

The Bangladesh Times

HIGHER EDUCATION

Education is recognised as a fundamental human right and also as a central element in development. The governments around the world have acknowledged the responsibility of providing basic education to their citizens, which is also a recognition of the importance of higher education. Indeed the progress of a modern society depends on the nature and level of higher education and on men who know the "best that has been said and thought in the world".

But what is the state of our institutions of higher education? Have these institutions been producing men of knowledge and learning? In what way are the young minds being cultivated? What priority do they give to intellectual development? Prime Minister Kazi Zafar Ahmed has said anarchy has become the syllabus today; pistols, daggers and knives have replaced pens and books and the student hostels have turned into armouries.

The consequence is: "several thousand" clashes on the campuses over the last seven years taking a toll of 89 valuable lives and causing a serious dislocation in academic activities. The three-year honours course takes eight years due to sessions jam. The situation caused wide and deep concern and had not only been subject of seminars addressed by enlightened people and discussed in the press but also found echo in the Parliament.

Inaugurating an 11-day national training workshop on academic staff development in Dhaka on Monday, Kazi Zafar Ahmed underscored the need for identifying the problems with a view to improving the pattern and standard of higher education. Detailing the purpose of higher education at the workshop, jointly sponsored by the University Grants Commission and UNESCO, he said the nation could not allow deterioration in the standard as on it depend the overall development and progress of the country.

In recent years there has been seen considerable expansion of higher education quantitatively, but quality has been the casualty. The number of universities in the country today is seven and of degree colleges 465. Two more universities will come up next year. The strength of teaching staff at the university level is over 3000 and at college level 15,000. The deterioration in teaching standard is ascribed mainly to the lack of trained and talented teachers. The suggestion for establishing an academy for higher education and research to deal with academic staff development is worth serious consideration.

Extolling the role of a teacher, Prime Minister Kazi Zafar Ahmed quoted the famous saying of Alexander the Great: "I am specially indebted to my parents for my birth and to my teacher Aristotle for imparting me knowledge". He saw teachers in the role of friend, philosopher and guide to the students and expressed the hope that with improvement in teacher-student relations almost 80 per cent of the current problems on the campus would be over.

None would dispute the urgent need of closely looking into the problems in the educational arena and taking remedial measures. But it undoubtedly warrants a multi-disciplinary approach in cooperation with all segments of the society. Education should be work-oriented and higher education selective. Investment in education should be balanced with investment in employment generation so that learners may without any loss of time involve themselves in the productive process. Measures should be taken to attract to teaching talented and dedicated persons and incen-

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