

Educational Decline

More than 1200 examinees were expelled from examination halls all over the country on the first day of the degree examination 1998 held under the National University. The reason, as everyone knows, is the adoption of unfair means. Apart from the expulsion of examinees, there were numerous incidents of damage to college property and even arson. Responsible for these incidents are mostly the helpers and comrades-in-arms of the examinees. If the developments of the first day are any guide, more such undesirable incidents are on the cards. Nothing to be surprised at however—if there were no copying or adoption of other unfair means in the examination halls. For years now our examination halls have turned into a place of unfair means and yet we are more or less unconcerned.

Why should examination turn into a farce like this? It is because education is no longer what it ought to be. When classes are not held regularly to complete the syllabi, students' attendance is redundant and there is no system for monitoring and evaluating the performances by both the teachers and the students, the examinations are bound to create all kinds of problem for everyone concerned in the process. If everything went according to the routine, there was no scope for sending all those rowdy students to the examination centres. It is these students who create and encourage others to create all the troubles in examination halls. Both politics and muscle have vitiated education in a way that today there is little chance for the very spirit of education to prevail in the educational arena.

Indications are clear that worse days are ahead for education in this country. Already the standard of our education on the international stage is suspect. Except our engineering degrees as offered by the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), no other degrees are recognised abroad. Our international rating is on the slide. This is time we looked back and came up with a remedy for this gradual decline in our educational standard. Examination is the ultimate proof of the learners' ability to learn after the end of a certain academic year, or years. When the teachers can allow students without the necessary preparation to face the test, one can instantly detect the disease at its outset.

There are political considerations to have a certain percentage of examinees at various levels successful. But this is a wrong way to look at the matter. Whatever may be the political stake for a government, the more important thing for the nation is to have an education system compatible with the best in the world. The process, we think, should begin at the primary level first. Unless the base is strong, there is every likelihood of the edifice of education coming down subsequently. So far we have done little to stem the rot at this level. Primary teachers have been placated by different governments only because they are a hugely strong force and a vote-bank. They need to be familiarised with the up-to-date and sophisticated methods of education. Even their basic competence for educating the young ones needs to be developed. Similarly science education at the secondary level in villages is being awfully neglected because of the absence of competent teachers, lack of other facilities and the right environment. Colleges are no better either, specially when they are located in remote areas. These are some of the handicaps that need to be removed immediately for the sake of equal opportunities.

Then the more complex issues of reform in education. How are we to do it and where to begin? We have three streams at the primary level and the obsolete methods of judging merit of a student. We also need to take care of these matters. But the first thing first. Political manipulation and commercial interests of the teachers have to be abandoned if we really mean business.

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