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The Admission Test Row— And The Answer

One might run the risk of rushing in where angels fear to tread to choose to talk about almost any controversial issue in the country. The admission test for SSC and HSC passed students to get into higher education institutions is such a one. The administration has officially banned the admission test and it has its reason for doing so.

Watchers of these tests,—let alone those watching the bigger sector of national education have long been troubled over the mushrooming abuses sparked by these tests: the abuses range from an unusual growth, among other commercial activities, of coaching centres in most cities for both city-based students and those converging on the cities from the villages for higher studies in the humanities or science groups.

Arts and science faculty of Dhaka University apart, education in engineering and medical sciences is provided by institutions such as BUET and Dhaka Medical College, among other ones. And for obvious reasons students throng these centres for admission in tens of thousands. Over the past years the rush has been unusually heavy for the institutions concerned to cope with this. This very visible side of the issue hide a number of invisible ones. At the heart of the latter was the opportunity for a class of people for a new line of commerce and business. Many rushed to cash in on it, as if the country's education had not already been commercialised enough.

As far the admission test, perhaps the most interesting fact is that (thanks to the coaching centres and their effort at equipping their clients for their admission ordeal and the easy money they earn by such means) while the candidates generally get through these test often with good marks, they mostly have a hard time to manage their viva voce tests. They get found out by the interviewers to show that their test results are no correct index of their merit and ability. That is exactly the point where the link between admission tests and coaching centres snaps. And consequently it raises the question of how a student getting through an admission test, more often quite impressively, cannot justify his test results at the interview. One might be forgiven if one comes to suspect a clandestine deal struck between interest groups at both ends.

With the tests gone under an executive order, it need not be assumed that the problem has gone away. It remains—and does so in far greater dimensions and as a much tougher challenge.

By the way, in matters like education or similar cultural ones, official dos or dont's do not necessarily work and those who aim at getting things soon on course by such steps must be living in a paradise of their own. They have to get out of it and see the reality and come to grips with it, if they mean business.

The alternative to admission tests, as decided by the education administration is that henceforward marks obtained in public examinations will decide the order of admission a student will be entitled to.

Here's the challenge. For one thing, the marksheet or the admission based on marks secured in the SSC and HSC examination—even if 'starred' bright—have in most cases been deceptive. There has therefore been no depending on them.

The question is two-fold, demanding an answer: why were they so undependable as a measure of merit and ability needs no repeating. The causes are now too well known. To put it plainly, innovations thought up with no thought given to how much good or harm they would do, have made practically a mess of everything connected with this part of the nation's education. This is the foundation on which is built the whole structure of boy's education. This has been all but destroyed—thanks to the skills of the innovators and their fertile brains.

The remedies to be thought of and applied are: help the children at school and college develop those skills that education at this stage has traditionally done to develop. Schools have varied in degrees of performance. But the curriculum and syllabus had aimed mainly for (1) the child be so groomed as to do much on his own, use his imagination and ideas. This is the beginning of his education. Scrap much that exists in the name of management of, and improvement upon, traditional secondary and higher secondary education,—from text-books to test-systems; (2) teachers and children must do their homework respectively, and the latter's work checked thoroughly in the class by the teacher; (3) daily grading of performance in the class and the grading announced for stimulating a spirit of competition; (4) along with language skills should go development of simple ideas, more as a revision and rehearsal of the familiar in his milieu emphasising specially its human relevances.

It involves in the main a policy change with one central focus: a radical shift from commerce to knowledge and enlightenment in the sense it is understood in today's world.