

An Examination Of Examinations

In developing countries particularly in the LDCs (Least Developed Countries) it is seen that social or other public issues when they take on chronic proportions tend to produce a state of immunity on the part of the ruling authority much as chronic diseases do for patients and doctors. Bangladesh's problems are a legion; but some of them are of a fundamental nature and therefore calls for much deeper understanding and expeditious treatment by the authorities concerned than has so far been in evidence. The phrase that has become a cliche is priority issues and its order of handling and implementation.

Take, for instance the problem of expulsion of examinees from the public examinations: the HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate) examination, started on July 12th and the very first day saw 4 (four) thousand students expelled from the different centres of the four Boards. This was followed by thousands more being so expelled. Earlier in the year the SSC (Secondary School Certificate) examinations, held on Thursday May 10, began with the expulsion of 3,911 examinees under the four Boards. In fact the examination abuses record has never been any better in the previous years. The continuing decline in the public system of examinations reflects some basic failures bearing on the management of HSC education as a whole. What we notice today is a cumulative picture of years of mismanagement and corruption that have got into the agencies running the two systems—right from the Boards to schools and colleges.

Unfair means on such a scale adopted in examinations seems to have been taken as a problem separated from the root causes accounting for it. Reforms have been suggested for the examination system and the former Education Minister proposed reforms ranging from the setting up of a "question bank" organising a hundred questions and their selection on the basis of lottery and restrictions on the number of examination centre to computerisation of the tabulation system and so on. This is holding the wrong end of the stick and missing the whole point.

Scandals of the kind reported in connection with public examinations go far beyond the copying practised at the examination hall by the examinees. Leakages of question papers far in advance of an examination and, allegedly, individuals or departments supposed to keep the secret about questions have been reported to spill the beans, so to say, in exchange for some material benefit. As for the teaching done in the classes, the widespread complaint is that class work involving directly teachers and students in the class room has long been an unknown thing. As a result tutorial homes run on a commercial basis are mushrooming, for instance, in Dhaka city; (other cities have followed suit). batches of students flock to these "homes" and tutors are said to be making enviable large fortunes. Needless to say the "homes" are run by the teachers not performing as seriously their duties in their school rooms.

44

Facilities provided by these private centres are mainly to help their students with encapsulated answers to 'probable' questions which are received in a package to be studiously crammed. It needs no straining of the imagination to figure that a centre to attract more customers would have to provide the best possible 'help' which, in turn, would mean that the tutors would exert their best in order to do their best to help their clients over examination hurdles. The exertions made in the process of rendering such 'help' may include not always impeccably fair or honest means.

Considering these circumstances the examination system as such is not to blame. Nor any adhoc "reforms" introduced to improve it will be of any avail. This very system has been in vogue for more than a century including that during the colonial days. Before its near-collapse over the past few decades in Bangladesh it had worked—and had been worked—efficiently enough to produce scholars and academics of note. The same system is working as efficiently and with as good results, say, in India and other countries in the region or outside.) But the difference is that the abuses and the inefficiency as well as that instinct of commercial gain dominating both the teacher's and others' psychology is a thing unheard of in them. There is nothing wrong with the present system of examination. The cap fits on those who run it. Consider also the condition in which the colleges (providing for HSC courses of education) as well as the schools across the country. According to a recent report there are more than one lakh vacancies in the colleges; the schools are not faring any better,—a problem wellknown to the administration. Add to it the perpetuating phenomenon of frequent strikes, unscheduled closures of educational institutions, politics often leading to campus fights in schools and colleges and interrupting the regular schedule of classes—and many other factors, not least the shortage of teachers and the worse shortage on administrative discipline in most colleges and schools. And no wonder that we have all but destroyed the very foundation of education in the country—the school and the college.