

Probing The Efficiency Of Educational Institutions

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editorial

In order for children to receive the kind of education they deserve, quality assurance for schools is a first requirement. Education abhors a vacuum but a mere increase in the number of children admitted to schools is not the answer. The Education Watch-2000 Report said the country's quantitative expansion in primary education took place at the expense of quality as only 1.6 per cent of students achieved competency after completing the primary course of education.

The Ministry of Education has decided to form three committees to probe the decline in the performance of some schools vis-à-vis the better performing ones in the nation's capital with the objective to find the reasons behind the decline of a number of institutions that were earlier known for their good academic performance. The authorities have noted that although the standard of teaching in some of these schools remains appreciable, it is the poor results of students that are of concern, but surely they are inter-linked? Two of the committees will inquire into the question of how some schools have been faring between badly and average, while another will study the ways in which schools doing better have been able to maintain their academic reputation. However the education authorities will be doing a far more effective and well-meaning job if they extend the scope of the inquiries to include schools all over the country.

Since educational institutions form the very soul of a society and create the space for both creativity and social introspection, downplaying important features of education can have a deadening effect upon society. To be able to create a progressive and democratic education system, the policy issue must come first but education policy is only part of a wider social and economic strategy as it is impossible to have a vision for education without first having a plan or vision for society as a whole. But as the study will be confined to schools within the city only, one wonders if both Bengali and English medium schools are included and if the study will ultimately be extended to schools in rural areas. If so, the move will surely be welcome considering the fall in standards of the products coming out of so many schools. There should also be a public policy to address the issues of the evident hunger for education across all sections of society, and in a democratic, creative and socially useful way, without allowing private profiteering and compromising quality in public institutions.

When we consider the poverty rate for families headed by dropouts is more than twice that for families headed by high school graduates, we can see the need for education especially as these are the people most likely to remain unemployed, less likely to vote, and more likely to be imprisoned than others. One of the major problems is the presence of divisions within the society that undermines the sustainability of educational institutions because divisions perpetuate social unrest.

But everything will depend on the motivation of the education system itself therefore state authorities need to first decide whether there is an effort to create a concerned and informed citizenry? Or meet the expected future needs of economic and social development? Or simply to meet the labour requirements of international capitalism? The greatest challenge we face is how to bridge the gap between us and the developed nations. Although technology helps, it also creates socio-economic discrimination between peoples and must therefore be handled carefully. Education is the social justice issue of our times and the most important long-term issue for the civic health of our nation. It is also important to help low-income students achieve their potential so that they too can participate in the economy and society.

Education is needed to bring discipline to the society. But we must remember that one of the requirements of a good school is the presence of a good teaching staff as the greatest resource a country may possess is the educational level and technical skill of its work force. Worker productivity, life expectancy, income per capita show a strong correlation with increased literacy levels. In this the private sector is contributing significantly to the development of human resources as these schools lay emphasis on raising a force of highly skilled men and women who can meet the challenges today's technology driven world poses. This is one area where the government will have to create the ideal conditions for private initiatives by helping the setting of a foundation that could ensure private sector participation in school management, training of teachers, production of educational toys and relevant teaching materials, etc.