

ADDITIONAL SSC EXAM FEES

1,209 schools get show-cause notice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The education ministry has served show-cause notices to 1,209 institutions for not responding to an earlier order to pay back the additional exam fees that they charged students before the last year's Secondary School Certificate exams.

In the notices issued on February 25, the authorities of these institutions were asked to give their explanations within 30 days, said Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid at a press briefing at the Secretariat yesterday.

"If they fail to give satisfactory answers within the time, their management committees will be dissolved," he said, referring to a High Court order that says school management committees should be dissolved if they fail to comply with government directives.

Speaking of last month's tuition fees anomaly, the minister said he had received two reports on the issue of schools' collecting hiked tuition fees.

Legal action will be taken upon a review of the reports if any institution is found to have violated the rules, Nahid said.

"It doesn't matter which educational institution is powerful and which not. All institutions are equal to us. Therefore, the law will equally be applicable to all."

Every year guardians and students complain of many schools' charging them higher exam fees than the government-set amount ahead of the SSC exams. There was no exception in the last two years.

Following an outcry this year, the education minister on February 3 asked the schools involved to refund the additional money in seven days

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1,209 schools

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and report it to the respective education boards.

The ministry also conducted an investigation into the allegations.

It found that 3,038 institutions under the nine education boards across the country had collected additional money, of which 830 returned, Nahid said.

Some 999 institutions informed that they had not taken extra money. The ministry has continued probing to verify the claims, the minister said.

Rajshahi board has 1,311 institutions, the highest, involved in taking higher exam fees, of which only 95 paid back the money. Some 896 institutions did not return the money, nor did they communicate with the board over the matter, according to the ministry.

Dhaka board has the second highest number of institutions, 752, facing the accusation. Of them, 233 returned the money. Some 296 institutions did not refund, nor did they inform the board of the matter.

The government fixed Tk 1,450, including Tk 300 as centre fees, for science group and Tk 1,330, including Tk 250 centre fees for humanities group. But the institutions took much higher than the fixed fees with some charging students three times the fixed rates.

Some of the best schools were involved in the illegal act, the education minister said.

"Such examples may have a negative impact on children."

Asked what actions would be taken against institutions for taking additional fees for this year's SSC exam, Nahid said action would be taken against whoever violates law.

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The Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) and a government agency submitted reports to the ministry yesterday on the schools' charging students increased tuition fees, Nahid said.

Sources in the ministry, however, said DSHE in its report had attached income and expenditure statements of 13 schools apart from mentioning the additional money they took from the students.

Of them, two schools -- Viqarunnisa Noon School and College and Willes Little Flower School and College -- gave an account in writing that they adjusted the additional money with the fees for February while the rest verbally told that they would adjust it soon, said an official, wishing not to be named.

A number of renowned private schools in Dhaka and Chittagong suddenly hiked the monthly tuition and admission fees in January, citing teachers' demand for a pay increase after the government approved the new pay scale for civil servants.

Following outrage from guardians, the education minister asked the school authorities to stop collecting increased fees and refund the money taken already.

DHSE in an investigation found that seven renowned non-government schools had hiked tuition fees between 11 percent and 100 percent.

The minister yesterday said the schools were asked to give specific reasons for hiking the fees.

"But you [schools] increased the fees suddenly breaking the rules. We'll not accept that. Give your proposal. We'll review it and then we'll take a decision on the increase, if needed."