

## Poor performance of rural schools

*Tradition of academic excellence must be emphasised anew*

HERE is little question that the results of the Secondary Certificate Examinations have been excellent this year. On our part, we have, through an editorial a few days ago, already extolled the performance of the students and their schools. We have also noted that there remains much room for improvement in the system and that ways and means need to be devised to ensure a zero failure school leaving academic structure in the country.

We are not happy to report now that there has been a widening gap between rural and urban education in Bangladesh, a fact that has once more been confirmed by this year's SSC results. Briefly, schools that have done poorly, even in this season of unprecedented success, are in the rural regions of the country. Obviously, as a report in yesterday's issue of this newspaper makes clear, a fairly good number of reasons are behind this decline in the performance of schools away from the urban centres. One reason is that while guardians in the towns and cities can afford private tutors for their children, those in the villages are in precious little position to be able to come by the same. Additionally, there has been a growing trend in rural areas for schools to go either without teachers in subjects like mathematics and English at all or without good teachers in these subjects. It may be noted that many of the schools which have in recent times been penalised through a suspension of teachers' monthly payment orders (MPOs) are located in rural settings. And that says a good deal about the impediments such schools are suffering from.

Observed from a broader perspective, though, there are important areas in which educational standards in rural schools can be raised to bring them on a par with those in the urban areas. An important first step is to identify those schools which in the period of the last four-party alliance government were brazenly politicised through a couple of bad steps. In the first place, school committees were peopled with local political elements who had little understanding of, or interest in, furthering education. In the second, a number of schools and madrasahs were opened through political patronage and in this way claimed MPOs they did not deserve. Strong and decisive action must be taken against them and those who helped establish them. There is then the matter of the facilities for rural schools, in such areas as libraries and laboratories, that must be taken up as a priority by the education department.

Time was when the bulk of Bangladesh's educated class, which went on to attain further laurels in the career field, came from its villages. That tradition of excellence ought to be emphasised anew in the interest of our collective intellectual goals.