

Science education on the wane

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 while that of commerce students has risen significantly, falling for the lure of lucrative jobs.

His findings are based on two research works carried out on 440 secondary schools of 23 districts two years ago.

Bangladesh Freedom Foundation, a private think tank, and The Daily Star jointly organised the roundtable on the decline in science education at secondary level at The Daily Star Centre in the city.

Of the total SSC examinees in 1988, 41 percent was science students, but the figure dropped to 22 percent in 2010. At the secondary level, science students have decreased by 31 percent over the last eight years, according to educa-

tion ministry data.

Citing the statistics of an education officer's data, Munir said that out of 52 secondary schools in Kumarkhali upazila of Kushtia, as many as 32 do not have a single science student.

On an average, only 18 percent of 148 SSC level students at each school study science, said the specialist, which should have been more than 50 percent.

In 1987, the Ershad government had made religious study compulsory for all students and higher mathematics an optional subject for science students, which was earlier compulsory for them. As a result, science graduates became math teachers without studying higher mathematics.

Referring to a survey, Munir said 3,600 out of 4,500

math teachers studied only general mathematics at the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) level.

The government in 1985 had allocated Tk 33 lakh for hosting science fairs all over the country, but about three decades later the amount allocated is now 28 lakh.

More than 94 percent schools surveyed never organised a science fair, while there has been no such fair in all the schools in Chittagong and Sylhet.

The survey revealed that nearly half of the teachers influence students saying it is hard as well as costly to pass from the science group.

Prof AR Khan, a retired teacher of Dhaka University, said science education should be made popular through the revival of exhibition, science week and

Olympiad with government support.

It is difficult to find competent science teachers, he mentioned, as teachers as a whole do not have financial and social recognition.

He observed that poverty alleviation and overall social change are not practicable without the knowledge of science and technology and therefore it is vital to promote science education from as early as school level.

Dr SM Mahbub-ul-Haque Majumder of Daffodil International University blamed poor salary structure and lack of social recognition of the teachers, among other things, for the decline in science education.

Kanika Chakraborty, who works for Muslim Aid of the UK, said as a parent she is

caught in a real dilemma about whether to send her son to study science as it is expensive and difficult to find competent teachers.

Citing Indian examples, Vice-chancellor of University of Asia Pacific Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury said study of science should be rewarded financially and socially to stop the decline in science education.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said a society without strong scientific basis is unimaginable in today's world order and a nation cannot survive without the knowledge of science and technology.

Climate change challenges are in a way a great opportunity to advance science education in the country, as solutions to its adverse impacts lie in science and technology, he mentioned.

He announced that The Daily Star was ready to recognise the best science teacher and the best science writer nationally every year if eminent persons in the field of science education take the lead.

Leading businessman Syed Manzur Elahi said science education should be the number one priority.

Prof Narayan Chandra Paul, member of National Curriculum and Textbook Board, and M Saidur Rahman, director general of National Museum of Science and Technology, spoke, among others.

Speakers at the discussion made some recommendations to arrest the decline in science studies. The recommendations include forming a national taskforce to address the decline, financial incentive for students and teachers, higher salary for teachers, setting up a science laboratory at every school, dedicating one-third of the TV channels' airtime to education, use of internet and other communication tools to disseminate science education, publishing science pages in newspapers with interactive content, motivation of teachers, parents and students through the mass media, training to the existing teachers and demonstrators and reform of curriculum.

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Number of science students declining alarmingly, no govt initiative to encourage them, The Daily Star-Freedom Foundation roundtable told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Science education in the country has suffered an alarming decline over the last two decades as it is no longer considered lucrative and the government remains indifferent to the situation, emi-

nent scientists told a discussion yesterday. In his keynote speech, Munir Hasan, a consultant in the science and technology ministry, said the number of science students has fallen by half

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