

Nahid's rules-abiding MPO list draws flak

PM suspends the roll amid uproar at cabinet meeting; ministers flay education minister for not accommodating their choices

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In the face of vehement demand of some cabinet colleagues, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday directed the education ministry to suspend the effectiveness of the recently announced MPO list of non-government secondary and higher secondary educational institutions for three months.

The institutions on MPO list get government subsidy as monthly pay orders to meet a portion of their teachers' salaries and benefits.

"The prime minister ordered to create a new list based on the existing one, adding some new names to it and dropping some old ones," a senior minister told The Daily Star preferring anonymity.

The suspension came just 72 hours into the list's announcement, as some ministers and state ministers expressed serious resentment against Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid at a regular cabinet meeting because institutions of their choice are not on the list.

They alleged most of the institutions on the list were established during the last

BNP-Jamaat coalition regime while institutions established during the last Awami League government have been ignored, meeting sources said.

They also demanded that the premier increases the number of institutions on the list, and the budgetary allocation for MPO as well.

In the last two days some ministers, state ministers, and ruling Awami League lawmakers also wrote to the prime minister demanding a review of the announced list.

MPO list

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 Nahid in his own defense told the cabinet that the list was prepared following proper rules, and on the basis of a performance index, the sources said.

There is a set of criteria for including educational institutions on the MPO list, which are: student numbers, numbers of students taking public examinations every year and the pass rate, and the dates of government approval for the institutions.

Sources present at yesterday's meeting said a few cabinet members alleged, Nahid does not understand the pulse of AL politics yet, as he came from a different party. When the premier gave the responsibility of reviewing the list to Nahid, those ministers vehemently opposed it.

So the premier directed her Education Adviser Dr Alauddin Ahmed to prepare a fresh list after reviewing the announced one in consultation with the members of the committee that prepared it.

At the same time, Hasina directed the education ministry to refrain from issuing any gazette notification regarding the announced list for now.

The PM's education adviser confirmed the decisions. "We will prepare a new list soon," he said adding that the number of institutions will increase on the new list.

A few senior ministers however came forward to back Nahid at the meeting. A few central leaders of AL also supported him outside the meeting. "He is a visionary minister and all should cooperate with him," AL Information and Research Secretary Afza Hossain told The Daily Star adding that Nahid prepared the list according to the rules.

AL sources said some ruling party lawmakers and ministers have been up in arms against Nahid since the announcement of the MPO list, as their choice institutions were not included. Those ministers and lawmakers already promised their constituents that they would manage to get institutions of their areas on the list, and now they are fearing public wrath, the sources added.

Ruling party lawmakers and influential leaders persistently pressed the education minister and ministry officials to include institutions of their choice on the list for at least a month prior to its announcement. The pressure reached such a level that the committee officials had to refrain from going to Bangladesh Secretariat to avoid the lobbyists.

The education ministry on Friday published a list of 1,022 non-government secondary and higher secondary educational institutions as new additions to the list of MPO recipients.

National Professor Kabir Chowdhury, chair of the National Education Policy Formulation Committee, told The Daily Star that political consideration should not be a factor in selecting which educational institutions would qualify for MPOs.

"Under governments formed by political parties, there will always be political pressure, but the education minister and the ministry must rise above that with courage. And I believe Nahid has been doing that," he said.

Education adviser to the immediate past caretaker government, Rasheda K Chowdhury, said the government can review the list if there is any systematic error in it. "If the list is reviewed only on political consideration, then the government's pledge for ensuring quality education will be questioned."

"Quality education needs quality institutions and teachers, and the education minister and his ministry have been trying to ensure that restlessly," she added.

Saying that the main goal of providing MPO is to ensure quality education, she said the goal was repeatedly hampered in the past due to partisan MPO lists. "I hope this government will not repeat the same mistake," she added.

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