

ADMISSION CRISIS

All the reputable schools have in recent years been subject to a literal mobbing by anxious guardians during the admission season. This year the crisis seems to be more acute, with the number of applicants into class one far outstripping the available seats. It is a desperate situation since seats in respectable schools have not increased in proportion to the waxing admission-seekers.

Dhaka city population according to a rough estimate is said to be about five million at the moment, hence the severe strain on schooling facilities despite the inevitable but much criticised mushrooming of "English medium Tutorials", which happily set their own rules and regulations in the absence of a viable controlling system from the centre. Whereas in the past this land had seen philanthropists establishing solid educational institutions, we have today bright young entrepreneurs doing flourishing business with "exam shops" for indeed today's schools are nothing more than that. The situation is so deplorably commercial that few would contest it is all for the advancement of earning rather than learning.

Dhaka city has about three hundred schools which some educationists believe can accommodate the present rush. The problem however is that guardians often prefer to enrol their wards into the few schools that have earned good reputations. This preference is said to encourage certain unfair practices like admitting children on 'donation' basis, substantial sums to influential teachers who can also guarantee good results. The pressure is overwhelming. Recently one prestigious girls' high school received over one and a half thousand applications for only three hundred seats in class one for two shifts. All the major schools face the same situation. The competition is practically for seats and certificates of good result and not school education as such. Under the circumstances 'cramming by rote' and private contracts with pet teachers who can ensure the passing of further academic hurdles become the objective.

The situation is very grave indeed. The primary and secondary levels which ideally initiate children into the correct attitude, towards learning and knowledge, become under the present constraints a period when children accept intellectual dishonesty as a clever means to an end. Under this sick system society is fast regressing. The dividends which proper education yields for a nation are therefore missing in our society, which seems to be drifting mindlessly and voicing slogans that have little to do with reality.

Honest community leaders must come forward to heal society by taking charge where it is necessary, suggest reforms and cooperate with the government in bringing a wholesome change in the entire education sector. First the foundation must be strong enough. Primary and secondary schools therefore must be strengthened and brought under uniform discipline, irrespective of their being elitist or middle-class. Equal distribution of grants and other facilities such as training and refresher courses for teachers could help upgrade the standard of hitherto less-reputable schools so that pressure for admission can be absorbed by them.

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