

HSC results debacle : Analysing the anomalies

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THE just announced H.S.C. Examinations results have come as a great shock and disappointment to the nation. Much to our embarrassment and dismay, the average percentage of pass of the country's seven education boards hovered just over 27 this year in contrast with 28.41 percent last year and 46 per cent in 1998. This debacle in H.S.C. results, lowest in the last six years, has given a jolt to the students, guardians, administrators, educational planners and conscious citizenry of the country.

People are inclined to think that there is something awfully wrong in the whole system of education. Educational experts in the country have almost diagnosed the fault attributing the debacle to such causes as falling standard of education, arresting cheating in the examination halls and lack of teaching and educational environment in the colleges. It would be totally unfair to absolve ourselves of the responsibility of this gross mismanagement, total neglect and indifference to the debilitating ailments that had long since been creeping in the system.

According to statistics available immediately after the publication of the result, it has been stressed that performance of the city based colleges and cadet colleges is better than of colleges in the rural areas. About 5,38,295 students sat for the H.S.C. examination under seven education boards of which 1,45,818 students came out successful this year. It was learnt that about one lakh students mostly from rural-based colleges were expelled while resorting to cheating and unfair means at the examination centres. The extremely poor performance of the colleges under Chittagong and Comilla boards points to dismal state of education of the colleges in the far flung areas, apathy of the teachers and college authorities and infiltration of dirty politics to the utter disregard of education. The disastrous performance, as a whole, had been long overdue and the nation had little preparedness to avoid such a shocking episode. It has been said time and again but it needs to be repeated ad nauseam that education is the key to economic development, health care and jobs. The poverty situation in the country, endemic violence and the virus of corruption in the body politic of the nation spring from our rotten education system. To walk through the villages and towns away from Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi is to understand in all its horror the extent of mismanagement, malpractices, squabbles, conflict and violence infecting all public utility services including the educational institutions. There is everything present in these educational institutions other than an atmosphere of education and an environment conducive to the

growth of knowledge. In a country where 73 per cent of students fail in a public examination of prime importance that decides their future career, meaning entry into university education or acceptance in the job market, is a shocking reminder that there is something seriously wrong with our methods of teaching and education and that inexplicably nobody so far has done anything to change that. Shockingly, our teachers on one side and political leaders on the other front remain poignantly indifferent to the intellectual waste. Educational administrators, school and college authorities especially in some 10,000 schools and colleges of rural areas out of 30,000 such institutions in the country have failed miserably in their obligations to the nation. Yet they demand more facilities and incentives to remain engaged in their profession. It sounds ridiculous to know that out of 890 students who

teaching, the debacle has been most debilitating and shocking. The disease has struck the students right from the school level. Often the student does not know how to construct a sentence with proper sequence of tenses, not to speak of complying with the norms of appropriate prepositions or making an expression idiomatic.

Teaching in the institutions has suffered badly. There is hardly any teaching in the schools and colleges nor there are class-tests to evaluate the performance of the students in the particular subject and repair the handicaps of the deficient incumbents. Teachers in all the institutions either at the primary school, secondary school or colleges have started coaching often at the expense of teaching in class room. These teachers without making any effort in building up a student and strengthening his/her basics start coaching their students on selected questions.

-vis the college teachers' indifference rising to a peak, the performance of the students was most disappointing.

In analysing or diagnosing the ailment, one has to delve deep into the problem. A flagrant deviation one would see these days in teaching English at the S.S.C level is that students are never taught conjugation of verbs which in the earlier days students were taught in class VII and class VIII almost religiously. The result has been that most of the students construct faulty sentences and hasten to write, for instance, "I have caught a fish" or "I have hold this view". In the earlier days, teachers in English language took special effort and care to see that their students learnt the use of appropriate prepositions that must follow a verb or a noun. This was almost done routinely and competitive groups took pride in their stock-materials of appropriate prepositions and phrase and idioms.

Mathematics seem to have defeated the objective of imparting education in line with the advanced institutions in the U.S and western Europe. Consequently the learners have been thrown off guard.

Most of the guardians in the country are not supposed to know how and where the system is ailing and they are highly upset when their wards cut a sorry figure even when they have spent huge sums of money for tuition, coaching, hostel expenses and conveyance of their wards. The nation can ill-afford to ignore the present catastrophic situation that seems to be our own making. Most shockingly true, even if we have remodelled the H.S.C. science syllabus, we have hardly paid any attention to teacher training at colleges in the far flung areas of the country. Because of our failure to formulate a methodology of teaching and training and equip schools and colleges with competent teachers at different levels and for different subjects, there is now total chaos and disarray in the system of education starting from the primary to secondary to higher secondary stage. It is at the higher secondary stage that the nation, so to say, the students are paying a heavy price as evidenced by a colossal disaster in the results of the last few years' HSC examinations. It is at this stage that the end result of years of productive efforts and investment starts flowing.

Most of our once fine schools and colleges outside the metropolis are in a state of decay because nobody, especially local political leaders and administration, cares to look into the causes of their malfunctioning. To cite some cases of such malfunctioning, as reported in a Bangla daily on September 18 last, at Bhanga College in Pabna, two teachers are working as Principals-in-charge under two Managing Committees that want to put their political dominance and ethos over the college. How can the students concentrate on studies and fare well in examinations in an educational institution that is embroiled in petty party politicking? Another report says that the girl students in a certain college in Comilla gheraoed the Principal's room, drove the principal out from the college premises and ransacked college properties to press home their demands, prominent among them being filling up the post of teacher in English. But even in the face of all pervading ills and dismal educational scene, there are some glad tidings. The commitment, dedication and a ceaseless effort by the teachers and the founder of the Abdul Majid College in Comilla has paid off enormously. The college stole 15 positions in the Comilla board merit list this year. Nevertheless, this college has won 88 merit positions in board examinations ever since it was founded in 1997 by Professor Abdul Majid. Could other colleges in the country take some cue from this institution?

Students were inspired to learn right from Class IX, for example, the different meanings that an expression takes by introducing different prepositions like "call in a doctor, call on a person, call at one's place, call up the names" etc. Another drawback that seems to have crippled the system of learning and stands as a setback to further learning and acquiring proficiency in the subject of English is the dearth of committed and competent teachers.

In taking a cursory look at the syllabus in the Higher Secondary science group, one would discover that the curriculum in Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics has been remodelled. But appallingly, the colleges hardly have a trained pool of teachers to teach these advanced nature of courses. This year's H.S.C. (Science) examination debacle stems from deficient teaching in these new syllabus. Speaking about Mathematics, without a fair knowledge of Trigonometry and Geometry no student can claim to have attained mastery in Dynamics and Calculus or even Physics. These three papers at the HSC level remain the most dreaded subjects because of the deficiency in knowledge and lack of proper understanding in Trigonometry and Calculus. People who have certain exposure to all these subjects wonder if all these intricate matters did ever creep into the mind of the educational planners while formulating the Mathematics syllabus. Ignorance, short-sightedness and lack of teacher training in the advanced courses in

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Tribute to a philanthropist

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LATE Dr Ruhul Amin, (who passed away on 22 August, 2002 at Bangladesh Medical College Hospital left behind a rich heritage of service to humanity, with humility. Although many opportunities lay before him, he opted out of both legal practice and active politics. He decided to be a doctor to serve humanity. He studied medicine in Dhaka and London.

Each doctor, at the time of registration, has to submit a signed written declaration, which is based on the International Code of Medical Ethics, 1949. Part of the declaration reads, inter alia, i) I solemnly pledge myself to consecrate myself to the service of humanity; ii) The health of my patient will be my first consideration. The most important operative word in this declaration is "to consecrate" oneself. To consecrate is to dedicate formally to the service or worship of God. Thus the declaration equates 'service of humanity' to the service of God. Dr. Amin did indeed consecrate most of the fifty years of his professional life to the service of humanity.

His honorarium was the inner satisfaction he got by treating the patients, especially those who were really poor, helping them to get back on their feet. His chamber was his residence, open seven days a week and virtually at all hours. If a person was too sick or too poor to come to his chamber, he would visit the patient and treat him. I have known Dr. Amin for the last forty years and have never heard that he ever accepted any fee or even reimbursement of the cost of transport.

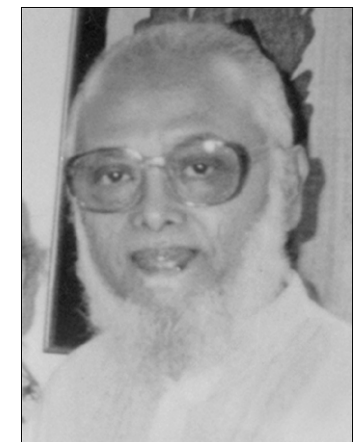
His lifestyle was disarmingly simple. He had no weakness to show-off or be counted as affluent. He had, by birth, some sort of freedom from want. To maintain his family and help others on the quiet, he first opened a pharmacy at Gulistan. But money or profit making was not his cup of tea and he had to close it down. Then he served as a part time doctor in several organisations until his heart started deteriorating. The modest salary he got was enough for him to be content.

He stayed on with his parents even after marriage. Dr. Amin would not have even entertained the thought of leaving his ancestral home at 20, Eskaton Road, Dhaka if total collapse of rule of law did not compel him. He had to build a shelter at 4, Dhanmandi by taking loans from various sources which he managed to repay. But, as irony would have it, again circumstances obliged him to sell this shelter to a medical entrepreneur and move to Gulshan at the fag end of his life. This was possibly the most painful move for him. For, he missed his relatives and his patients, many of whom were very poor like the hawkers who sold him groceries. These were people with whom he had built up a rapport by his genuine concern for their welfare. It did not take long for them to regard him with love, admiration and profound respect.

Moreover, he still felt he had to serve them. Despite serious heart ailment he would come to the Bangladesh Hypertension Society, Green Road, Dhaka, almost five days a week. He was its general secretary. It has ten thousand patients, of which two thousand five

hundred visit the Society regularly and are treated almost free. These patients belong to the low-income bracket. They could not have gone to a usual doctor's chamber and pay Tk 300 to 500 per visit. The Society was the only place in Dhaka for them to be treated. Dr. Amin ensured that they were duly examined, their individual problem properly diagnosed and if funds or supply of medicine were there in the Society, the poorest among them would get it for free. They were monitored by periodic reminders for check-up by doctors of the Society. Some of these patients might have had stroke due to high blood pressure if they had not been treated by the Society.

Being the General Secretary, Dr. Amin, also had to look after overall administration of the Society and keep a watch over expenditure. Founder of the Society, Late Prof. G M Chowdhury, never sought publicity or funds for the society from the affluent class, many of whom were his patients. During his lifetime, he sent his patients for pathological



Late Dr Ruhul Amin

tests, X-ray and ECG to the Society's laboratory to supplement its income. The Society faced severe shortage of resources after the demise of Dr. Chowdhury.

Dr. Amin undertook the difficult task in collaboration with some other office-bearers, to approach various organisations and pharmaceutical companies to get resources in cash or kind. Like Dr. G M Chowdhury, he was too polite to knock at the door of the Government of Bangladesh, let alone foreign donor countries/agencies. Assistance from the Rotary Club, Lions Club, Bangladesh Foundation and some generous individual donors helped the Society to survive so far.

Recognising the harsh reality of fund shortage he himself would type out the notices of the meetings and their proceedings. By typing out a notice he saved Tk five only. I occasionally objected. His disarming reply was, "I am the trustee. I have an obligation to save whatever money I can and use the amount saved to treat at least one more patient". Many of us are top office-bearers of humanitarian organisations and NGOs. Do we have a lesson to learn from Dr. Amin?

Dr. Amin ensured every year that the death anniversary of Late Prof. G M Chowdhury was observed to pray for the salvation of his soul and also to remind the beneficiaries,

young doctors and others that he was indeed the founding father of the Bangladesh Hypertension Society.

Dr. Amin was very different from many of the doctors we encounter these days. He did not know how to over-charge patients or order multiple pathological tests to be done or direct them to designated laboratories and later collect his commission from there.

Being scrupulously honest and trusting he himself often got cheated especially when he went shopping. His "defence" to his family was that he would rather be cheated than be a cheat.

Despite being educated abroad he was a firm believer of the eastern joint family concept. He stayed on with his parents even after his marriage. His parents passed away decades back respectively with him by their side. He looked after their health, comfort and interests as well as a devoted son could. With their demise, he automatically became the patriarch of a large extended family and of those, who came from various rural areas to 20, Eskaton Road and settled down there. He passed away as the patriarch. One has to see for himself how his sisters and brothers spent day after day literally sleeping on the floor to be close to the cardiac care unit.

His quikhwani was held on 25 August, 2002. The venue was packed to the capacity. There was the usual sprinkle of VIPs amongst the participants. The relatives, friends and colleagues were also there. This was expected. But most of the participants were poor lived far away from Gulshan. Dr. Amin was their benefactor. He either treated them free, or gave them financial relief, subsidised the weddings in their families or was their customer who would not bargain or check the quantity, let alone quality.

The learned speakers essentially made three points in his quikhwani, viz, i) our never ending chase for material wealth, ii) concern to build up our children and give them a comfortable berth in life and iii) service for the suffering humanity. They stressed that material wealth above would desert a person on his death, that children would soon forget him and in any case would not recognize him on the day of judgment. It is the service for humanity which will be ever lasting and will count on the ultimate day of judgment.

Dr. Amin was clear about his priority. He had to have a shelter. So he had. He also had a car -- but a very small one, 500 cc. with no AC. He did give time to his children but by and large left them to make their life with the guidance of their mother. It was service to humanity which was his all consuming passion. He his heart was in a very weak state and he was past 70. Despite this knowledge year in and year out he over-strained himself to run the Society, if others had shared the load Dr. Amin might have survived for some time more.

He knew he was hastening his death by virtually running the Society single handedly. This could be his way of keeping to the declaration "to consecrate my life to the service of humanity".