

Teachers And Text-books

It has just been announced that a conference of school teachers will meet towards the end of January to consider the problems the profession is plagued with. They will, we imagine, have a heavy agenda to discuss if they do not confine their attention to pay-scales and discipline. There are in our opinion two problems in especial which have assumed an over-riding importance.

The first is the problem of teacher-training. Most of the fifty thousand old primary and secondary schools in Bangladesh are staffed by men and women without any special training. This is particularly true of private institutions which cannot afford to pay for trained personnel, and the supply is also so limited, that the annual output from teachers' training institutions and colleges is easily absorbed in state schools, with no surplus for private employment. The result is that pupils in the majority of schools are handled by men and women who lack professional competence and are consequently unable to give them the quality of education they are entitled to receive. Year by year academic standards are declining, and they have reached a point where the level of performance of a pupil in a secondary school is hardly different from the level attained by a better than average student in a primary school. This means an enormous waste of resources at the cost of the country. This also gives the teaching profession in Bangladesh a bad name, and whatever goes wrong in education is blamed on the teachers.

There are two things which must be insisted on. One is an increase in the number of training institutions to cope with the expansion of primary and secondary education. We had only 10 teachers' training colleges in 1983-84 and 49 teachers' training institutions in the same period for primary education. This is much less than the minimum we need.

But the work of these bodies also needs to be supplemented by regular in-service refresher courses. Every teacher should be required to attend a refresher course once in every three years in order that he might be enabled to keep in touch with the latest developments in the profession.

The second problem which helps depress academic standards is the problem of text-books. Teachers have little say in the selection or preparation of the text-books they are called upon to teach, nor can they complain effectively if they find any of the text-book board's impositions unsatisfactory. Complaints are being continually made in newspapers about every class of text-book used, whether in the sciences or in the humanities, and the mistakes range from crude printing errors to factual error committed by incompetent writers. What the teachers can rightfully ask for is the right to set up expert committees for the examination of whatever text-books are adopted by the text-book board. What criticism and suggestions they are in a position of advancing in the light of their experience should carry weight. Teachers are frequently required to teach books or adopt methods of teaching devised by people without any actual experience of what goes on in the schools. The outcome is unhappiness for the teachers and inadequate, unsatisfactory instruction for their pupils.

One glaring example of this is the rejection by pseudo-experts of the method of teaching English which several generations of sub-continental teachers have preached over nearly two centuries. The new method now recommended baffles the instructors and the instructed, and which some boys and girls are forced to cram up new terms for the sake of success in examinations, their ability to write a correct composition declines year by year. Teen-agers who have not mastered basic grammatical structures are being forced to study elements of linguistics which have no relevance to their simple needs. One has the impression that they are sought to be used as guinea-pigs by experts who are not sure of their own ground. It is against this, among other things, that teachers are organised in a way.