

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA TUESDAY JULY 22, 2008

Appalling misuse of MPO

Those responsible must be held to account

A very bad instance of blatant disregard for public money to feather political nests, have come to light through a report in The Daily Star relating to misuse of MPO (monthly pay order) facility. The practice of including educational institutions on the MPO list, disregarding the set criteria - which was resorted to by both the political parties when in power -- has cost the public Tk600 crore annually. It highlights once again the political-bureaucratic nexus to circumvent rules and procedures - for pecuniary and political gains and does very little to generate public confidence in the system of governance. A further scope of corruption in the system, reportedly, is that no MPO cheque is ever passed without greasing the palms of the related officers in the ministry or the department of secondary and higher education (DSHE).

It would not be enough to see this merely in terms of monetary loss. The irreparable damage that it has done to the system of education, particularly to the secondary and higher secondary levels, will perhaps not be apparent till after many years from now. It will have by then seriously impacted on the state's plan to spread education equitably throughout the country.

Apart from providing government subsidy, which the MPO is, inasmuch as it supplements the teachers' pay, the political motivation behind starting private schools and colleges have caused distortion in the education system in that educational institutions have grown up where not needed, whereas, areas in dire need of schools, colleges and vocational institutions, are having to do without them.

To put the matter in perspective, a study of the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Institution and Statistics reveals that while no steps had been taken to establish any of the 3000 educational institutions (of various definition) needed in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet areas badly, the Shikkha Bhaban, under orders of the education ministry, had approved more than 5000 institutions including more than 3000 private ones in areas where they were not needed, ostensibly under political pressure.

The system of MPO is no doubt a good arrangement but what we have witnessed is a good system going awry, misused by some of the politicians and their unholy collusion with a section of officials in the education ministry and the department of secondary and higher education -- that helped circumvent the system and flout all requirements.

The MPO system should continue but what the government must ensure is that the laid down criteria are strictly followed through constant monitoring. Not only should those responsible for the gross violation be taken to task, it must be made clear to those responsible to monitor the system, that they risk bringing upon themselves heavy punishment should there be any laxity in the exercise of their duty.