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Exam or a Hoax?

SEVERAL thousand examinees expelled, mass cheating and clashes at different centres in the first three days of the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations programme speak of anything but a healthy education environment. As it seems, examinations under the country's five education boards, both SSC and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC), have become nothing less than military manoeuvres with heavy deployment of law and order personnel at 'trouble zones', with even BDR jawans being called in at times. Evidently, gone are the days when teachers and local government officials were enough to conduct reasonably 'fair' examinations. In fact, police patrol is no longer adequate. While cheating in the examinations assumes mammoth proportions, police have opted to join the bandwagon, so said the Dhaka Education Board chairman at Sunday's meeting with the parliamentary committee on the education ministry. SSC and HSC examinations have truly become a hoax!

Primarily, the crisis — it is indeed one — is the concomitant result of years of enforcement failure, if not nurturing of this ethical aberration. The pity of it is, nowadays students demonstrate and go on rampage if not allowed to cheat. Many students, it appears, have deemed it as their 'lawful' right, understandable given the fact that so many cheats have been allowed to get away with it. The impact of such an arrangement is multi-dimensional. First, students who actually work hard and shun unfair means are not properly rewarded for their efforts; neither in grading nor upon graduation to working world. Second, beneficiaries of such a systemic failure go on to constitute a substantial section of the country's work force, thereby actually hampering national productivity. Last but not the least, mass cheating eventually leads to total disintegration of the education system with little respect for it in the public mind.

The Dhaka Education Board chairman was absolutely right when he said that the prevailing situation was scary. To restore sanity and solemnity to the examinations system, what we need is strict enforcement of the rules. With hundreds of thousands appearing at the SSC and HSC examinations every year, the task is indeed Herculean; however, once the tough tenor is set, aberrations will automatically decrease. In the long run, the policy-planners might start rethinking the examination system as such; there lies quite a few loopholes in it to be plugged.