

Return extra fees

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"We welcome the government's intervention. But we do not know how or when the schools will return the money," he added.

However, school authorities were clearly not happy with the decision.

Some of them said they would discuss the matter with the school managing committees before making a decision.

"We will have to return money if the education ministry asks us. But it will not be possible to run the institution further if the government takes decisions hearing one side only," Abul Hossain, principal of the Willes school, told The Daily Star.

The school increased tuition fees by 45 percent for Bangla medium students and 61 percent for those studying in English version this year.

"If we do not hike the fees, we will not be able to give the teachers, who are not under the MPO coverage, the facilities like those who get the MPO," the principal said, justifying the fee hike.

"It will create a chaotic situation and many bright teachers will leave this profession," said the principal.

Umme Salma Khatun, principal of Udayan Higher Secondary School and College, said they were respectful to the government decision. "We will have a meeting of the school managing committee to decide on it."

Her school increased tuition fees by 100 percent for Class-I students and 50 percent for the other classes.

"To ensure quality education, we had no alternative to increasing the tuition fees," she argued.

A number of other renowned private schools in Dhaka and Chittagong suddenly hiked the monthly tuition and admission fees at the beginning of this year, citing teachers' demand for a pay increase after the government approved the

new pay scale for the public servants.

The fee hikes outraged guardians, who staged demonstrations for two weeks. Following this, the education ministry asked the school authorities to stop collecting the increased fees until further notice.

The Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) in an investigation found seven renowned non-government schools had collected tuition fees hiked by 11 percent to as high as 100 percent.

According to the admission policy, the capital-based Bangla medium schools, which enjoy MPO facilities partially, can charge a student highest Tk 8,000 in monthly fees, session charge and development fees during the admission. Tk 10,000 is the ceiling for the English version schools.

"We want to implement the policy completely," the education minister said during yesterday's briefing.

He mentioned the DSHE had been asked to come up with a complete list of schools that collected extra fees, violating the government's admission policy, and the amount of money they had collected this way.

"For the schools, I suggest they return the money and save their honour."

The government has already prepared a list of institutions that collected SSC exam registration fees much higher than the amount fixed by the education boards, Nahid said.

"The boards will inform us whether these institutions will return the additional money within seven working days."

The minister also urged guardians to complain to the education ministry or the education boards whenever the schools increase fees illegally.

The government would soon hold a review meeting to discuss whether it was necessary to increase the fees, Nahid added.

Education minister asks schools, warns of action if they fail to do so in 7 workdays; guardians hail decision

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid yesterday asked the educational institutions to return within seven working days the additional money they had collected in tuition fees and registration fees for the SSC examinations.

"If they fail to do so, we will take stern actions ... There is no room for being flexible," he said at a press briefing at his secretariat office.

Asked what actions they were considering, the minister said there is a High Court order with directives in this regard.

According to the order, if any school violates the admission policy, the government can dissolve school managing committees.

"We will cancel their monthly pay order (MPO), or even their registration, if necessary," said Nahid.

The Prime Minister's Office also has issued directives regarding such educational institutions, he added.

While guardians hailed the government move, they were not sure about how the schools will return the money.

"The schools are increasing fees every year on different excuses. But the hike this year was way too much for families like ours," said Halimur Rahman, whose son studies at Willes Little Flower School and College, after hearing the news.

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