

Primary, junior exams as earlier

Cabinet now decides both exams to be held this year

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Just a week ago the primary and mass education minister had announced that the Primary Education Completion (PEC) exams in class-V would be scrapped from this year.

Mostafizur Rahman also said there would be only one public examination at the end of class-VIII and that the cabinet would abolish the PEC test.

His announcement brought relief for about 30 lakh fifth graders and their guardians who were in utter confusion over holding of the PEC exams this year.

Educationists had welcomed the announcement as they viewed that the test put "extra pressure" on kids, with most of the guardians getting into an unhealthy competition for ensuring their children get highest grades. The test also created a boom in coaching centres.

But the cabinet yesterday rejected the primary education ministry's

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proposal to scrap this year's PEC exams.

The cabinet meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, decided to continue with the PEC and Junior School Certificate (JSC) exams until a final decision is taken in this regard, meaning the class-V students will have to sit the public test this year.

"The cabinet didn't approve the proposal and asked for further scrutiny of it," Cabinet Secretary Mohammad Shafiqul Alam told reporters after the meeting.

The cabinet asked the ministry to look at the proposal in detail and said the PEC and JSC exams in classes-V and VIII would continue until a new decision is taken, he added.

The cabinet viewed that it is not possible to introduce the new primary exam system this year, since most of the primary and secondary schools are located in separate places. Necessary preparations, including rearrangement of classes, are essential for implementing the policy, said Alam.

The government on May 18 elevated the level of primary education to class-VIII from class-V, and made a decision in principle to scrap the terminal examination, introduced in 2009, due to the elevation. But it didn't say when the

test would be abolished.

A section of guardians started demonstrations, demanding the government scrap the PEC exams from this year. They held protest rallies at different schools over the last couple of weeks, arguing that the terminal test in class-V became obsolete with the elevation of the primary education level.

On June 20, the guardians, under the banner of Obhibhabok Oikya Forum, announced that they would form human chains at different schools in the capital on July 20 if their demand was not met by July 10.

The following day, Primary Education Minister Mostafizur Rahman came up with the announcement of cancelling the PEC exams.

FRUSTRATION ALL AROUND

The cabinet decision frustrated the guardians, students and educationists.

"We are very disappointed. By making such a decision, we continue to put extra pressure on our children," said Borhan Uddin, a guardian from the city's Mohammadpur.

He said the guardians were greatly relieved when the primary education minister made the announcement. "But now we'll again have to get our children prepared [for the test]."

Eminent educationist Rasheda K Choudhury was also disappointed with the cabinet's move.

"What are we getting out of the decisions? What are the benefits of the decisions and who would be the beneficiaries?" she questioned.

"We have turned the learners into examinees. Everyone is an examinee now," she said, adding that the kids don't have the time to play, get involved in cultural activities or to have healthy entertainment due to the exams.

Rasheda, executive director of Campaign for Popular Education, said decision makers have the right to make a decision, but it has to be pro-learner.

The cabinet's decision was taken ignoring the guidelines of the National Education Policy-2010. The guidelines stipulate that terminal exams would be held across the country at the end of class-V with identical set of questions and a public examination would be held at the end of class-VIII.

Ziaul Kabir Dulu, president of Obhibhabok Oikya Forum, said they would continue their movement until the government scraps the PEC exams.

"We will declare tougher programmes after the Eid," he added.