

# City schools must return extra fees

Education minister stands firm against admission trade

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid, yesterday categorically said that schools which charged admission fees higher than the government-fixed amount would have to return the extra money or adjust it with the monthly fees.

He stated this at a public dialogue, "Admission trade: People speak", where a number of students and guardians brought allegations of extra fees being charged by city schools.

Campaign for Popular Education (Campe), in association with Channel i, a private television channel, organised the dialogue at LGED auditorium.

Some of the participants demanded that political leaders be kept out of school managing committees (SMC) through formulation of a law aimed at putting an end to the commercialisation of the education sector.

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Many also criticised the government and the Monipur High School and College authorities for dropping lawmaker Kamal Ahmed Majumder's name from the probe report on the assault of a woman journalist of the private television channel Rtv.

"It took Tk 25,400 to have my daughter admitted to Monipur School. The school also sold admission forms at Tk 600 each," said a parent, who asked when and how guardians could expect to have a refund.

Another guardian of a student of the same school said the institution took Tk 32,000 to enrol her daughter in class-I (English version) while the monthly fee is Tk 2,000.

Nasirullah Nahid, a student from Khulna who could not get admitted in a reputed school despite doing well in the last Junior School Certificate exams, asked whether students like him would never have the chance to study in reputed schools due to their not being able to pay exorbitant fees.

The minister said the reputed schools were charging extra fees in the name of development, session charge and other fees. Without mentioning the name, he said a school had made Tk 4.42 crore from admission and other charges this year.

that schools in Dhaka city must not charge more than Tk 5,000 for admission and session charges.

But things turned ugly on January 3, when ruling Awami League lawmaker Kamal Ahmed Majumder assaulted Aporna Singha when she went to Monipur School to prepare a report on extra admission fees being charged by the school. The lawmaker heads the school managing committee.

Yesterday, the education minister said the authorities could review the admission fees for private schools which had been fixed in consultation with teachers, parents and officials concerned.

Stating that political economy was involved with the admission trade, Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, proposed the formulation of a law to ensure that no political leader could be involved with any school and no politician could be the head of any school management committee.

Rehman Sobhan, chairman of Centre for Policy Dialogue, said almost all the lawmakers' children study in English medium schools and so it should be analysed whether a lawmaker had any interest in the school he was leading.

He proposed keeping 25

"We cannot get rid of this problem unless standard education is ensured in all the institutions. We are striving to do that," said Nahid, adding that the issue of charging higher admission fees was nothing new in the country.

He said since there were few good educational institutions, most parents felt eager to get their children admitted in them, thus leading to a huge competition. And thence come some people in the play to take advantage of the situation, the education minister added.

"We have got a report from the committee working on admission fees and will take action against the rule-breakers as per law," he said.

Aporna Singha, staff reporter of Rtv, who was assaulted by lawmaker Kamal Majumder, asked the minister how long the ministry would keep repeating the cliché "taking action or will take action" as most students have already got admitted by paying the extra money.

The minister in reply said there was no negligence in the part of the authorities about the issue and they would definitely take action.

Only a few days ago, the enquiry committee on monitoring school admissions in its report found that 24 out of 32 prominent non-government schools in the capital charged fees much higher than the amount fixed in the admission policy.

Monipur High School and College, Viqarunnisa Noon School and College, Motijheel Ideal School and Motijheel Model School are among the schools that charged high fees.

The committee recommended refunding the extra money to the parents and guardians.

The admission fee issue came under the spotlight following media reports that most of the prominent schools in the capital had been violating the admission policy by charging extra money. The extra amount ranged between Tk 7,000 and Tk 26,000 for class-I, whereas the policy states

to 30 percent seats in case of colleges for general students.

The speakers also demanded more allocation in the education sector to ensure education for all and quality teaching in schools.

"We have seen a rise in the budgetary allocation for defence but not for education, which is depressing," said Rasheda K Chowdhury, Campe executive director.

Psychologist Mehtab Khanam stressed the need for changing the mindset of guardians who compete to send their children to so-called good schools just to get good results but not for overall development of a child.

Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid, demanded that the schools publish their annual audit in the public domain.

Human rights activist Sultana Kamal said education was not a matter of business, but nowadays schools and colleges were being established for profit.

Hossain Zillur Rahman, former education adviser to the last caretaker government, said problems with admission would not be resolved until a long-term agenda to turn all schools into good schools was taken.