

Education Debacle And The Strategy To Meet It

Roughly, one lakh out of a total of four lakhs of HSC examinees failing is a major (educational) debacle for HSC studies and, generally, for the country's post secondary and pre-university education. It implies a calamity that cannot be just explained away by this or that factor or political statements made as usual.

For a start, the immediate and long-term factors need to be pin-pointed and remedial measures, both short and long-term, adopted to put right what has gone wrong with the country's secondary and higher secondary academic system. And much has gone wrong.

The debacle, immediately, is attributable, to the extent of about 80%, to the hurry with which some changes have been introduced in, e.g., question setting, script-examining, result-compiling and, particularly, in the changed nature of questions in English and Mathematics. Needless to say English has for long been the major hurdle for SSC and HSC students to cross. The changes obviously have been wrought in pursuance of the education administration's aim to shore up the deficiency in the knowledge of English among students and arrest the overall decline in the teaching of English at these levels.

Students' problem with English has been compounded also by the 'uniform' question system under the boards and the rule asking for the examinees to obtain 'compulsory' pass marks on both essay and objective types of questions. They have explicably become the last straw considering such permanent factors as, among others, shortage of teachers in numbers of colleges, both new and old, across the country.

Add in the sagging standard of teaching at the SSC level in English and Maths and most other subjects, aggravated by the general lack of discipline in school/college administration, the virtual absence of inspection of schools or colleges, which had been one of the most effective monitorial institutions for more than two hundred years under the British and for sometime after. Consider also the interruptions caused this time around by political activism of regular academic programmes for the classes to be run smoothly and regularly.

While one appreciates the anxiety with which the administration wants to see improvements in quality and standard, one finds it hard agreeing that changes set in train in a hurry could be anything but counter-productive. It has been transparently demonstrated by the HSC examination disaster. In fact this would hold true for any other area needing reform and renovation.

Teacher shortage, specially of English teachers, has been a chronic one over many years, particularly for rural schools and colleges. This has been made worse by the poor standard of class-room teaching offered in these colleges and schools. Private tuition that has become a source of earning for teachers obviously filled the lacuna in the class-room teaching.

But this advantage is enjoyed only by the affluent few in rural or urban sectors. For the overwhelming number of others in both city/town-based and village-based schools this objective help is out of reach.

So here is not only a major education debacle, here is also a huge problem for the administration (and the education ministry) seriously to address. The media for itself has in its comments and reports shed enough light on the essential aspects of the problem. It is now for the higher authorities to do the amount and kind of thinking to deal with what very plausibly may be regarded as a crisis of education at both SSC and HSC level. Strict and elaborate monitoring through inspection and all that it means about how the schools and colleges are run around the country, we think could mark the beginning of the new education strategy to improve things—rather than anything else.