

# Education plagued by question leak

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THE government in the outgoing year failed to check question leak in public exams; it rather spread to the school-based terminal exams of elementary education, causing further slide in the already declining standards of education.

One after another question leak incidents in public exams, admission tests at universities and terminal examinations for Class I to V has raised serious doubts in public mind about the credibility of exams as well as education.

During 2017, the government faced huge criticism about changes in the secondary textbooks allegedly

in line with the demand of an Islamist outfit but the authorities did not drop 'debatable contents' from the textbooks.

The government during the last nine years credited itself with distributing textbooks on the first days of January but in 2017 it faced criticism for distributing textbooks with gross mistakes which they later corrected to save their face.

'Question leaks along with banned notebook and guidebook business, coaching in absence of proper classroom teaching are having negative impacts on the standards of education,' Dhaka University professor emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury observed.

'With widespread question leaks, public exams and overall education lack credibility,' lamented former Dhaka University English professor Syed Manzoorul Islam.

'How can we expect that the standard of education would improve when question papers of terminal exams for Class I or Class II students are leaked? Primary education is the foundation of all education,' Manzoorul said.

'I will not differ with the opinion about dipping credibility of public exam due to question leak,' said inter-education board coordination subcommittee chairman Mahbubur Rahman, also Dhaka education board

chairman, who conducts public exams.

The authorities on December 18 postponed final examinations of mathematics of grades I and IV at 102 government primary schools of Natore Sadar as question papers were leaked.

On December 16 night, mathematics exams for Grade II at 140 primary schools were postponed following allegation of questions being leaked at Betagi in Barguna, said district primary education officer Md A Mazid.

On December 13, the question papers of school final examinations for Class I and Class IV were leaked at Barguna Sadar, prompting the authorities to postpone

examinations at 248 primary schools.

On December 12, exams of Classes II, III, and IV were postponed at 119 schools of Munshiganj Sadar as question papers were leaked, said district primary education officials.

The parliamentary standing committee on primary and mass education ministry on December 20 asked the authorities to take effective steps to stop question leaks in primary education, said the committee chair, Motahar Hossain.

Directorate of Primary Education director general Abu Hena Mostafa Kamal said that they would take stern actions against people

*Continued on page 2 Col. 5*

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*Continued from page 1*

engaged in question leaks. 'Some of them have already been arrested and the rest will not be spared,' he added.

One after another allegation of question leaks of different papers of Primary Education Completion Examination after Class V in November, Junior School Certificate Examination after Class VIII in the same month, Higher Secondary Certificate after Class XII in April-May and Secondary School Certificate Examination after Class X in February-March, surfaced ahead of exam.

Question leak allegations have been coming since the past few years.

Transparency International Bangladesh in a study in August 2015 found that 63 question papers of public examinations were leaked in four years.

'Incidents of question papers of public examinations being leaked can be found since the 1970s but in the past five years it became a regular phenomenon,' the study says.

'Situation regarding question leaks has worsened,' TIB executive director Iftherkharuzzaman observed, terming it one of the major hindrances to quality education.

He blamed non-enforcement of the existing laws, lack of punishment for the offenders and indifference of the responsible authorities to the malady. 'We have seen none to be punished in the near past, so offenders feel that their wrongdoing can go without punishment and they also feel a sort of encouragement.'

Manzoorul and Iftherkharuzzaman said that a nexus

between government employees, coaching centres, guidebook businesses, political activists and some teachers was behind the malpractice.

Serajul Islam Choudhury and Manzoorul said that guardians' race for results of their children and dependence on memorisation boosted coaching centres, guidebooks and notebooks business.

'Question leaks and coaching and guidebooks and notebooks business grow hand in hand in Bangladesh,' said Manzoorul.

Education minister Nurul Islam Nahid has blamed a section of dishonest teachers for question papers leak.

'Coaching centres allure teachers. They engage in question leaks so that their students can perform better and they can get more students and more money,' said Nahid, who is education minister for nine years.

The combined pass rate in SSC and equivalent examinations in 2017 fell to seven-year low, combined result of HSC and equivalent examinations to its 10-year low, same result of JSC and equivalent fell seven-year low and primary completion exam to eight-year low.

Number of highest grade point average 5 of all public exams fell in comparison to that of 2016.

Nurul Islam Nahid blamed new script evaluation system for the poor results in JSC, SSC and HSC exams while primary and mass education minister Mostafizur Rahman said a research was needed to find out reason of poor results.

At the beginning of the year, the government faced huge criticism over gross mistakes in the textbooks and dropping of some contents. Secular activists alleged that National Curriculum and Textbook Board dropped the contents bowing to the demand of Islamist groups.

In the wake of criticism in May, NCTB issued corrigendum.

They, however, did not restore the dropped contents.

'We did not make any change in the contents for the textbooks of 2018,' NCTB chairman Narayan Chandra Saha said, adding they did not make change as they were planning to revise curriculum for 2019.

NCTB this year also needs to change about 27 lakh madrassah books for students of class VII to IX to be distributed among students on January 1, 2018, as it pointed out some anti-Islamic contents in the books. NCTB incurred losses of Tk 14 crore in the process, said NCTB member.

'We have reprinted all these books and have already redistributed them,' Narayan Chandra Saha said.

Teachers of government colleges observed two-day work abstention in November, protesting at a government move to include teachers of newly nationalised colleges in education cadre service.

Teachers of 313 public colleges, under the banner of BCS General Education Association, are in the protest against a government move to include teachers of newly nationalised colleges in education cadre service.

In April 2017, the government selected 285 private col-

leges across the country for nationalisation. Besides, the government so far nationalised 51 private colleges, said sources in education ministry.

Apart from that, assistant teachers of government primary schools like previous two years continued their movement for reducing the difference in wages between trained head teachers and trained assistant teachers.

Non-government secondary school teachers have also been on movement demanding monthly pay order benefit.

At the fag end of the year, severe criticism greeted Nurul Islam Nahid's speech at a December 24 programme in which he allegedly asked officials to 'take bribe, but keep it tolerable' and 'government official and cabinet members are thief'.

Nahid, however, claimed on December 27 that a section of media published his comment on corruption, bribe partially, creating confusion among people.

Academics countered the education minister's claim that corruption in education decreased and claimed it rather multiplied.

Academics cited examples of question leaks, irregularities in printing textbooks and providing MPO facilities illegally.

Former Dhaka University Institute of Education and Research professor Siddikur Rahman said that no minister in any circumstances could say 'take bribe but within a limit'.

'It is like providing licence to corrupt people,' said Siddikur, also NCTB chief consultant for secondary curriculum.