

## Govt should purge education of ills, put it back on track

CORRUPTION that has taken place during the 15 years of the authoritarian regime of the Awami League, toppled on August 5 in a mass uprising, has gravely impacted education, as the white paper on the state of the Bangladesh economy says. The white paper, which a committee submitted on December 1 after the government instituted it on August 29, puts out a call for the government to take early steps to arrest the decline in education. The informational document says that along with corruption, mismanagement, political considerations, the leak of question papers of public examinations, the partisan management of committees of educational institutions and irregularities of public officials have all together contributed to the decline. Along with all this, the document highlights sexual harassment, so far left miserably attended, as a major factor that has tarnished the sector. The corruption includes, as the white paper says referring to some studies, the collection of unauthorised fees for school admission, forced private tuition by teachers and bribery in stipend and grand distribution. The document lists teacher's misconduct, absenteeism and neglect of duties, dysfunctional school managing committees and an absence of accountability that have deepened the problems.

Corruption in procurement, irregularities by education officials assigned to oversight duties, especially in grass roots, and partisan considerations in the formation of managing committees of educational institutions have only helped to corrupt the system with the incorporation of unqualified people. The document says that the leak of question papers became rampant after 2014 when papers from Primary Education Completion Examinations to Higher Secondary Certificate Examinations started to be leaked. Transparency International Bangladesh, as the white paper says, blamed the collusion of deputy commissioners, upazila nirbahi officers and bank officials for the events at the local level and teachers, question setters and moderators, and coaching centre operators at the institutional level. And, a brazen denial of the authorities has only allowed the trend to grievously set in, further weakening law enforcement. Papers of university and medical college admission examinations were also leaked. The authorities not having made public reports of investigation committees only encouraged the trend. As for sexual harassment, most of the institutions are yet to have any prevention committees and the ones that have, have appointed within-the-organisation ranking officials that inherently curbed the capacity of such committees. Private coaching and 'high-stake' tests have also largely undermined learning and deprived poor families of the benefits of education. Above all, the white paper has also noted that a growing social inequality has had its influence on national education that the government now needs to effectively attend to.

Such a situation has not harmed only the students but also the teachers, causing a decline in quality of education. The government should, therefore, take initiatives to free education of corruption with approaches separately fitting in with the needs of government, non-government and private educational institutions. The government should also increase education funds.