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Studies Abroad

In a developing country like Bangladesh where a substantial number of meritorious students are obliged to seek scholarships, study grants and fellowships from foreign governments and United Nations agencies to pursue their higher studies abroad, the government has a responsibility of facilitating the process. Unfortunately, judging by a report published in this paper on Thursday, the system, if there is one, has not been working particularly well.

According to the report, since 1972, a sizable number of Bangladeshis have failed to avail themselves of such opportunities as scholarships and study grants due to what a source described as "negligence" of different Ministries. It seems that in most cases, the opportunities fell through when the authorities responsible for processing the applications failed to complete the necessary formalities in time. It is also possible that sometimes the offers were withdrawn when candidates nominated by the Ministry concerned did not meet the requirements laid down by the donor government or the UN agency. We assume, this has happened in cases not only involving students but also civil servants or local experts in non-government organisations (NGOs) who were offered places in orientation courses, such as seminars and training workshops held in foreign countries. Again, from time to time, one hears of charges of favouritism in matter of selection of candidates for such programmes.

The fault may not always lie with the authorities here that some offers for scholarships or invitations to seminars or training workshops remain unutilised by Bangladesh. Some UN agencies are notoriously late in making the offers, sometimes with incomplete information, and that too often to the wrong department or Ministry. Sometimes the initial contact is made with individuals, disregarding the formalities laid down by the authorities. Such a practice which also may smell of favouritism invariably causes irritation in some official quarters, often resulting in a negative decision from the Ministry concerned. Here, exceptions should be made in the case of Bangladeshis who are invited by international organisations or foreign governments to serve as consultants or to attend seminars in their individual capacities.

It is high time the authorities looked at the situation carefully and identified the bottlenecks in the existing procedure. Obviously, the system can be streamlined and, if possible, simplified. When offered a chance to study abroad on a scholarship from a foreign government or an international organisation, a student should not be obliged to run from one department to another to complete all the formalities. If the selection of a candidate involves a test among several applicants, the contest should be open and straightforward. Above all, the procedure should have a built-in provision for dealing with emergency cases.

While steps are taken within the administration to improve on the procedure for students going abroad for higher studies, Bangladeshi missions in foreign countries should put in some extra efforts to identify possibilities for advanced studies for our students in countries where they are based. This is particularly important in the field of high technology, especially computer science. With a little persuasion, some foreign governments may be willing to offer study grants; others may agree to reserve seats for Bangladesh in their institutions. Similarly, our permanent missions attached to the UN system should ensure that Bangladesh gets its due share of fellowships in training programmes sponsored by UN agencies. What's more, information thus obtained should be readily available to people who can make use of them.