

Revising MPO list is a bad move

Still time to roll back the damage

THE cabinet criticism of the recently announced MPO list of non-government secondary and higher secondary institutions raises once more the spectre of partisan politics undermining a positive national cause. The prime ministerial decision, to review the list prepared by a competent committee we would like to make it clear, is not only hasty but also gives out some very bad signals about the future of education in the country. It is particularly painful because of the very sincere efforts made by Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid to have the MPO list finalised in line with the criteria set for it. Given that the MPO was in the period of some earlier governments stigmatized by political considerations coming into it, Minister Nahid's judicious move to streamline the entire process was a refreshing sign of positive change in the field of education. The criteria on which the MPO list is based are unambiguously clear: student numbers, the number of students appearing at public examinations every year, the pass rate and the dates of government approval of the schools in question.

A fundamental question here is where did the education minister go wrong? Obviously, he did not. What is, however, terribly wrong is the pressure that has been piling on the minister, thanks to his cabinet colleagues. We detect a strong whiff of the partisan in the move. It should have been for Sheikh Hasina to defend the education minister against the reservations and objections to the MPO list from other ministers especially because it was clear those other ministers had their own axes to grind over the issue.

Besides, governance becomes a messy affair when ministers, particularly well-meaning and competent ones (Nahid is one such), are not allowed to function because of interference in their work by other ministers. In this particular instance, politics has definitely come in. But it should have been for the prime minister not to buckle under the pressure. Indeed, she should have adopted a position which one in her position should be doing, which is to make it clear to her cabinet colleagues that the MPO list had been drafted in the broad national interest and was therefore not to be subjected to any other consideration. That she has not done that but has instead empowered her education adviser to prepare a fresh MPO list after a review of the existing one is tantamount not only to an undermining of the education minister but also a wholesale defeat of the very purpose behind the finalisation of the list. In this context, we feel the comments made by National Professor Kabir Chowdhury and former adviser Rasheda K. Chowdhury are relevant and speak for the country as a whole.

A bad signal has been sent out to the country by the move. It is our view that there is still time to roll back the damage. The PM must preserve the list and support the minister who has followed rules and procedures. She may add a few more schools if found genuine.