

Edn sector reeling from graft, mismanagement

Shahin Akhter  07 December, 2024, 00:25

Share

Tweet

Email

Share

Print



| File photo

Corruption, mismanagement, politically-driven selections and sexual harassment had reigned the country's education sector during the immediate past 15-year rule of the now ousted Awami League, a White Paper has revealed.

The sector had been infested with corruption in areas, including admission and tuition fees, mismanagement, politically driven selections in the committees to run educational institutions, irregularities committed by public officials, question paper leaks, and sexual harassment, the paper states.

Underscoring the significant fiscal opportunities lost to corruption, the 'White Paper on the state of Bangladesh economy' also states that halving tax exemptions could double education funding and triple health allocations.

Senior educationists have observed that corruption in the sector impacted all the concerned and the government should take immediate actions to curb the identified irregularities.

A 12-member committee headed by economist Debapriya Bhattacharya prepared the White Paper and submitted it to chief adviser Muhammad Yunus on December 1.

According to the paper, some studies point to specific forms of corruption in the education sector, including the collection of unauthorised fees for school admission, not distributing free textbooks, coercing students to take private tuition, and taking bribes to disburse school stipends and grants.

The paper also mentions misconduct, absenteeism and neglect of duties by teachers, inactive school management committees, and a lack of accountability mechanisms.

The paper highlights two particular areas—question paper leaks in the public examinations, and sexual abuse in which female students were sexually harassed and grades were awarded in exchange of sexual favours.

The paper has also found corruption in procurement activities, invisible corruption committed by officers assigned to monitor education at the grassroots, politically-driven handpicking of managing committee members leading to the incorporation of unqualified people into the committees.

Dhaka University's Institute of Education and Research director Professor Hosne Ara Begum told New Age that not only the students but the teachers also were affected by the corruption that deeply harmed the quality of education.

'The government should take initiative to free the sector from corruption,' she added.

Echoing Professor Hosne Ara, BRAC University professor emeritus Manzoor Ahmed also said that the government should take steps to establish an environment free from corruption and mismanagement in the sector.

The government's approaches should be different for the government, non-government and private educational institutions as their problems were different, he added.

About the question paper leaks, the White Paper states that the trend became rampant after 2014 when question papers of the public examinations, including Primary School Certificate, Junior School Certificate, Secondary School Certificate, and Higher Secondary Certificate were leaked on a regular basis.

Multiple university and medical entrance exam papers were also leaked, it read.

Citing a research conducted by the Transparency International Bangladesh, the paper states that the collusion among the officials like deputy commissioner, upazila nirbahi officer and bank officials was responsible for leaking question papers at the local level, adding that at the institutional level, a section of teachers shared photographic images of the papers with the students over cell phones.

The paper also states that a nexus among question setters of creative section, business running coaching centres and publishing guide books, and a section of teachers and moderators engaged in the question setting process was responsible for the question leaks.

Some unskilled teachers and educational institutions trying to top the performance list also provided leaked questions to the students to secure better results.

The relevant authorities' brazen denial of the question leaks further weakened the enforcement of law and not disclosing the observations of the probe committees encouraged the culprits to go as usual with their business, observes the paper.

The paper also mentions that sexual harassment prevention committees have yet to be established at all educational institutions although a High Court directive, years back in 2009, ordered to do so.

Those universities that have such committees often have appointed members from within their high-ranking officials inherently curbing its capacity, the report reads.

The paper also mentions that private tutoring and 'high-stakes tests' are largely undermining learning and depriving economically poor families of the fruits of education.

The increasing social inequalities in the country is expanding to the education sector to address which urgent attention is necessary, the White Paper observes.

The interim government on August 29 formed the committee to prepare the White Paper.