

The Morning Sun

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Four medical colleges-for what?

Medical education in the country is in disarray and for that not only the system of education is defective but those who are responsible for manning the medical colleges are also definitely at fault. There is total anarchy in the educational arena and medical education is no exception. Even in this democratic set-up, there seem to be no sincere efforts to reverse the situation. The country in this new democracy is involved in many crucial problems and issues of a vexing and chronic nature in tenor and content, but the political will to resolve them in the best interest of the nation is very much lacking for reasons best known to those who advocated — and advocate — democracy, people's rule, rule of law and a policy of national consensus. All these have rather disappointed the silent majority who still continue to groan under the yoke of abject poverty and deprivation and medicare is also no exception. Any welfare oriented state is pledge-bound to provide the basic necessities of life at fair and reasonable prices. But despite all high rhetorics and vote catching tactics, people continue to suffer at the hands of exploiters of all kinds. We have to traverse a long way to realise the goals of our valiant soldiers of independence. But a pertinent question arises: why are we so averse to improving the lot of the teeming millions despite ample opportunities? With the flow of foreign aid in the form of grants and project aid, we wonder why even after twenty years of our independent existence we continue to lag behind in all sectors of national life. Medical education is also one of the worst casualties of political vandalism and plunder. Every institution has been politicised for the aggrandisement of the selected few who still continue to dominate the country through dubious means and at the cost of education. Dhaka Medical College is closed sine die. Rajshahi Medical College was also closed after clashes between two rival student groups and the overall functioning of state-run hospitals and complexes is in total disarray, steeped with corruption. There is loot and plunder and medicines are not given to the deserving patients and the needy. Why at all should this continue to disturb the minds of the people at large? Tax payers' money is being squandered with impunity.

At this moment, the announcement by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia the other day that four new medical colleges will be set up in phases — in Dinajpur, Bogra, Khulna and Faridpur — is not at all in consonance with the need of the hour. She told the Doctors' Association of Bangladesh that preparations to set up the medical colleges would begin shortly. Already medical education is in a terrible mess, as we have pointed out. Teaching of medical science in the existing medical colleges has sharply deteriorated owing to acute scarcity of dedicated teachers and the politicisation spree for which past governments, teachers, students and more so the socio-economic environment were equally responsible. These factors still exist and strenuous efforts are going on to do away with them. The purpose is to make medical education free of the travails it is going through.

Why not improve the standard of medical education and bring it at par with that of the advanced countries of the world? Why not ban private practice of professors and other senior teachers? Why not improve the quality of medical research and innovations so that we can compete with other countries of the Asian continent? Why not introduce the concept of community medical education system so vehemently expounded by national professor Dr Nurul Islam?

It is sheer misfortune that our degrees and diplomas in various disciplines like medicine, engineering, etc, are not often recognised by known universities in Britain and the USA. We are still waiting for recognition. Why not go for radical reorientation of medical teaching and practices and give the whole process an institutional shape instead of taking hasty decisions like setting up four new medical colleges? A lot remains to be done to fully recast our medical education paraphernalia. Political gimmicks and educational pollution will lead to a drift, something that we cannot afford in national life.