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Private Capital And Education

Even amid falling standards of education something can be thought of that will save the surviving minimum of quality education and also help improve it. This can be achieved through education turned into a competitive investment entrepreneurship. This should not be construed as commercialisation of education in the way to which it is now tending. Indeed our problem is one both of quantity and quality. Quantity-wise even the 20-25% of the population to be put to school, college and university are hard pressed for accommodation. There are simply not enough school houses or college or university buildings. Hence the increasing rush of admission-seeking crowds of students, nearly of equal magnitude among school, college or university goers.

The rush is relatively great for admission to the reputedly good institutions. Failing to get into the few of them available in Dhaka or other cities the choice for many has to fall on almost any school, college or university college. The position is so taut that, in the cities, for instance, even second rate institutions suffer from a glut.

The existing number of schools, colleges and universities for an eleven crore-strong population set to almost double by the end of the century would not touch deeper than the fringe of the education problem of the country.

The worst part of the story is that excepting the few institutions run by efficient management, government or nongovernment, the bulk of the rest suffer from an acute shortage of teachers, lax management, student indiscipline and factious student politics. Nearly three-fourths of them stay in such disarray.

While the state is to blame to have allowed academic discipline to slide on such a scale it will be too much to expect it to bear the total cost of educating the nation.

Assuming it would do its best to pay for Compulsory Free Primary education it has promised there still remains the problem of secondary, post-secondary and university education.

It is in this sector that private capital can step in view of an enormously rising demand. Which means that investment in education i.e. setting up and running schools, colleges and universities can be one of the most paying commercial ventures. This can be seen working in most developed countries including Britain.

Since good schools and colleges are in great demand competition could grow along the line warranted by it. In Dhaka city one or two such institutions (pre-eminently Nore Dam College among a few others) has a reputation for good teaching and academic discipline, attracting increasing number of students. Colleges, universities privately established and managed, aiming for the best possible standard of teaching and discipline can follow, among other things, their own rules of recruitment of staff. Generous salary scales and other benefits will attract well-qualified teachers which, in turn, will attract good students.

The one principle that an individual proprietor or a company running such institutions will have to respect is that the institutions will remain completely free in matters of academic programmes but accountable to a higher committee for anything going wrong with either standard or discipline.

The overall aim will be a joint endeavour by the proprietor or a body of proprietors (in the case of a company) and the academic authorities concerned not only to ease the current pressure on accommodation but to provide better education under a new, efficient management based on private initiative. Once such a competition gets underway the present sloppiness in education management will begin to be replaced by something better, let us hope.