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## Consensus on education

President Ershad said on Friday that the government would not 'impose' the recommendations of the Education Commission constituted last year. There would instead be discussions, seminars and symposia on the Education Commission report before its implementation. This attempt at developing a national consensus on the necessary reforms in education would be a welcome departure from the past practice of unilateral action by the government.

Our experience in education reforms is not happy. The history of education reforms is chequered with controversies, frustrations and miscarriages. As a result, the state of education remains deplorably sick. Not only that. The condition is deteriorating alarmingly. Chaos and confusion reign supreme—be it in curriculum, examination system, admission, completion of studies, job and service conditions of the teachers or institutional structure of educational establishments from the level of primary school up to the level of university.

There are no two-opinion in the country about the urgent need of overhauling the education sector. The poor literacy rate—claimed to be 30 per cent—is a shame for the nation. The standard of education is embarrassingly low—certificates from our universities do not command the respect outside the country as it did in the past. And at the national level, the huge numbers of failed students in the various examinations and the shockingly poor quality of the educated population are a matter of concern. Turmoil on the campus, mass cheating in the examination halls and unruly behaviour of a section of the student community verge on the law and order situation. Negligence to duty by a section of teachers and irregularities in running many educational institutions are an open secret. Last but not the least, the legion of educated unemployment is a telling proof of the unimaginative education system that needs to be reformed.

The objective of any worthwhile reform in education has been aptly described by the President: "We want a production-oriented education which is suited to the need of the time. At the same time we want to go back to the good old days when teachers earned both awe and respect from the students."

A national consensus on educational reforms can come only through free, open and detailed discussions, dialogues and exchanges of views among all concerned. Creation of a climate suitable for such exercises is obviously the responsibility of the authorities. But no less important is the responsiveness and a sense of responsibility on the part of all who deal with education as experts or as institutional representatives. Reaching consensus is evidently a daunting task but is always worth trying.