of industries. The government has, in the meantime, created such zones for the IT and tannery industry and there are even proposals for creating such zones for the growing readymade garments industries. All these are very important steps for a healthy growth in these sectors, but nothing could be more helpful for national development than creating an education zone.

Before going further, let me share some