

Education and Vision 2021

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THE Ministry of Education seems to have rightly (and quickly) taken on board the issue of formulating an education policy for the country. This is reflected from a recent meeting of the Hon'ble education minister with renowned educationists of the country. I would like to present a personal perception on education to invoke insights.

Any discussion on education must take into due cognisance the vision of the government. A government without any vision is like a ship without a rudder. Few governments have visions; many have short-term missions to be accomplished within the tenure of office. The visionary government visualises things to come long after, even may not be during the lifetime of the dreamer.

After a long spell of missionary governments that ruled Bangladesh over the last decades, we observe that the present government led by Sheikh Hasina came to power with a visionary zeal. In shortest possible phrase, the dream is called "digital

Bangladesh," to be reached by 2021. The slogan seemingly lured a large number of new and young voters to vote for the boat. Basically, digital Bangladesh implies a science-based Bangladesh comprising innovations, inventions, connectivity etc. The solutions of innumerable problems that the people of this country are afflicted with must be solved through the application of scientific knowledge and tools.

But a digital Bangladesh could turn out to be discriminatory Bangladesh unless access to the inputs of digital Bangladesh is equally shared by different segments of the society. Digital Bangladesh in that sense also implies an "inclusive" Bangladesh.

Such a Bangladesh requires digital education in the first place. But it appears that the current education system in the country would militate against such mission. Take education at the primary levels -- the foundation upon which the multi-storied building called "digital education" will be built. There are many tracks at this level. Disparity develops from here that subsequently separates the society. It is high time that one track is

followed at this level.

The present education minister, as far as I know, is an ardent advocate of this system. I can only hope that his thoughts will now be translated into actions. Second, at primary level, more emphasis should be placed on quality through teachers' training and provisions of logistics, mathematics and science.

Perhaps much capital investment is not needed as the number of primary school going children has been falling over time. We wonder whether higher secondary level has any utility on its own. There could be economy of resources by imparting secondary level education for 12 years.

Allow me to be a bit provocative at this stage. I hypothesise that the ongoing systems of education at university level is not friendly toward "vision 2021." Many of the private universities are working like parlours and shops, with the ulterior motive of profit maximisation. Education is bought and sold in these places.

Successive governments failed miserably to contain commercialisation of higher education. These institutions must be brought under the rules of the government. Education must be inclusive, with an eye on society and the cultural milieu of the society.

At the other extreme stand public universities, with a steep decline in their educational standard. Devouring public resources, these institutions continue to remain as a bane to societal development. Teachers are alleged to be more active in politics than in publications; more in tea-rooms than in teaching rooms.

The Bangladesh Education Act '73, where applicable, needs to be reviewed through a discussion with stakeholders to make it contributory to digital education. A system of accountability must somehow be incorporated.

Teachers should be heavily penalised for neglect of duties. Likewise, student politics should also be revisited. The present destructive politics of students should be shunned. The science and technology universities should be strengthened through rational choice of teachers and administrators. English needs to be brought back to its earlier importance as far as medium of instruction in higher education is concerned.

The Kudrat-E-Khuda Education Commission could serve as an eye-opener for any new ideas on education for digital Bangladesh. The education policy formulated by AL government in its previous tenure could also serve as a guide. Minor changes in earlier documents prepared by the same political party can contribute to the formulation of an educational policy in the quickest possible time.

By and large, the orthodox education system needs an overhauling for the creation of a digital Bangladesh. Digital Bangladesh needs a secular, scientific and social education to move ahead with the motto enshrined in AL's manifesto.

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