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FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

The outcry by certain quarters against the government decision spelling out that higher seats of learning would admit students on the basis of marks secured in S.S.C. and H.S.C. examinations from the current year is hardly logical. Those who support the new policy argue that it would end the exploitation of students (should we include also parents?) by mushrooming coaching centres and reestablish the importance of performance of students in public examinations generating an urge in aspirants for higher education to excel fellow students in knowledge. The critics argue that the new admission policy would not discriminate between students who have secured high marks by adopting unfair means in examinations and those who took the examinations seriously but scored less marks. Apparently, both sides have convincing points. What then should be the admission policy?

Beyond the usual arguments in favour of and against the new admission policy, there are certain unpleasant realities that ought to receive the attention of all concerned. These realities will become vivid to us all if we identify the persons who run or used to run coaching centres specially meant for preparing students for admission tests of different higher seats of learning. Many of these coaching centres across the country are run or used to be run by a section of influential students having the coercive power to effect decision-making on admission to some extent. Just carry out a random survey in any town, apart from Dhaka, which has an important higher seat of learning, like a medical college or an institute of technology which offers degrees in engineering, you will come to know the trade done by majority coaching centres.

The great majority of coaching centres for admission tests teach nothing beyond what any good student has already learnt. If they do, they offer education in capsule, which may be useful for securing good marks in admission tests but, in the real sense, is no meaningful education at all. But if someone with that little learning in capsule knock out a competitor with more elaborate education but without the training from a coaching centre, is he not just buying the chance of entry into a higher seat of learning, depriving a more deserving candidate? The new admission policy will terminate this sordid role of money in the matter of enrolment in higher seats of learning. Clearly, it will guarantee equal treatment to all students aspiring to receive higher education. Isn't that democratic?

But the most important outcome of the new policy will be that it would substantially reduce rivalry among many influential students and the unnecessary demonstration of strength by them within the campus. This is particularly true about academic institutions outside Dhaka, where party politics is rather deem. Most of the country's medical colleges will be much quieter once the prospect of business related to admission, done through coaching centres, withers away. A change of mood will take place in the business-minded section of influential students when they come to realise that prominence acquired through display of strength will not pay them handsome dividends.

It's true that admission to higher seats of learning on the basis of marks alone will not discriminate against those students who have achieved better results by unfair means, adopted in examinations. But this very fact will cause the students to mount pressure upon the authorities to be more active to check adoption of unfair means in all public examinations. It will help ensure better quality of education, a good thing for any nation aspiring to move forward.