

Dropping out of SSC examinations

Education must be made productive

NEWS on the education front is indeed disquieting. With the Secondary School Certificate examinations beginning this morning, it is estimated that as many as 42 per cent of registered students at the SSC level will be dropping out even before the exams get under way. By any standard, such a huge number of examinees staying away from examinations which are regarded as a decisive stepping stone to higher education is not only surprising but also raises questions about the direction in which education is headed. As to the matter of why these students, more than 5,00,000 in all out of a total of nearly 13,00,000, will not sit for the examinations, a number of reasons have been cited. Included among these reasons are some fundamental social problems like students' inability to clear their dues before the examinations, failure of students to get promoted to class ten from the preceding class, inability of many to emerge successful at the qualifying tests for the exams, early and sudden marriage in the case of girl students, et al.

The reasons cited above are all social factors that Bangladesh's generally economically strapped society has regularly lived with. And yet for generations it has been the ambition of families to have their children cross the school threshold and move on into higher spheres of education in the interest of a better life. But what we are now confronted with is sadly a clear waste of time, talent and resources on the part of those who will stay away from today's examinations as also for their guardians. The bigger and quite legitimate fear is that a very large number of these dropouts will simply lose the way and may turn their back on education altogether. And that precisely is where our sense of disquiet comes in. And it does because of the belief that education, especially for a disadvantaged society like ours, is geared to making productive citizens out of the young. Unfortunately, the system of education, the falling standards in the quality of teaching and the poverty of students' families have all seemed to come together to thwart that purpose. The mission of education, the sense of purpose that comes with it, is now under threat, to our dismay.

The dropout issue in this year's SSC should be a wake-up call for the education authorities as well as everyone involved with thoughts of an expansion of education and a raising of its standards. The future for Bangladesh is clearly in the way we equip our young men and women at school for their onward progress in life. And that progress will depend on how much of a need-based education we can provide them with. There are the clear economic imperatives upon which poor and middle class families send their children to school. A sign of social progress is when the next generation lives better. That unfortunately does not happen if the students we speak of fall behind or do not sit for their school leaving examinations.