

Time for action against errant schools

THAT different government and non-government schools in the capital Dhaka are imposing fees more than the amount set by the government on students seeking to take the forthcoming Secondary School Certificate examinations is very unfortunate. Also, it appears to be another poignant pointer to the failure of the education ministry to put a leash on the educational institutions that hardly miss any opportunity to extort their students. According to a New Age report on Thursday, while the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Dhaka has set Tk 1,240 as exams fees for a regular student of science group and Tk 1,150 for that of humanities and commerce groups, the extra amounts depending on schools range between Tk 590 and Tk 7,210. Moreover, most schools reportedly realise the additional fees under different dubious heads such as development fees, farewell programmes, etc.

Indeed, such malpractice by the school authorities going on for long is widespread all over the country. It is, regrettably though, also commonplace that on every occasion, there is a huge uproar over the issue and that the top brass of the ministry, along with the ones of the education board concerned, come up with pledges aplenty to get tough on errant institutions just to go into hibernation once the hue and cry diminishes. Undoubtedly, such inaction on part of the government further emboldens the ravenous authorities to pursue their means to earn unauthorised money. One can also hold responsible the pervasive commercialisation pursued for decades by successive governments, including the incumbent Awami League-Jatiya Party government, of the education sector for all this. Commercialisation is a policy that, on the one hand, allows the government to shrug off its responsibility in the sector and, on the other, enables authorities of different educational institutions at least to raise funds needed to run the institutions from what they love to call internal sources at their will.

It cannot, meanwhile, be denied that the vast majority of the students that take exams under different education boards every year belong to fixed income groups — the people who literally need to struggle hard to keep body and soul together, especially, after the incumbents' assumption of office as there has been an unabated surge in prices of commodities, that too, with hardly any increase in their genuine income during the period. The government, therefore, needs to realise that the extra amounts imposed on SSC examinees will invariably add to the miseries of their guardians. As constitutionally bound to provide education for all, and also pledge-bound to ensure free education up to graduate level, it has no room for dithering on reining in errant schools.