

Unequal Educational Standards

When the competition for higher education is tough — so tough that 20 to 40 candidates vie for a seat in some highest seats of learning, we receive the uncharacteristic news that the total strength of this year's candidates will fall short of the degree colleges' accommodation capacity by at least 23,000 students. The country's degree colleges — both government and non-government — have a total enrolment capacity of 243,000, but the five education boards have produced only 220,748 students eligible for education at the degree level. Now here is an irreconcilable contradiction we have been living with for long and yet do not bother about. The same is the case with education at the primary or even secondary level. There is a tremendous rush for admission to the reputed educational institutions at these levels too but those with no enviable record have to be satisfied with the rejected or not so ambitious types of candidates.

The message therefore is quite clear. Education here suffers from intolerable disparities — at the one end the standard of teaching is high, facilities are upto the mark; and at the other, the reverse is true. The problem too is more or less known to most people. But there has been no serious attempt to correct this wrong. When students seeking higher education found the door of university, medical college etc slammed in their face, the authority brought about a quick-fix solution by introducing honours courses in a number of degree colleges. Today the number of such colleges has increased to the extent that students try to avoid some of them lest they have to go through the ordeal of a sort during their academic years. With no well-qualified teaching staff, seminars and library facilities, these colleges offer honours courses mostly in name only. The more serious of the students there have to look for an alternative. They come to Dhaka or other centres of opportunities two or three months before their examinations to stay there and collect notes and other examination guides, receive coaching at coaching centres specially arranged for the purpose. This is how they prepare themselves for the examinations and even pass those. The fact remains that they learnt virtually nothing from the educational institutions where they got themselves admitted.

Nobody protests because somehow the situation suits almost everyone concerned. The political leadership does not talk about the issue because almost all the political parties maintain their students' organisations to exercise their party influence there. Particularly for the government such moves act as a show-piece of education. No government has ever tried to go deep into the problem of higher education or even education at its lower levels. The political agenda dominates the concern for education. No wonder therefore that education in general is gradually making a down-turn here. There was however nothing wrong in allowing the colleges to open honours courses. But the move was preposterous. Without creating proper facilities and providing the right kind of teaching staff it is useless to offer such courses. So what we needed was to do the ground work first and ensure that we have the proper environment for education at this level.

Even more important was to have an assessment of the national employment situation vis-a-vis the future challenges to meet. Today we boast of general graduates in millions who cannot find employment anywhere — either in the country or abroad. But there are new opportunities for us to seize. For example, computer education has opened up a wide vista and we are yet to comprehend the full import of this wonder machine. Our education should be planned with a goal in mind — one that will have to be responsive to our national need and at the same time focus on markets — employment market in particular, abroad.