

New school rules need to be enforced, earnestly

THE education ministry's circular asking non-government educational institutions, among various other issues, not to increase tuition fees by more than 30 per cent on the current amount is heartening. The institutions, whether enlisted for monthly pay order, fully or partially, or running outside the monthly pay order scheme, can increase the fee only to make up for financial deficits through due process, that too on consultation with guardians and with the approval of national education managers. The ministry issued the circular at a time when educational institutions, especially the ones running under monthly pay order scheme and the ones without, have for a few years come to be criticised for increasing, in many cases even doubling, tuition, admission, session and other fees, pushing up the cost of education and, thus, forcing a high drop-out rate. The High Court in November 2013 declared the educational institutions charging students additional fees at the time of admission to be illegal. The order has so far not been adhered to, as evident in fees that the institutions charged even at the start of the 2016 academic year. What now remains to be a worry is whether the government this time is sincere about effectively enforcing its directives.

By way of the circular, the ministry has also banned educational institutions from charging session fees and development charge. It has also prohibited the extension of classes and sections and the recruitment of teachers without permission. The circular has asked authorities of the educational institutions to set the salary of teachers and employees in accordance with the qualifications laid out in the organogramme and stopped any institutions from paying teachers, enlisted for the monthly pay order, more than what government teachers of the same grade receive and from paying teachers, outside the monthly pay order, more than the salary and allowance of a teacher on the monthly pay order. Such directives are expected to bring about positive changes in management across educational institutions, to positively contribute to arresting the drop-out rate and to afford guardians, already struggling because of spiralling living cost, relief of a sort. What now remains to be seen is how sincere the government is about enforcing the directives. The government in December 2011 spelt out a guideline on admission, session and other fees, which the government failed to enforce, and the High Court in November 2013 had to step in. The court made mandatory for all non-government educational institutions to follow the government's 2011 guideline on admission, session and other fees, which could not exceed Tk 5,000 in the capital, Tk 3,000 in district towns, Tk 2,000 in upazila towns and Tk 500 in rural areas. But that too has not happened because of the government's lackadaisical attitude.

Now that the government has laid down the rules, delayed even though it must, under the circumstances, now activate its education managers about enforcing them and stringently tackle any breach.