

Nahid's graft comments frustrate educationists

Mohiuddin Alamgir

SEVERE criticism greeted education minister Nurul Islam Nahid's speech at a Sunday's programme in which he allegedly asked officials to 'take bribe, but within a limit' while the education ministry in a statement on Monday termed the matter 'confusing and unfortunate'.

A video featuring the minister advocating 'bribe at a tolerable level' went viral on social media on Sunday, triggering uproars in the virtual sphere.

Academics, however, have observed that the minister in no circumstances could make such a statement that might encourage irregularities in the sensitive sector.

Nahid while talking about corruption at the Sunday's programme said he after becoming education minister in 2009 held meetings with different departments and directorates including Directorate of Inspection and Audit and Education Engineering Department.

At every meeting... he claimed, he had pointed out that corruption in education should be stopped as the ministry had zero tolerance toward corruption.

At one point, Nahid said, 'When I sat with EED, I told them please do good work.... I tell you ...take bribe, but you must keep it within a tolerable limit.'

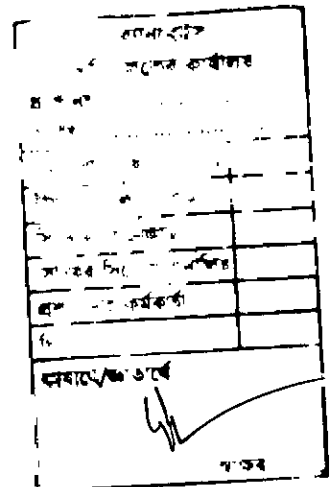
'I did not have the courage to tell them not to take any bribe at that time,' he said, shoring up his comments of that time.

Nahid while citing example of corruption of DIA officials in the past said once envelopes were kept ready at schools for the DIA officials visiting there; the envelop was handed over to the officials and they used to give a 'all is good' report.

'... This was DIA's image to people. But situation has changed a lot,' claimed Nahid.

'It is also true that there are still some stray incidents in which DIA officials take bribe,' Nahid, however, admitted, mentioning that an

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education official owned 13 houses in proximity of Dhaka.

Renowned academics in reaction to Nahid's comments stated that if the education minister made such a comment, it was 'unfortunate and irresponsible and a statement of hopelessness'.

They also said that a minister could not say 'take bribe, but within a limit' under any circumstances, be it in 2009 and now.

They also countered the education minister's claim that corruption in education decreased and claimed it rather multiplied.

They cited examples of question leaks, irregularities in printing textbooks and providing MPO facilities illegally.

Dhaka University professor emeritus Serajul Islam

Choudhury, former Dhaka University English professor Manzoorul Islam both strongly criticised Nahid's comment, terming it unfortunate.

'If he [Nahid] makes such comments, it is unexpected and shocking,' Serajul Islam said, adding, 'Widespread corruption still exists in the education sector.'

'Such comments would increase corruption,' he warned.

'It is a statement of hopelessness,' Manzoorul Islam said, echoing Serajul Islam.

'It is not correct that corruption has decreased in education sector. I respectfully differ with the minister's claim. In reality corruption has not only increased but multiplied,' he added.

Former Dhaka University

Institute of Education and Research professor Siddikur Rahman said that no minister in any circumstances could say 'take bribe but within a limit'.

'It is like providing licence to corrupt people,' said Siddikur Rahman, also National Curriculum and Textbook Board chief consultant.

'It is true that corruption is still in education sector. A research is needed about scale of the corruption,' he said, adding that many achievements of the incumbent government have been eclipsed by the existing corruption.

New Age made several phone calls and sent text messages to Nahid but he did not respond till 10:00pm.

The education ministry in its statement said that Nahid, while distributing laptops among officials of DIA in a

programme at Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education on Sunday, recalled the previous corruption situation in his ministry and claimed improvement in this regard.

At the programme, he also reminded officials of the government's 'zero tolerance stance against corruption'.

The statement said that some of the newspapers and news web portals carried distorted news about Nahid's statement with headlines 'take bribe, but within a limit' or 'take bribe at a tolerable level' which created 'scope of misunderstanding'.

The statement said Nahid portrayed the picture of DIA corruption in the past, cited example of eight years ago and said that introduction of peer inspection of schools and digital monitoring situation at DIA improved a lot.