

Quality Education is the Key to Progress

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a bad thing. But they should not belong to any party. So a law should be promulgated that no political party should have any student wing. It is damaging not only for the students. It is damaging for the country.

The syllabus or the textbooks written by the teachers are not inferior to any country of the world, but if they are not taught in the class, if they don't take it seriously, what is the use of having an education policy or writing good textbooks or having good teachers. Even this deliberation of yours with all learned people here, whatever we talk about, ultimately it goes to the government for implementation. There is no other way of implementing that.

In that aspect, private schools should be encouraged rather than government schools. Even private universities are better than government ones. It is not that the teachers are superior in any way, but if the classes are not held, if the teachers are attending class but the students are not there, what can be gained? But in the case of private universities, they may not be models, but till now these are doing better in essence.

Shafi Ahmed: Professor Shamsul Haque is in favour of banning student politics. How about banning teachers' politics?

Professor Shamsul Haque: Thank you, that should also be done.

Shafi Ahmed: I belong to the university, so I know. Even with the strikes and all, we could manage it, but because of belonging to a certain group, I will always face a problem. There is no accountability in the university or in the colleges. There are teachers in our university who wouldn't take one single class in a month. Sir, you have been the Chairman of UGC. You know that you can't do anything.

Professor Shamsul Haque: Coming to primary education, it is better in the sense that primary school teachers are not involved in politics, well. At least not so much.

Hena Das, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad: I have had the experience of working with the Kudrat-e-Khuda Commission and Professor Shamsul Haque's Commission for the education policy. I retired as an educationist.

I will identify the problems, in brief, which the country faces. One is about the budget. The budget is very small. Our Education Minister said, it is nearly three per cent of the GNP. That is really very little. We have said that it should be seven per cent. And there is an alarming discrimination in the budget. This discrimination is increasing in various sectors. And there are various types of discrimination in each sector. There is discrimination in the government and non-government primary education to the secondary level. The per student expenditure varies from place to place. This is one thing in the secondary level, another in the madrasas, another in the cadet colleges and another in the government and non-government primary and secondary levels. The poor sections of the rural areas are victims of this discrimination.

This discrimination in fund distribution automatically takes discrimination into the system. As a result, it is impossible to ensure equal quality of education for all.

Why are we not getting good teachers? Why is their quality failing? There is reason for this. The teaching profession has become very unattractive, particularly in the non-government sector. Good teachers have decreased drastically at the village level. In the government schools too, there is a social impact that is affecting the teachers alarmingly.

We have talked about curriculum, syllabus and textbooks. This is very defective from the very primary level. It has no relevance with the age of the primary school students and how much they can retain. There is no attention paid to how much they are capable of understanding or retaining. The professionals, the teachers of the different tiers are hardly consulted about these matters.

Then we come to the examination system, the evaluation system, from the primary to the highest level. It is so defective that it must be changed or else we will just go on seeing cheating going on in full swing. We will read about it in the newspapers and those who pass by such means will be the teachers of the new generation. This is a scary prospect before us. It is happening in cyclic order. The teachers are getting worse and worse. The meritocratic students do not want to take up this profession nowadays.

The main issue is that there has never been an education policy since the independence of Bangladesh. There have been attempts to draw up an education policy. Money has been arranged from here and there. Recommendations have been made. In 1974 there was the Dr. Kudrat-e-Khuda Commission.

We had thought that would take us ahead, but that was not to be. Nothing happened after that. Another education policy was drawn up under the leadership of Prof. Shamsul Haque. There were others in between. None of them have been effective. Money has been spent for nothing. Money, labour, time, all have been wasted. What will happen in the future, no one can say. The people must know what the government is thinking in this regard. Are they going to cancel it? Place it with the parliament? Take public opinion? Or what? We must know.

We have talked about monitoring systems. There are education officers and all. Corruption is a big obstacle to our going ahead. Corruption from top to bottom, from the government down to all in the machinery. All of it has rotted. Other than bribery and corruption, nothing happens in any of the education offices. The Textbook Board publishes textbooks with no competition. The school inspectors are corrupt. All of us running the education system of the country right from the top are corrupt. We can't simply blame the teachers. Corruption has trickled down from the top. So we need a total change in our outlook, in our character, a total change.

The standard of politics, the standard of the parliament has fallen to such a level, has deteriorated so far that we fail to find a developed culture. Forgive me for saying so, but that is the trend of politics. Who is responsible for the terrorism on the campus? The students or the political leaders? Today's politics has become dependent on armed cadre and black money. This is dangerous. We have to change this culture.

Hena Das
Then in the various institutions we have for primary education upto the secondary level, the managing bodies comprise of illiterate persons, criminal leaders or extremely corrupt persons. They neither understand anything about education nor even think about it. They are happy if the teacher helps their child to cheat. This is the type of managing committees that exist. The teachers and the local people are fed up with the Education system. It has been ruined. This has become a general phenomenon.

Something has been done about girls' education, food for education, free education for girls outside the municipal areas. Even so, girls' drop-out rates have gone up. The conservative attitude towards girls still remains. Poverty is also a problem. Because of this, less importance is given to girls. Child labour is still very prevalent in our country. And violence against women has reached such a height that sending girls to school is a cause of worry. The *fatwa* is an obstacle. School is also far, making communication difficult for the girls of the village. The quota for girl students is not fulfilled. That is because, for one reason, there is no appropriate accommodation for women teachers over there. There is an unwillingness in the government regarding women teachers.

Momena Khatun, General Secretary, Teachers' Federation: When we go anywhere abroad, the first thing they ask us is what does your education policy state? We lack continuity in this regard. The government must maintain this continuity.

The DG in Dhaka controls all teachers. It is not possible to do so. In fact, if we find a gross lack of responsibility towards the duties at district and thana level, we find it in the education officer. He is the most irresponsible. Even the veterinary officers have more commitment. The fisheries officers have more commitment than the education officers. In every area if you go to see the schools, we have to ask the DCs to see that the teachers are there. You don't find them.

So despite the British rulers and other things you criticise, the only two persons you find whenever you go there, are the SP and DC or maybe nowadays the agricultural officer who is also very important element at the moment. Others are just not found at the district level at any particular moment of time. So it's no use blaming education budgets and other things.

Then comes the curriculum. When I was part of drawing up the syllabus, we were given 30 to 25 syllabus of neighbouring countries and told this is what they were studying. Our syllabus

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could be drawn up accordingly. Fine, we could draw up a good syllabus, but who was going to teach? There are no quality teachers. There are about 90 per cent non-government schools and colleges. Their pay scale is not good. And so quality teachers are not coming forward and the books which have been drawn up are more or less teacher-oriented.

Then there is full-fledged cheating in the exams. That means there are hardly any good students. On one hand you have to stop the cheating. On the other, each school has to show a percentage of students passing the examinations.

If we look at other countries, say Sri Lanka, they are 100 per cent educated there. And this is in liaison with their government.

And then we have the private schools. I think the books for the kindergartens are not drawn up with child psychology in mind. The children are getting an excessive load upon them. There are no standards, either in the kindergartens, or in the madrasas. There is no standard. The children are passing their SSC, but there is no standard. They have neither standard teachers, nor standard books. There is an overall mismanagement.

We first need an education policy. The government has to control this.

Rasheda Choudhury: There is need for more investment in quality aspects. In terms of South Asia, we know that per unit cost per year ranges between US\$ 25 to US\$ 50. In UK it is US\$ 3000. In USA it is US\$ 5000. Quality doesn't come free. So what is the budget for primary education. It is about 41 per cent of the total education budget, but not for quality. This mostly goes for paying teachers' salary and infrastructure development.

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Saifur Rahman: There are elements of truth in everybody's speech. There is lack of teachers, of infrastructure, inadequate teacher-student ratio, teachers are not getting accommodation, particularly in primary education in the rural areas. Then there is the supervision of education, decentralisation, there are all these elements.

The problems that we have seen is that the teachers are not there in the classes. There are schools, with four teachers in each school. If you go in the afternoon, you won't find a single teacher. You will find a class with a Class Three child teaching Class One children. The teacher has gone off somewhere. This is also happening. So there is a lack of supervision because of centralisation.

Another problem is that the teachers want to be under the control of the central government. They don't want to be under the control of the district administration. They resist it. They want to be like university teachers or like college teachers. So this is a problem.

The DG in Dhaka controls all teachers. It is not possible to do so. In fact, if we find a gross lack of responsibility towards the duties at district and thana level, we find it in the education officer. He is the most irresponsible. Even the veterinary officers have more commitment. The fisheries officers have more commitment than the education officers. In every area if you go to see the schools, we have to ask the DCs to see that the teachers are there. You don't find them.

So despite the British rulers and other things you criticise, the only two persons you find whenever you go there, are the SP and DC or maybe nowadays the agricultural officer who is also very important element at the moment. Others are just not found at the district level at any particular moment of time. So it's no use blaming education budgets and other things.

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what is the tax-GDP ratio in Bangladesh? It is 9 per cent. So if you give 6 per cent to education, you will have to run the entire government including the development process with the remaining three per cent if you give up overseas assistance. The tax-GDP ratio is only 9.5 per cent. Previously it was 11 per cent. It has now come down to less than 9 per cent actually because revenue is zero. If that is the case, how will the government finance the other functions of the state?

Then there is the corruption in the Education Directorate at the thana level, district level for transfers. People who are smart enough go and get transferred to that school. So you find there are an overwhelming number of teachers in the thana or district headquarter areas and less teachers in the rural areas. In the rural areas you may find two or three teachers. Where you will find five or six in the thanas.

You have to improve the system. The quality is not there. That is up to the education authorities, not us.

The main problem is management in education. The Ministry cannot supervise. The Ministry gets involved in all this kind of work like the facilities department, building structure, tenders and this sort of thing. But you have to have the Education Ministry concentrating on education. There is less incentive in this side. There is more incentive for the development area where there seems to be more interest.

Then you talked about the inequity in the education structure in terms of quality. You can't say that. We are in a free world today, in a free market economy. You can't have socialism in education in Bangladesh. You have private schools, government schools, cadet colleges. You have got better quality schools so this sort of inequality will be there and it is better that it is there. But you have to have equal stable educational facilities up to the primary and secondary level. But that is also not possible. My granddaughter goes to a school in Dhanmondi. I did not have the kind of knowledge when I did my BA. They have a lot of pressure on them, so many books, so many classes.

We prevented the dropouts by the Food for Education programme. This was supposed to be taken to Class 11 and 12. Later on I do not know what has happened now. The number of girls to be taken to this level by 1998 was projected as 3.3 million. I do not know the latest position, but the programme is there. This government has not discontinued the programme. But perhaps it has not accelerated because of the resource limitation. But the government has not withdrawn commitment to the earlier programme. So it is not fair to say that the government changes programmes from the previous government. Not always, sometimes, but not this time.

These were two excellent programmes. In fact, when I was in Davos, two African delegates came to me and said, you have two excellent programmes in your country. We want to implement these in our country.

We prevented the dropouts by the Food for Education programme. I did it myself. I did this as an individual although I was the Finance Minister, not the Education Minister. The Prime Minister approved. We said if you can have Food for

Work, you can have Food for Education. Otherwise the parent sends a child to the fields to take the cows to graze. If he gets 100 taka worth of something, he will not do it. That is why the dropout rates drastically fell in the Food for Education areas.

By the year 1995-96 we extended the programme to 12,500 schools. The intention was to take it to 20,000 schools. And if out of 60,000 primary schools in Bangladesh we take 20,000 schools under Food for Education, by rotation we will cover all these excluding urban adjacent schools.

The girls' stipend programme in the rural areas has brought about tremendous improvement in education. You go at nine o'clock in any road of Bangladesh, you will see beautiful rows of girls going to school, just like a developed country. Everything is not bad in this country. Go and see. Hundreds and hundreds of girls are going. And this is in spite of the deterioration of law and order.

We did not agree with the World Bank. The World Bank has said to give this programme for only 79 thanas of Bangladesh. I said no, if I give it, I give it to everybody. So we started with our own resources. It's working very well. By 1995, a total of 2.3 million girls were getting stipends under the programme. This was supposed to be taken to Class 11 and 12. Later on I do not know what has happened now. The number of girls to be taken to this level by 1998 was projected as 3.3 million. I do not know the latest position, but the programme is there. This government has not discontinued the programme. But perhaps it has not accelerated because of the resource limitation. But the government has not withdrawn commitment to the earlier programme. So it is not fair to say that the government changes programmes from the previous government. Not always, sometimes, but not this time.

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So there are good programmes, but the main problem, believe me, are teachers' training, facilities, distance, the curriculum, syllabus and overwhelming is the supervision, management and control of education by the Education Ministry. In this Ministry management is zero, absolutely zero management. Managerial ability is one thing and educational ability is another thing. You have to know how to manage the education system.

Mahmudul Alam: It is said that political will is very important. You were in the government at one time and can be called government-in-waiting now. You could not implement devolution of power. Why have you failed? There is still a bureaucratic top down approach.

Saifur Rahman: You see, upazila won't solve the education problems. It is the whole cadre of education structure. It is the Teachers' Associations of Bangladesh. They would not like to be controlled by a district or thana or any institution. Even in primary education today, there is no ownership of primary schools in Bangladesh today. It is just left to the teachers. There are the villagers, but they hardly meet to discuss about education. If there is a fight by the students, then they meet there. Otherwise, there is hardly any management.

So despite the British rulers and other things you criticise, the only two persons you find whenever you go there, are the SP and DC or maybe nowadays the agricultural officer who is also very important element at the moment. Others are just not found at the district level at any particular moment of time. So it's no use blaming education budgets and other things.

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wasn't something like that. In England it is the boroughs which control the schools, not the central government of England.

And you all put too much importance on NGOs. I do not think that NGOs are doing as much as you all feel they are doing. I am sorry to say, the NGO so-called achievement in education needs evaluation and assessment. When an NGO says I have 5000 schools, BRAC or Proshika or somebody else says 20,000 schools or whatever, you go ahead and find the existence of schools, where they are and what sort of education they have. Where are the children sitting and how are they performing. NGOs are not a government to themselves or maybe to someone who sends money from abroad. But the government is answerable to all the people. The teachers will strike, calling on the government to increase wages. They can't do that with the NGOs.

If the politics of the country is good, which is not good at all. It is rotten I am telling you. If the politics is quality, education will be quality. Administration will be quality. Unfortunately, even the electorate does not exercise quality control. The whole problem is politics. Politics is sick. Unless this country is taken out of this sick divisive politics, you will have this sort of problem. No education commission, no report.

If we need good teachers for primary education, we cannot forget about secondary or higher education either. Our teachers will come after passing high school, college. There has to be some quality education there. Of course, in our good schools education is excellent. But in general, the standard of education is unsatisfactory.

When there was an exam to appoint primary school teachers after this government came to power, there were about 300,000 candidates. Most of them were BA and MA degree holders. There were about 200,000 BA pass. Even after giving 20 grace marks to several of them to attain pass marks, only 5500 passed. From the entire Sylhet area, only 18 passed.

Mahfuz Anam: What would happen if those 20 marks grace were given?

Nurul Islam Nahid MP, Chairman of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education: I agree with what most of the previous speakers have said.

We have learnt a lot from the experiences shared at the Dakar conference, but we have to go ahead in the light of our own country's context, our own reality. In the Dakar conference, the year 2015 was fixed for abolishing illiteracy. In that sense, we are ahead. Our target is 2006. Some persons have expressed their doubts in this regard. But it is good that we have a fixed target. The government has not withdrawn commitment to the earlier programme. So it is not fair to say that the government changes programmes from the previous government. Not always, sometimes, but not this time.

In my observation, the more remote areas, harder to reach, have a higher percentage of girl students. This shows that an environment has been created for everyone to come to school. And they are.

There has been assessments in certain catchment areas where there is a high degree of absenteeism. The degree of attendance is surprising. The reasons have been shown as incentives and so on. I want to add a reason to this, that is social awareness. This social awareness and parental eagerness is the main reason behind attending the education system.

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