



The Bangladesh Times

Dhaka Tuesday, January 6, 1987

Admission rush

As part of an annual scenario, there is a rush for seats in the city schools and as usual, there are too many candidates chasing too few admission opportunities. In a random survey carried out by the Times on Sunday, there are at least ten candidates vying for one seat in the better schools in the capital. One can easily gauge the enormity of the admission problem by looking at the crowd of parents in front of the good schools and their apparent anxieties writ on their faces. In fact even the schools enjoying an average reputation are no less crowded. The admission rush is really turning the setting up of schools a booming business which explains why there are so many kindergartens, "pre-cadets" and the so-called "playgroups" in the cities.

But while most of these "enterprises" brought good profits for the proprietors, these have introduced a new element in the country's education sector. While not all can be called merely money making machines, a majority of them do not meet the desirable academic standards. This brings up the question of whether the time has come when these "enterprises" should be brought under some control of the Education Ministry. Some control is necessary to first upgrade their standards and to maintain uniformity in the education sector. No wonder one hears now of "fake teachers" and "fake schools" who are siphoning away government funds. The Education Ministry is worried about it as much as the public. All this has been possible because there has been so much of "decontrol" in the education departments. A great deal of political influence has also been responsible for the current state of affairs.

The government, it seems, is planning for an overhaul of the Education Ministry as it goes about sanctioning new institutions. Planners are apparently convinced that they must bring order back into the education sector. This has to be both at the lower and at the higher levels of education. There is no reason to discourage people who want to set up schools in the private sector, but what the authorities must ensure is that the quality of education is uniform. This uniformity has to be made not by lowering the high standards of the good schools but by raising the low standards of the not-so-good schools.

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