

EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

The education sector has rightly drawn priority attention of the new government. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia herself, in what may be seen as her first policy statement, gave the backdrop of campus violence and an account of time loss in academic institutions over the last decade. Education Minister Prof A.Q.M. Badruddoza Choudhury has asserted the government's commitment for improving academic atmosphere and bringing about a qualitative change in education. It was impossible to build up a progressive society keeping four-fifths of the population unlettered, he said hinting that a mass literacy campaign might be undertaken to remedy the situation.

The leaders did not close the issue with rhetorics but followed up by setting in motion measures for concrete action. Already two committees have been constituted to address urgently two of the leading problems in the educational sphere—one to deal with session jam and another with unfairmeans at the examinations. An eight-member committee with Prof Zillur Rahman Siddiqui as convener will look into session jam and report within three weeks about the causes of session jam and possible measures for reducing the same and long term strategy to keep the malaise off the academic arena. Incidentally the universities in the country are two to four sessions behind schedule.

Another nine-member committee with State Minister for Education Principal M Yunus Khan as convener will look into the public examination system and submit recommendations within two weeks for better handling of the public examination at the secondary, higher secondary and degree levels. The madrassah examinations will also come within the purview of the committee. It will recommend measures relating to secrecy and security of setting, printing and distributing question papers, fair and peaceful holding of examinations, collection and evaluation of answer scripts and publication of results. The mechanism of sending up candidates would also be looked into so as to find ways to prevent undesirable persons from taking the examinations.

The loss individual student, his family and the society suffer due to session jam could not really be measured in terms of money. A student may be 30 years by the time he comes out of the university whereas the usual age for completing studies at that level is 22. The reasons for session jam are many. It begins with delay in admission and ends with delay in announcing results after the examination. In between comes the delay in completion of courses and holding of examinations due to unscheduled closure of the institutions. Besides, strikes by the students, the teachers and other employees, there are also occasions when classes are suspended due to political compulsions.

The examination system in the country is obviously outmoded. It needs overhaul with changes in curricula and pattern of setting questions and evaluation scripts. These are time consuming issues. We should, therefore, concentrate on better management of the existing system, particularly on plugging the leakage points and improving vigilance. We might also take advantage of the experience of other countries in handling such problems.

It should also be appreciated that session jam and unfairmeans at the examinations are partly manifestations of the socio-economic problems prevailing in the country. With corruption permeating every strata of the society public examinations could not remain sacrosanct. And the bleak prospects that await the vast majority of the students on completion of their studies obviously overtake them with frustration and lead to vices.

These problems really need more comprehensive studies and the solutions have to be sought not in isolation but in the overall socio-economic setting.

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