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Problem Of Admission To University Studies

The country's higher education is faced with an old problem with new dimensions. The number of students passing out of degree colleges (offering BA/BSc) and seeking admission to MA/MSc courses has increased more than the existing universities or university colleges have room for them. As of now, the country makes do with eleven full-fledged universities—Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Dhaka Medical College, Dhaka Engineering University, Mymensingh Agricultural University plus National Independent and North-South Universities. With university colleges such as Jagannath, Titumir, Barisal, among a few others, added to them the picture apparently is one of an increase in institutions providing for admission-seeking students after their graduation from degree colleges. But the actual position remains one of acute shortage of such institutions vis-a-vis the candidates wanting to go for university education. It has assumed crisis proportions in the humanities.

The dearth relates equally to medical, engineering and other technical or technological courses. For one thing, this ill-accords generally with claims made that the country's education is taken full care of—and, more ambitiously, the target is full education around the turn of the century or, allowing for exaggerations in claims, by the first or second decade of the next century. This may, if everything goes according to plan, hold true of primary education, which has already made an ambitious beginning. Never mind the many problems that still bedevil the (primary) sector and need to be sorted out to make the project a success as resounding as the claims made.

But the problem concerning post-SSC and HSC education, or higher university education, has only become intractable from year to year. The greater pity is that education planners or managers do not yet seem sensible enough of the problem, which, in the ultimate analysis, is a huge national one. That in the sense that the massively increasing numbers of students will be the victims of circumstance in two definite ways: (i) either they will go without university education (ii) or they will get admitted to courses against their choice, or aptitude or interest.

As a result, every academic year a great number of students (painfully, the brighter ones, boys and girls) are leaving the country for facilities available in other countries, India included. But they constitute an insignificant number of students who, opportunities at home or none at all, would prefer going abroad for higher education for obvious reasons of quality and standard. They may thus be treated as an exception. They can afford to do so. Nor should they excite envy or be discouraged from adopting such means of self-improvement. Well-educated, they will also be a national asset.

The problem is concerning the multitude at home for whom inadequate or near-adequate facilities are still to be provided. Maybe a preoccupation with matters like developments in the primary sector has made the authorities concerned forget about this problem, or at most look the other way, as one sees them doing in many an allied sector. It also seems a matter of attitude or habit: a stubborn reluctance to break away from tradition, which goes back more than a half century.

An answer to the problem may be provided by following examples set in the management of, and provision for, post-secondary or university education in some other countries. In them. (Iran is one of them, among others) education following school is incorporated into a university education scheme. In other words, instead of the three or four slabs as we have in our system of education—primary, secondary, degree and higher university—they have only two: secondary and university. It would not only suit a country like ours; it will largely solve our problem besetting university education as stated before. For the moment, (that is before we plump for a policy change in the light of what we have just suggested) let more colleges be turned into university colleges first to perceptibly ease the congestion and, second, to provide psychological and intellectual satisfaction to thousands of students being enabled to enter into a university.

Start with a fresh selection of colleges, first grade and high-second grade ones (considering their academic and management standards) and turn them into university colleges. To help them start and develop as universities, the administration ought to do its best to financially help them grow. This will not only reduce the present pressure on a limited number of university level institutions but will also make higher (university) education affordable for a markedly larger number of students.