

Tough law for education

Draft says govt approval a must before fixing tuition fees; commission to be formed to fix fees in universities

WASIM BIN HABIB

All educational institutions will have to take approval from the government before fixing tuition fees and other charges.

Registration of the institutions flouting this rule and charging extra fees will be cancelled and punitive actions will be taken against them, according to a draft of the Education Act.

The education ministry has finalised the draft of first-ever Education Act that says the government will form a regulatory commission for fixing student fees in universities.

The Act aims to implement the guidelines of the National Education Policy-2010. The education ministry on January 26 last year formed a sub-committee to formulate the act. The committee submitted the draft act

titled 'Education Act/Integrated Education Act' to the ministry last month.

Educationists, however, are quite sceptical about fixing the students' tuition fees upon the government's approval.

Rasheda K Choudhury, former primary education adviser to a caretaker government, said it would

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discourage private initiatives in the education sector.

Private schools must be brought under a regulatory mechanism so that they can't charge exorbitant fees, but it would not be proper to control private schools this way, she observed.

Besides, it should also be taken into consideration whether the government has the capability to deal with thousands of private schools when it is struggling to stop "admission trade" in a number of private schools, she

added.

According to the draft, compulsory primary education will be up to class VIII from class I and a few subjects including Bangla, English, religious studies, moral education, Bangladesh studies, information technology and science will be made compulsory in general schools, madrasas and kindergartens.

On the other side, the secondary level will be from class IX to XII. The draft also says class XI and XII will be

added to the existing secondary schools and class IX and X will be opened in higher secondary colleges.

The draft says the subjects of Bangla, English, Bangladesh studies, mathematics, and information technology will be compulsory in general, madrasa and vocational streams with examinations on uniform question papers to ensure uniformity.

However, at O and A levels, two subjects -- Bangla and Bangladesh Studies -- will compulsorily be

included. The draft says the teaching activities at O and A levels will have to be conducted with the government's approval.

All the educational institutions at pre-primary, primary and secondary levels must take registration from the authorities stipulated by existing laws or rules and any violation will be considered as a punishable crime. The violators will be fined Tk 1 lakh or awarded six months' imprisonment or both.

The draft further says the government will take steps to audit the financial and other activities of the pre-primary and primary schools.

A fulltime or part-time teacher with special training on education of disabled or other communities will have to be appointed in every primary school, the draft suggests. It adds that registration of the institution will be cancelled and Tk 1 lakh will be fined if any school defies it.

On admission in the primary level, it says the institutions will arrange lottery for enrolment in class I if the number of admission seekers is higher than the number of available seats.

But, for subsequent classes, separate admission tests will have to be arranged if the number of admission seekers gets higher than available seats.

The draft says a separate 'Non-government Teachers' Selection Commission' will be formed to appoint teachers in non-government primary schools, ebtedai madrasas, secondary

and colleges.

It adds a single person cannot be elected or nominated as the president and member of the managing committees of more than three non-government educational institutions.

It also says no university can be run on commercial purpose and the University Grants Commission and other agencies will monitor their activities.

No private university or foreign university in Bangladesh without approval from the authorities concerned can run branch campus, study centre and tutorial courses.

If any institution runs only on commercial purposes or any private university or foreign university runs branch campus, study centres and tutorial courses without approval, the responsible persons will be fined Tk 10 lakh or awarded five years' imprisonment or both.

The education ministry will form an autonomous Permanent Education Commission for implementing the education policy, it adds.

"Many countries in the world have the law and we are now formulating it to bring all education related thing under a legal coverage, Education Secretary Dr Kama Abdul Naser Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

"The draft of the act has already been prepared and will be finalised at a ministerial meeting soon," he said.

Once finalised, the draft would be sent to the cabinet for approval and then to parliament following the