

Rethinking Education Options

Education in recent years has been an issue of grave concern in Bangladesh. It has especially been in the case of secondary and higher secondary education that questions have been raised in many quarters. The normal run of examination results has almost always raised anew thoughts of what ought to be done in the matter of bringing about reforms where the various education boards are concerned. The issue of why such thoughts have come in has much to do with the manner or of the functioning of the education boards. In very simple terms, the different education boards in the country are in serious need of a sweeping clean-up operation. This is so because of the charges that have been made over a period of time. There have been allegations of answers being supplied to examinees during and even before the commencement of examinations. And worse has been the growing trend by now of examination questions finding their way out even before the exams have begun, through means that cannot but be regarded as unethical and dubious. All too often, there has been agitation, and justifiably so, on the part of the conscientious, against the unscrupulous means employed by certain sections of board officials where premature release of questions is concerned. And then there is a much graver matter that many believe has gained currency over the past many years. Accusations have been made that at times results are tampered with as a result of influence, the upshot being that truly good students pay a price for sins they did not commit.

The intention behind a critical look at things relating to the education boards is surely not to undermine the organisations responsible for the promotion of education at the secondary and higher secondary levels. In fact, the opposite is true. The record of the past many years suggests, and powerfully too, that much has gone wrong with education at these levels; and unless something of a drastic nature is done or contemplated in the overall national interest, the future of the young cannot be a proposition one could be proud of. The truth is that unless the system is streamlined at the levels of the SSC and HSC, education in the broad sense of the meaning will continue to be an elusive affair. School and college provide the very basics of academic achievement, which is as much as to say that upon a bettering of the record in these two areas depends the future of the nation's children. For the record to be made better, it is necessary that the bunglings which have so far been made by the boards, notably in the exercises that have gone on over such issues, as question banks, are not repeated.

The pity today is that the question of education has been accorded only minimal attention by the educated sections of society. It should have been the endeavour of the teaching community as well as other areas of intellectual life to probe the problems and come forth with specific recommendations. That this has not been adequately done is reflective of the malaise the country finds itself in. Before it is too late, the question one must face squarely is simple and yet of prime importance: what has been going wrong with education? The answer needs to come hard, and fast, for what has happened through the years has been fundamentally an improvisation of examination methods under the boards. The result has been stagnation on a gigantic scale. Briefly, there has been an acute absence of principles that should have governed school and college education. That condition has led to the present debilitating state of education in the country.

And while we are on the subject, it is necessary to mention that one very significant way in which conditions can be corrected is through going for an overhaul of the teaching methods that have so long been in application. All so often, teachers have quite failed to impart education in a way as can even remotely make a dent on general sensibilities. Some teachers have been found to be too busy with work that falls outside the scheme of their professional responsibilities. It is for such reasons that the old, time-honored method of institutional inspection be brought back into play. Dossiers will need to be maintained on teachers' performance, which will in effect be one of the measures by which education could be put back on the rails.

The time for rethinking our options, at least in the education sector, is now. The goal is to catch up with the rest of the world.