

Oversight of English-medium schools a must

A LACK of government oversight on English-medium schools, as New Age reported on Tuesday, is gravely concerning, especially in view of a rapid growth and with middle- and upper-middle class people increasingly sending, or trying to send, their children to such schools for education hoping for better prospects.

While the lack of any oversight on these schools that has so far persisted, encouraging such institutions in many cases to charge exorbitantly for education, is itself lamentable, this also stares back at the government as a failure to at least look into what has been happening there in terms of the quality of education and teaching and the academic trend and environment. The failure now appears to be glaring as the government, which took a move to frame a guideline on English-medium schools on an order that the High Court issued in June 2012, has failed to complete the task in four years. The government even does not know how many English-medium schools are there in the country. While the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics, under the education ministry, puts the figure at paltry a 162, which seems to be ludicrous by any standards, education officials have termed the BANBEIS data as being not credible.

The need for such an oversight has now been reinforced against the backdrop of the July 1 hostage-taking and killing by some gunmen at a restaurant at Gulshan in the capital Dhaka and the subsequent July 7 violent attack near the Sholakia prayer ground in Kishoreganj on the Eid day. The demand, which earlier came to the fore because of traditional notion that English-medium schools contribute to the cultural alienation of their students from the Bengali society and its customs, has surfaced now in a big manner as almost all the gunmen or assailants involved in the attacks are reported to have been from upscale society and to have had schooling in English-medium schools. Being English-medium schools, which follow foreign curriculums, obviously does not mean that they all alienate students from society. But the government should also naturally have the mechanism in place to monitor such institutions, at least for their better and effective management and to look into what sort of education they provide and how they hone out the young minds in the institutions. This is also necessary in order for the government to set the cost of education in these institutions reflecting the ground realities, especially now that the market for English-medium schools is expanding much beyond the cities and big towns.

The government, under the circumstances, must act expeditiously to work out, and implement, the guideline on the monitoring of English-medium schools to bring them under an oversight regime, by way of registration, and holding regular inspections of the schools in addition to looking into their curriculums, monitoring the teaching quality, if not the curriculums, and ensuring the value for money that the guardians shelve out on the education of their children in the institutions.