

ENGLISH MEDIUM SCHOOLS' TUITION FEES

No VAT for 6 months: HC

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THE High Court on Thursday stayed collection of Value Added Tax on tuition fees of English medium schools for six months.

Students of English medium schools and their parents held demonstrations on the streets of capital demanding complete roll back of the controversial VAT on

tuition fees. In 2010, the government imposed 4.5 per cent VAT on tuition fees of English medium schools and raised it to 7.5 per cent in 2014.

In his current year's budget speech, finance minister AMA Muhith proposed raising VAT on tuition fees of English medium schools, private universities, as well as medical and engineering colleges to 10 per cent.

While adopting the finance bill, Parliament slashed VAT on tuition fees to 7.5 per cent.

On Monday, street protests by students of private universities force the government to withdraw VAT on their tuition fees.

Within three days, students of English medium schools and their parents took to the streets on the demand of withdrawal of VAT

on tuition fees. In 2010, the government stepped back from imposing VAT on tuition fees of private universities facing protests from the students.

A bench of Justice Shamim Hainain and Justice Mohammad Ullah stayed collection of VAT from the students of English medium schools and issued a rule on the government to explain in four weeks as to

why its decision of imposing VAT on the learners should not be declared illegal.

The court issued the rule after hearing a writ petition filed by two guardians whose children study in two English medium schools.

The writ petition challenged the legality of imposing VAT on the tuition fees of schools by the National Board of Revenue.

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Appearing for the petitioners, Shahdeen Malik submitted that his clients were forced to pay 7.5 per cent VAT on tuitions fees of their children.

He described NBR's decision as discriminatory, arbitrary, and in direct contradiction to the Constitution of the Republic and the education policy of the government.

Lawyers said that the government did not pay heed to previous orders given by two separate HC benches not to collect VAT on tuition fees of English medium schools.

The HC issued the orders on June 20, 2012, and on April 23, 2014.

On April 23, 2014, the HC also prohibited collection of readmission fees from students every year and directed the government to formulate a guideline on fees to be collected by the English medium schools.

On June 20, 2012, the HC asked the government to ex-

plain why it should not be directed to abolish VAT on tuition fees of schools.

On Thursday, teachers, students and their parents stood on Sat Masjid Road forming an hour-long human chain to press the demand of withdrawal VAT on tuition fees.

The protestors shouted the slogan 'No VAT, No VAT'.

They carried placards with the inscription, 'Why the discrimination against English medium schools only?', 'Education is not a commodity', 'Why VAT on English medium only?'.

Muntasirul Alam, who sends his child to European Standard School, said that the authorities should expect stronger protests unless they rolled back VAT on tuition fees before Eid.

As the government did not formulate the guidelines as the HC had directed, the English medium schools increased various fees to make up for the annual readmis-

sion fees it cannot collect any more.

Several English medium schools also abnormally increased monthly tuition fees after the HC in its order of April 23, 2014 directed them not to charge annual readmission fees from their pupils.

Some of the schools are also collecting the annual readmission fees in another name.

Some of them raised tuition fees by up to 80 per cent to make up for the readmission fees, said parents.

Many of the schools simply ignored the HC directive, they said.

Education ministry joint secretary Ruhi Rahman said Thursday that guidelines for the English medium schools would be prepared soon as the HC had directed.

Australian International School charges Tk 30,800 (\$400) to Tk 77,000 (\$1000) as annual fee, Tk 38,500 (\$500) to Tk 1,07,030 (\$1390) as tuition fee for a

term, and Tk 34,650 (\$450) as admission fee from a new student.

Parents said, Scholastica, Mastermind, Sunnydale, Oxford International School, Maple Leaf International School and some other schools charge between Tk 60,000 and Tk 1.50 lakh as the admission fee

They said that the school authorities developed the practice of increasing admission, readmission and monthly tuition fees almost every year.

Neither the officials of the education ministry nor the English medium school authorities could say how many English medium schools were there in the country.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics there are 159 English medium schools in the country with 64,500 students. But parents and officials expressed doubts about the accuracy of the data.