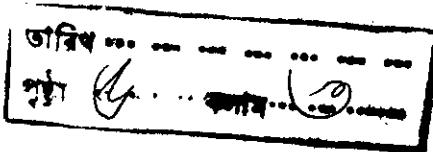


26/9/2007



e-Education Menace In Bangladesh

Mazharul Hasan Mazumder

BEING failed to get admitted into the Honors program at the solitary government college in his hometown Asif, a teenage mofussil boy, has fallen into extreme despair. After wasting a whole calendar year to and fro, with his hope against hope, Asif migrated to the capital city in a bid to learn Computer, which, as he could learn from newspaper advertisements, must bring him success galore soon. Accordingly, ignoring all of my cautionary suggestions he, in full gear, get himself admitted into a computer-training institute (I would rather call it Computer Training Shop). And afterwards, a refreshed Asif was found busy in going to and returning from his new school carrying a nice bag with the name of the institution printed on it. Only after a couple of months I once again met Asif in his hometown and I was compelled to notice in amazement that this time I meet him as an entrepreneur, a proud proprietor of a computer training shop that was a franchise of a reputed IT education provider, and not as a novice computer learner! "A few months after my admission I came to notice that they don't have much to teach us on Computer and that only with the knowledge of booting a computer you can start imparting training on computer and do some cash-in only if you have the vision to do so", Asif tried to convince me. What type of education do you provide here? I asked. "Here at my center we offer IT (Invalid Technology) education to the really deserving people", an all smiles Asif uttered in an astonishing voice, thanks goodness Asif has at least been able to give birth to a homonym!

What's wrong with the aforesaid story? Am I jealous of the success story of Asif? No, question does not arise at all. But here lies the issue, dear readers, that we must bring into utmost consideration urgently.

There is no denying the fact that we badly need a leapfrog in the field of modern technology – particularly in computer technology if the enervating state of the economy is to be improved at the shortest possible time. This becomes further apparent as the government has already identified Information Technology (IT) as one of the few thrust sectors. And

ment was dare enough to allocate a fund of Tk. 15 crore exclusively to this sector. Nevertheless, the way we are stepping toward that end does deserve a second thought especially from the cautious citizen/civil society.

Enjoying competitive advantage hordes of foreign IT firms, especially from the neighboring India, have been penetrating to the country every day to cater to the thirst for IT education, especially of the youth and thus, exploit every bit of opportunity generated here by the *dotcom age*. Worthwhile to say that the overwhelming majority of these firms could not even manage a room in their home-market. Having luxurious get-up with posh offices, glamorous ladies, ultra-modern fittings & fixtures, and eye catching brochures, these firms have been doing the same harm that the then East India Company did on this soil years ago.

Apart from the invasion of the foreign firms, there has been mushroom growth of local firms all across the Delta. In the name of developing competent IT professionals, e.g., software developers, these firms have been doing brisk business, in most of the cases, having forge franchise of imaginary overseas firms.

The irony of fate is that either of the firms usually does resort to magnificent advertisements bearing eloquent messages published especially in Bangla newspapers so as to induce the vast majority of the rural aspirants, who do not usually read English Dailies, to come on to their un-trodden path. Notably, these firms eagerly keep their doors open to anybody who has sufficient monetary capacity and possess the least willingness to avail the train of so-called e-prosperity. Although computer and its relative avenues call for some sort of mind game, these firms enroll students in gangs irrespective of their mental as well as intellectual capacity and academic profiles. True to say, lacking any effective screening system most of the firms have simply been generating a class of ordinary computer operators who, at most, would fit clerical positions in two day's job market of the employers.

Another important facet of the issue is that among the firms there

that comes into being with registration as Private Limited Company (PLC) from the government.

At the time of registration these firms cleverly mention their objectives as 'to promote education', and through this loophole they start offering various Graduate Programs in Computer and Information Technology without having any sort of legitimacy from the University Grants Commission (UGC) – the only body to act as the watchdog on behalf of the state. Regrettably, UGC, the titular body of the government, has very little to do with the problem as it has not been empowered enough to exercise such authority that might enable it to sue the guilty firms as and when necessary. As a result, there remains nobody to examine the standard and legibility of the curricula followed in these institutions. And it must not be hard for any rational person to understand whether the terms 'promoting education' and 'imparting/delivering education' denotes the same or similar thing. These firms, in fact, are doing absolute trade in education, and, therefore, voice must be raised against this practice soon to awake the respective policy makers to relieve the nation from their curse.

Again, these institutions are used to include various most-modern courses in their curricula more to allure potential students to come under their umbrella than to really offer those. As a consequence, the common students soon put their steps mistakenly onto that quicksand. It will be worthwhile to note that the institutions, in practice, cannot offer those latest courses simply due to high paucity of qualified, competent teachers. And as the honeymoon period passes away, the students get to realize the blunder they already have committed. The frustrated students are then consoled by awarding certificates on the basis of whatever they have learned.

Parallel to the old adage that "The man behind the gun is more important than the gun", it can be said that the situation becomes more worse when the state of the faculty comes into consideration. Majority of the institutions have no full time faculty and are run by part time teachers who, due to abnormal load, cannot revise their

with the developments that take place in the respective fields day after day. On the other hand, a few of the institutions have a small number of full time teachers (not trainers) who apparently fall far below the required standard and are not used to teach smooth in English, which is *the medium* of instruction in this field. Moreover, a good number of books on different subjects that are used as Bas Text in these institutions contain series of mistakes, which the respective teachers, either deliberately or due to inability, cannot rectify correctly. Against this backdrop, it must not be extraneous if someone raises the question as to whether these graduates will be able to compete globally, which is supposed to be a common phenomenon at the dawn of the year 2004 when WTO will come into effect.

Finally, it can be said that we must devote ourselves towards the economic emancipation of the poor masses. IT is one of the few sectors than can only expedite the rapid pace of growth of the economy – it is no way the means. To that end, we must measure our eligibility for the sector as long as IQ level of the people is concerned. Today practice of enrolling *en masse* in the IT institutions must be restricted and students with good should be encouraged to come this arena. Moreover, the bulk foreign currency that has been drained out of the country by the foreign institutions must not be left unconsidered. In addition, UGC must be empowered enough to scrutinize the quality and responsibility of the curricula of the institutions and to monitor whether these firms charge exorbitant tuition fee from the students. Because we do not wish to see the old saying 'Appearance can be deceptive' materialize in this field. And last, but not least, accountability as well as transparency is to be ensured, the functioning of the IT firms currently in operation in the country so that no other entrepreneur like Asif can born to the scene in the days ahead.

(Mazharul Hasan Mazumder, a Lecturer in the Department of Business Administration at Shaheed Sajal University of Science and Technology, Dhaka)