

Educational Aberration

Inaugurating the National Education Conference organised by the Ministry of Education, President Shahabuddin Ahmed has made a strong case against educational aberrations the country has come to know about in recent times. The president is of the opinion that the decline in the moral standard as witnessed among a section of teachers cannot be checked merely by admonition, rather stern action is needed to get rid of the malaise. We fully support the president in this regard. All kinds of irregularities and indiscipline seem to have become a feature of academic life and they have crossed the stage where soft remedy would have done the trick. A venerable profession has indeed fallen from grace, thanks to the erring teachers who, we still believe, are not a majority. However the fact is that in a respected and crucially important job like that of teachers, a drop of bad blood can wreck havoc. Admittedly, the number of bad elements in the teaching profession is not that small.

In any civilized society teachers set the standard. Unfortunately those days are long past when teachers of this part of the world did the same and jealously guarded their reputation. Today majority of them may not be susceptible to evil influences but at the same time they cannot boast of the teacher's moral standpoint. Teachers are no longer involved with teaching alone, either they are village leaders or politicians or house tutors who have no time to teach in classes. The president goes on record that primary teachers remain present in schools merely at the time of preparing bill for their salary. This single statement epitomises the professional devotion of our teachers. Maybe, the president has not meant that all the primary teachers do so but this is the general practice. And who does not know that primary teachers are drawing salaries quite commensurate with their qualifications? In fact, the teachers of non-government schools with better qualification draw less and enjoy fewer facilities.

The reason behind this discrimination is simple — primary schools are run with government money. Majority of the high schools are privately run. Now 80 per cent of salaries of the non-government school teachers are paid by the government. The government's contribution is expected to rise to 100 per cent. Now here is the catch-22. When the schools could not pay more than a negligible amount to their teachers, un-qualified and substandard teachers had their chances. Now they have served for years. Particularly in recognition of their contribution in the difficult days, one cannot ask them to go. What happens is that the poor-quality teaching staff continues to serve. This has happened when the programme for mass government takeover of primary schools was taken up and is likely to happen again in case of secondary education. It also happens in case of colleges when they are given the nationalised stamp.

When the academic career of a teacher is below par, even training does not make much of a difference. Primary schools and high schools of the country are in fact crowded with such below-quality teachers. Politics now uses them and they take recourse to bad politics in view of keeping their position secure. So there, in fact, is an unholy alliance. This has to be dismantled if we want to ensure quality education in our educational institutions at those levels.