

AL's left allies against VAT on education

PARITHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

The ruling Awami League's partners in the 14-party combine yesterday said they are against imposing VAT on education, as it would encourage commercialisation of education.

Some of them went on to accuse Finance Minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith of creating the present crisis and demanded the prime minister's intervention.

The government slapped a 7.5 percent VAT on private universities in the current fiscal year's budget. The decision has provoked outrage among students and their guardians who believe the university authorities would eventually pass the burden on to the students.

Since Wednesday, the students of private universities have been protesting against the decision.

The Daily Star has talked to leaders of six components of the 14-party alliance and all of them expressed objections to

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

AL's left allies against VAT

FROM PAGE 16

imposing VAT on education. Some of them, however, questioned the intention of the students' movement.

The Workers Party of Bangladesh, a key ally of the AL, said the government imposed VAT on the birth, basic and constitutional right, turning education into a commodity.

In a statement, party's General Secretary Fazley Hossain Badsha accused the finance minister of giving rise to the students' movement. "Imposing VAT on education will encourage commercialisation of education," he said, adding that different statements of the finance minister have only added to the confusion.

"Maybe there is confusion in the way the minister thinks," Badsha said, seeking the premier's intervention to resolve the crisis.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal General Secretary Sharif Nurul Ambia termed the imposing of VAT a "controversial" decision.

"People have not accepted the decision, and the government should clarify its stance immediately," he said, adding that they are against VAT on education.

Stating their position against VAT on education, Communist Party Presidium Member Nurur Rahman Selim questioned the intention of the ongoing movement.

"Private universities are doing business with education and VAT on them is logical. The government should be alert so that the universities cannot make the students bear the VAT burden," he added.

Samiyabadi Dal General Secretary Dilip Barua said there is no logic behind imposing VAT on students. He, however, believes imposing VAT on private universities is logical as those universities have turned education into a commodity and are making a mint.

National Awami Party (NAP) General Secretary Enamul Haque said they would never support VAT on education. "But, as private universities are doing business, imposing VAT on them

is right. The government should be vigilant so that universities could not increase tuition fees on this pretext."

Communist Kendra Joint Convener Asit Baron Roy said education is not a commodity and imposing VAT on it is illogical.

"When the government attaches importance to the education sector, it cannot impose VAT on it," he added.

Main opposition Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad bitterly criticised the government for the decision, saying it proves the government does not want to develop the education sector.

The BNP has also opposed the decision, saying no country in the world has VAT on education.

Bangladesh Chhatra League President Saifur Rahman Sohag has, meanwhile, said there should not be any movement after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina clarified that VAT would be levied on the private universities.

"As the largest student organisation, we think the movement was right at the initial stage when there was confusion over VAT. But when the prime minister herself made it clear, there is no logic behind continuing it," he told The Daily Star.

The BCL president said it is now up to the law, enforcement agencies to deal with the agitation.

The BNP's student wing Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal Vice-President Nazmul Hasan said the private university students are demonstrating for a righteous cause. "We will stand by them," he told The Daily Star, demanding withdrawal of VAT.

Bangladesh Chhatra Federation President Saikat Mollik said the state should shoulder the responsibility of education and withdraw VAT imposed on the private universities.

"We urge all students to support the movement," he said.

Bangladesh Chhatra Union (BCU) President Hasan Tareque and General Secretary Lucky Akhtar said they expressed solidarity with the demonstrators and urged all progressive organisations to do so.