

Corruption, Financial Losses And The Education Sector

According to a report on corruption released July 5th by Transparency International Bangladesh, in 2005, the country incurred a financial loss of Tk 526.27 crore due to corruption in various constituents of the public and private sectors in 2005. Releasing the report at a press conference at the National Press Club, the chairman of the TIB trustee board, Mozaffar Ahmed, said there was no sign of reduction of corruption as most of the corrupt people go unpunished. He said, "Abuse of absolute power helps expansion of corruption in the society" and is the main factor behind the corrupt practices we see today.

It is said that power corrupts but absolute power corrupts absolutely and Bangladesh today seems to serve as a good example as the report has categorised corruption into four types: excessive, most, middle and less. Education, police, health and family welfare, LGED and the private sector were identified as excessively corrupt. Although land, political parties, forest and environment, finance, communications and the power sector were identified as the most corrupt sectors, in our view, corruption in the education sector reigns supreme as incidents of bribery and abuse of power in secondary schools are rampant.

When a chairman of one of the country's nine education boards says we are concerned to know that some examiners are taking bribes from the students for giving full marks in the exams, we are convinced that corruption in this sector has become endemic. If underhand deals in marking the performance of examinees in practical examinations has been so open that it is known to the authorities concerned, we may just as well say good-bye to education as we know it. However the fact that the Ministry of Education has taken up the matter seriously is comforting and gives us a little hope that all is not yet lost because during a meeting with the chairmen of all nine Education Boards the Ministry has, reportedly, asked them to take drastic action against those teachers involved in the corrupt practices.

Following this meeting, the chairmen of the education boards have reportedly appointed head-examiners for scrutinising the papers of practical exams to check corruption in giving marks and ordered the secretaries of the examination centres to ask the examiners not to give undue marks in practical exams as the boards would scrutinise the final results. The head-examiners will check the marks after 20 July after the completion of all practical exams. The State Minister is reported to have said at the meeting - "We have observed that some examinees 'manage' to score full marks in practical exams, but fail to get even pass marks in theoretical exams."

However one question remains as to why the chairmen of the education boards and college principals - because of their age, experience and efficiency - were silent over these corrupt practices for so long? According to newspaper reports, some guardians had earlier lodged complaints with the authorities about this kind of corruption. But it does not end here because reports of corruption in other areas are also rife. For example the politicisation of the appointment of teachers brings us to question more thoroughly the nature of the corruption that is eating at the vitals of education. If universities are places where the emphasis is on academic excellence, it is essential to eschew political partisanship but the fact that there are a number of groups among teachers to clearly show their political inclinations has by and large acted as a stumbling block. The bigger question for the nation is however, whether there is anyone out there that understands what corruption is doing to the country.

Unless we can bring to an end to what business people call the "prohibition era" - a period when the sensitivities of client and member governments made the subject of corruption virtually taboo, we will never be able to conquer it. But the reality of fighting corruption has been a disillusioning experience and the energy invested in the anti-corruption drive has been wasted. For some years now TI has been compiling data on corruption and the result has always been that Bangladesh has fared badly. In light of these findings, and amid pressure from emboldened domestic lobby groups and international donors, most governments are seeing the light and have now raised the importance of the fight against corruption. The problem is they