

Rising tension in the education sector

Government must address protesters' concerns

BOTH private and public universities in the country seem to be in a state of flux, with dissatisfied students and teachers waging separate movements to realise their demands. The government ought to address the concerns of the affected groups before the situation escalates.

The students of private universities across the country have been protesting the imposition of VAT on their tuition fees, arguing that education is not a commodity that only the rich can afford, since the budget was announced in June. After four months of continuous protests, rather than withdraw VAT, the Finance Minister declared yesterday that the burden of the VAT should be borne by the university authorities, not the students. That is well and good, but how is the Finance Minister going to ensure that the burden of the VAT is not passed on eventually to the students through enhanced fees? It seems to us that the government has stalled the issue rather than really solve the matter. If this directive is to work, the government must engage the university authorities and ensure that they pay their dues to the government from their coffers without unduly affecting the students.

Meanwhile, teachers in public educational institutions have intensified their protests regarding their pay scale following the approval of the new pay structure on Monday. We believe that the teachers have some legitimate concerns. Rather than brush off their demands, the government should live up to its commitment to set up a separate pay commission for them. At the same time, we request the teachers not to call for programmes that hamper the educational activities, for the ultimate loser would be the students.