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PEC exams to continue

Decision illogical, unnecessary, disappointing: academics

**Mustafizur Rahman and
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THE cabinet on Monday decided that the Primary Education Completion examination for Class V students and the Junior School Certificate examination for Class VIII students would continue until the schools were pre-

pared to extend the primary education up to Class VIII. The weekly meeting of the cabinet sent back for further scrutiny primary education ministry's proposal for abolishing the PEC examinations after Class V, said a minister after the meeting. Academics as well as guardians heavily criticised the cabinet decision on PEC exam after Class V terming it 'illogical, unnecessary and disappointing.' The decision would be harmful for students and guardians but would be more profitable for coaching centre and guidebook business, they added while

Continued on page 2 Col. 5

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Continued from page 1
talking to New Age.

The primary and mass education ministry placed the proposal for extending the primary education up to Class VIII scrapping the PEC exam keeping with the 2010 education policy at the meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

'The cabinet has sent back for further scrutiny the primary education ministry's proposal for extending the primary education up to Class VIII scrapping the PEC exam,' cabinet secretary Muhammad Shafiul Alam said at a briefing at the secretariat.

He said that both the PEC and JSC exams would continue until adequate infrastructural development was made and teachers were trained for the major changes in the primary education system.

The PEC examination would be held this year, the cabinet secretary cleared replying to a query.

Several senior ministers including AMA Muhith, Tofail Ahmed, Matia Chowdhury and Rashed Khan Menon criticised the primary education ministry move without doing any preparatory work for the extension of the primary education system, a minister said.

According to him, the ministers said that the primary teachers were not capable to teach students up to Class VIII.

The overall conditions of many of the high schools, particularly those located in hard-to reach areas like haors, were very poor, said a minister.

Neither education minister Nurul Islam Nahid nor

the primary education minister Mostafizur Rahman could defend the proposal as most of their colleagues were opposing the proposal to scrap the PEC exam at the moment.

In the wake of demands from guardians and educationists, the primary education ministry decided in principle that the PEC exam after Class V would be scrapped from this year.

The ministry sent the proposal for scrapping the exam to the cabinet division as the test was introduced in 2009 through a cabinet decision.

'There will be no primary education completion exam after Class V from this year', Mostafizur Rahman said on June 21. Earlier on May 30, he said that examination for primary students would be held after Class-VIII as the government has elevated the primary level up to the 8th grade.

The government on May 18 decided to elevate the primary education level up to Class VIII in line with the National Education Policy 2010.

Educationist Serajul Islam Choudhury, also Dhaka University professor emeritus, told New Age, 'The decisions would be harmful to students as it has been proved that the exam is unnecessary which is putting huge mental pressure on children.'

The Education Watch Report 2014, unveiled by the Campaign for Popular Education in August 2015, said that the introduction of PEC exam made students dependent on coaching and private tuition, increased education cost and replaced textbooks by guidebooks.

The cost for coaching and private tuition per student was Tk 1,902 in 2008 and it increased to Tk 3,056 in 2014. 'This increase is clearly linked to PEC exam introduced in 2009,' said the report.

It said that 81 per cent PEC examinees went to take coaching class at schools and 77 per cent had private tutors at their home and about 96 per cent had bought guidebooks, the report said.

The PEC exam, introduced out of the blue, was not in the 2010 education policy, education commission co-chair Qazi Kholiquzaman Ahmad said while chairing the report launching programme.

Former caretaker government adviser on primary and mass education Rasheeda K Choudhury said that she was shocked by the decision as few days back it was decided that there would be no public exam after Class V.

'It's like taking one step forward, two steps back,' she added.

There are many countries where at this level there is no exam, said Dhaka University Institute of Education and Research professor Mohammad Jalaluddin. 'There is no logic in taking exam after Class V,' he said.

In Sri Lanka, according to the World Bank study in March 2014, students take public examinations after Class XI and XIII while in India, Pakistan, the Maldives and Bhutan, students take public exams after Class X and XII. Nepalese students take public examinations after Class VIII, X and XII.

Government at first says

there will 'no exam after Class V now says exam will take place after Class V, it is playing with students making confusing decisions,' said Salma Akter, one of guardians of students of Ideal School and College who are taking part in different programme demanding scrapping of exam after Class V.

'We will sit after Eid to take programmes against the decision,' she added.