

Schools yet to refund extra fees must be punished

A REPORT sent to the education ministry on Tuesday, as reported by New Age on Wednesday, by the Dhaka education board said that five schools have not yet returned the additional fees that they had realised from students taking the Secondary School Certificate examinations in 2015. The report comes two and a half months after the education ministry on February 25 had issued show-cause notices to schools and warned that it would take action against the schools which would fail to give a satisfactory reply to the notices within 30 days. The ministry issued the notices to 1,209 schools including 296 under the Dhaka board which had failed to return additional fees it had taken from students despite a High Court order to the government in the last week of November 2015 to take appropriate action against the management committees of schools that had realised extra fees from SSC candidates. The High Court had also asked the government to force the schools in Dhaka found to be guilty of charging extra fees to refund the money to the examinees.

In spite of all of this, a top ministry official had earlier said that they had an intelligence report that about 500 secondary schools had realised extra fees from the SSC examinees again in 2016. This should be of particular concern as it shows that some of the schools are completely indifferent to both the rule of law and to the High Court directive. Such demonstration of indifference by the schools is completely unacceptable as it illustrates an air of impunity which the management of the schools seems to be enjoying, particularly as the government has, in the past, failed to take any significant action against errant schools despite its strong rhetoric. It is important to note that the government, this time around, did take significant action against some of the errant schools. For example, it ordered the Rajshahi and Chittagong education boards to dissolve the management committee of 148 and 3 schools belonging to the respective boards. One can conclude, however, that its past inaction has already given the errant schools such leeway that the school management may believe that they can get away with breaking the law, once again, as they had done before.

Under the circumstances, the government must abide by the court order and force the schools that had charged examinees extra fees in 2015 and investigate whether some schools had indeed done so again in 2016 and punish them accordingly. It must realise that because of its continuous inaction against errant schools in the past, which had helped the air of impunity to set in, it must now continuously act to make schools abide by the law. Thus, it must make each and every school follow the law and do so strictly.