

Noble Profession Without Nobility

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THE doubt was always there. Now it has been confirmed that 28,000 teachers of non-government educational institutions of the country have their existence only on paper. Despite the education ministry's correspondence with all the educational institutions this huge number of teachers have failed to open their bank account required, according to the ministry's circulation, for drawing their salaries. This they could not do over a period of almost two years. So it is clear why there is no taker of the government portion of the teachers' salary which now constitutes 80 per cent of the total.

The government has since decided that the heads of the educational institutions—schools, colleges and madrasahs—are responsible for drawing salaries against the fictitious names in the past and they must be made to return the money they embezzled. The money will be realised in instalments against the institutional heads' salaries. Each month the government had to pay seven and a half crores Taka against names of these fake teachers. And this continued for years together.

No doubt, the government's decision is quite harmless. It does not seek to mete out punishment to those teachers who have been at the helm of affairs for their wrong-doing. The heads of the educational institutions will have to return the money they have misappropriated. What does the law of the land say, is it not a crime to draw government money against names who do not exist on earth? Why should the teachers go scot-free? If farmers have to pay taxes even after their crop failure, which is none of their fault, why should educated people be granted such a reprieve?

Crimes like this committed by a teacher moreover have their stupendous impacts on society. After the preachers, teachers set the moral standard of a society. Teachers who can stoop so low should have no moral right to teach their students. Here is one profession that under no circumstances be allowed to be mired by such gross malpractices.

Lacking in integrity these people are likely to produce students with no scruple whatsoever. In some recent incidents we notice with anxiety what kind of devils they have already spawned. A so-called student leader of Jahangirnagar University, who had the uncanny ability to change his allegiance to the student front of the ruling party leaving behind the losing party, made a most bizarre celebration of the 100th victims of his violent carnal desire. A few illustrious gurus of such monsters in Dhaka University seem to have started the process quite sometime ago.

Now the question, of necessity, ought to be if education is safe at the hands of teachers lacking in integrity of character. The education ministry by its express concern for recovery of the money misappropriated by the head teachers has acted more like a financial manager or an ac-

countant. When a headmaster or principal falsify for personal financial gain or for his/her staff, the educational ambience suffers a crisis of ethical or moral standard and mutual respect. This can never be a congenial atmosphere for education. Quite a lot of the teachers are moreover found to be culpable for committing other kinds of serious wrong-doing. Some of them realise exorbitant examination fees, others simply go into hiding with the whole amount so realised, throwing the future of the students into uncertainty, yet others contact examinees and demand a huge amount of money in exchange for high marks for a subject of which the teachers are examiners. The list is in fact endless. Reports have it that some teachers were expelled from examination centres of the ongoing S.S.C examination for their part in supplying copies to examinees.

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We do not believe that all the teachers are ready to give in to such weaknesses. But the trend is towards a gradual spread of the disease. In a situation like this, the step considered by the education ministry will have no deterrent impact on moral turpitude of the teachers. Far from that, it might act as a subtle encouragement for them to go for similar malpractices if and when they get an opportunity. It is time that the authority got rid of the bad blood. After all, corrupt mind and education do not go together. However there is no reason to think that the authority has thought of the measure out of its love for money. Both political leadership and bureaucracy today find themselves in a less transparent position than they should have found. In fact, they would be hard pressed to disown their contribution to this mismatch of a situation. Unhealthy politics has made its unstoppable inroads into all ar-

reas of life—not least into education.

So it will not be easy to unseat the guilty teachers. But then how much one can expect from the new education policy that is about to receive the green signal from the parliamentary committee? This policy framed to guide our education has sought to bring about quite a few readicall changes in its form, if not in its content. No doubt, some of the changes like doing away with the public examinations at the S.S.C and H.S.C levels have merit. But no system, however excellent it may be, can work if the implementers themselves are not fine-tuned to its challenges. Fine-tuning does not only demand efficiency and skills but also the integrity of character. Those teachers who can supply copies to examinees will enjoy a field day if they get the responsibility to grade students of their respective educational institutions under the proposed system.

Even more questionable will be the general standard of education at the secondary and higher secondary levels. In the absence of any public examination, they will have nothing to show in terms of results at the national level. Chances are that the teachers' ability or sincerity to teach in classes will be replaced by an unhealthy competition to award higher grades to their students. The grading may in fact go in a reverse order so that the more inefficient and insincere the teachers the higher the marking or grading.

A responsible local committee can only halt such unbridled educational aberrations. But political clout is so pervasive that such responsibility from school or college committees can never be expected. Yet this has to be the starting point by all means. One thing is certain that guardians today are more con-

cerned about their wards' education than ever before. Let them monitor the progress of their sons' and daughters' schooling. Unscrupulous teachers may deceive them for sometime but not for all time to come. Grading made without substance or falsely will get exposed when the local people take stock of the success rates of their respective schools in higher education. What is to be noted is that there will be enough scope for teachers not to do their duties properly but at the same time if the schooling is made a joint responsibility of the teachers and local people, things may really look up, instead of taking a beating, in the education sector. The most important condition for that is to give responsibility to people who are honest and dedicated. Without honest men and women wedded to the ideals and principles that have made this profession special, no programme is going to be successfully implemented.

At the same time it has to be noted that teachers deserve a better deal—not least from the economic point of view. Raise the salaries of the people who in fact shape the mind of the nation. But then ensure that only the deserving ones get into this noble profession.