

VAT on English medium schools

Is education a commodity?

THE Supreme Court has stayed for eight weeks a High Court order halting collection of VAT on tuition fees paid to English medium schools. While the legal process will run its normal course our appeal is to the government to treat education across the country equally.

We believe that the government's policy of imposing value added tax on tuition fees of English medium schools since 2007 is unfair as it reduces learners to nothing but consumers.

We understand the importance of expanding the tax net in order to produce revenue for financing development projects and programmes, but singling out English-medium schools in such a manner is discriminatory and runs counter to the government's promise to ensure inexpensive education for all. The government had levied a 7.5 percent VAT on the tuition fees of private university students in this year's budget but eventually rescinded the decision following mass protests in the capital last month. We suggest that not only should the government revoke its policy of levying tax on English medium schools, it should also ensure that the parents are not burdened with gratuitous payments that many of these schools impose on them.

We want to impress upon the policy makers that education, be it English-medium or otherwise, is a public good and investing in it pays more than anything else in the long run. We, therefore, repeat our call to the government to exempt English-medium students from the burden of VAT.