

Education system riddled with flaws

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to be too generous in marking papers. The meeting that was off limits to journalists discussed issues, including problems at private universities and medical colleges, efficiency of teachers and the education budget.

"The main goal of exams is to filter out ... What is the need for an exam if everybody passes it," Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed, founder and chief executive of Bishwo Shahitto Kendro, told The Daily Star coming out of the meeting.

"I told the meeting that the exam or filtering system has to be more stringent. Only then, the quality of our education will improve."

Referring to the increasing number of GPA-5 holders in SSC and HSC exams, he said it will create a "crowd".

"The standard of 80 percent of the GPA-5 holders is equal to that of second division holders in our time. The criteria [for getting GPA-5] should be harder," he said.

Noted artist Prof Hashem Khan said children are getting an exam-centred education, which is an obstacle to enhancing their creative and rational thinking.

"There should not be any exams until class-V so that the students can study with joy and the fear of exams doesn't grow in them. The students should sit for an exam at class-V," he said.

Prof Emeritus Ausazzaman said they discussed ways on how to stop leaks of question papers. The application of information technology has to be increased in the preparation and distribution of question papers, he suggested.

Bring down numbers of exams

Formulate a new law with provision of stringent punishment to check question leakage

Use modern technology in formulating and distributing question paper

No need to approve new private university and medical college now

Strengthen monitoring on private universities

Noted author and educationist Prof Muhammad Zafar Iqbal said, "I pointed out that there is no law for punishing the culprits for question paper leaks. The minister said the issue will be incorporated in the proposed Education Act before it is passed in parliament."

The minister also assured the educationists that steps would be taken to prevent question leaks by using modern technology, he said.

Author and litterateur Selina Hossain said there should be a strict monitoring system regarding the preparation and distribution of question papers.

Prof Shamsuzzaman Khan, director

general of Bangla Academy, said the government should strengthen its monitoring on private universities, many of which are just handing out certificates in exchange for money.

Prof Pran Gopal Datta, vice chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, said the government should not give approval to any more private university or medical colleges.

"There is no discipline whatsoever in private medical colleges ... no patients are admitted there," he said.

Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of Campaign for Popular Education, said, "The government should sit with stakeholders before bringing any changes in the exam system. We should also consider whether the grading system is applicable in our country."

She said they stressed the need for increasing budgetary allocations at primary and tertiary levels.

After the meeting, the education minister said, "The country's education system has gone far quantitatively over the last five years. Now, we have to ensure quality education."

On leaks of question papers, Nahid said a law is already in force to prevent it. "We can incorporate the provisions of the law in the Education Act. If necessary, a new law can be formulated."

Prof Salahuddin Ahmed, Prof Zillur Rahman Siddique, Prof Rehman Sobhan, Prof Rafiqul Islam, Prof Abdul Mannan, Prof Syed Manzoorul Islam, Prof Nazrul Islam, Prof Mustafa Nurul Islam, Mustafa Monwar, Prof MM Akash and Prof Muntassir Mamoon were also present at the

Poor the easy prey

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dreams of going to Malaysia, the youth gave Tk 10,000 to a trafficker, who put him on the boat.

However, his boat was caught by Thai police en route. After spending five months in a Thai prison, he returned home around three months ago, broken-hearted and diminished in health.

Twenty-four-year-old Mohammad Alamgir of Cox's Bazar town used to lead a happy life through running a small business. But he too got lured into the aforementioned quicksand.

Alamgir paid Tk 2.06 lakh to a human trafficking gang at Teknaf and set sail for Malaysia in March in the hope for a better income. But fate held something else for him. He is now languishing in a Thai prison, waiting for the government of Bangladesh to arrange his return home.

Many people have gone missing in the last few months after setting out for Malaysia illegally through the sea route. Scores have been killed in trawler capsize and at the hands of human traffickers. A number of others remain incarcerated in foreign lands, while many more have returned empty handed and are now gasping for life, their homes and hearths having been lost in their bid to pursue a better life abroad.

However, nothing could stop or even slow down this evil business of human trafficking through the sea, thanks to the sweet-tongued gangs of traffickers and the gullibility of a section of youths, who think the grass is always greener on the other shore of the choppy sea.

A JOURNEY PERILOUS

According to the Coast Guard, police and local sources, the godfathers involved in trafficking people illegally through the sea route are mainly based in Teknaf of Cox's Bazar district. They have appointed middlemen across the country. These middlemen lure people from all over the country with pledges of sending young people to Malaysia at a low cost and hand them over to the Teknaf-based trafficking gangs. They get "commission" in return.

The traffickers keep the people in their various safe houses in Teknaf and at opportune moments board them on mini-steamers and trawlers at seven to eight points along the Teknaf coast. Only dry food like puffed rice and molasses and a few containers of water are given to passengers on a journey that may last two weeks or more. The boats then sail to Thailand first, where members of the trafficking gang hold

the passengers hostage.

The families of the hostages then are contacted for more money, apart from what they have already paid. Once the money is paid through the middlemen, the passengers are made to board another boat for Malaysia. In many cases, the Bangladeshis get caught either by the Thai or the Malaysia authorities.

The traffickers take Tk 10,000 to Tk 20,000 for sending a person to Malaysia. Sometimes they even take nothing until the aspiring people are taken to Thailand.

PICK-UP AND TRANSIT POINTS

Until a few years back, the traffickers would use Shah Parir Dwip and Teknaf Sadar union under Teknaf upazila for gathering and sending people out to the sea. But following the deaths of many aspiring Malaysia-bound people in trawler capsize at these points, the Coast Guard, Border Guard and police have intensified their presence there.

Now the traffickers use about 40 places and pick-up points for trafficking. These places include Katabonia, Kachubonia, Paschim Para, Dakkhin Para, Bazar Para, Noakhali Para and some remote corners of Shah Parir Dwip in Teknaf upazila; Inani, Reju Mohona, and Madarbania in Ukhia upazila; Himchhari in Ramu upazila; Kolatoli Borochhara, Khurushkul and Choufaldandi in Cox's Bazar Sadar upazila; Hoanok and Sonadia in Moheshkhali upazila; Moghnama and Ujanthia in Pekua upazila; and Tabaler Char and Ali Akbar Dail in Kutubdia upazila.

THE STAKES

More than 50 people were killed when a trawler carrying Malaysia-bound people sank in the sea adjacent to Dargahbil and Habirchar under Teknaf on May 16 last year. In the same year, around 200 people died when two trawlers capsized in the Bay. The bodies of only 80 persons could be recovered.

Not just the accidents, there are even worse demons that take the lives of these ill-fated people. The captors in Thailand, locals allege, have killed many people for not paying the money or disobeying them.

In December last year, 23-year-old Putia, son of Sukkur Ahmed of Dakkhin Para of Chakoria upazila, died in captivity at the hands of the traffickers in Thailand. Many others, including Abul Hashem of Segun Bagicha of the same area, Nurul Kabir of Chhoangkhalai under Ukhia upazila, Mohammad Kamal of Kutupalong, Noor Mohammad of Maricha Paling

Mohammad Ismail of Lombaghona remain missing. All of them boarded the boats between January and April this year.

Many of the aspirants get caught en route as well. In the biggest incident of detention of illegal migrants, the Coast Guards held 220 people in a Malaysia-bound trawler from Dakkhin Paschimer Baroshil area near St Martin's Islam on February 11.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

The Human Trafficking Deterrence and Suppression Act was passed in parliament in February 2012, with the provision life imprisonment as the maximum punishment for human trafficking. After the law was enacted 124 cases were filed in Cox's Bazar district, accusing 705 people, 238 of whom have been arrested while the rest are on the run. All the cases are pending at court.

Abu Taher, a community leader of Sabrang union of Teknaf, told this correspondent that Noapara and Puran Para under the union are two main points used for human trafficking.

"There are hardly any males in these two villages as most of the male residents have left for Malaysia," he said, adding that some of them succeeded in reaching Malaysia, some remain missing and some others have been detained by Thai police.

LAW ENFORCERS IN COLLUSION?

Locals of different coastal areas of Cox's Bazar district have blamed the inaction of the law enforcement agencies for the rise in human trafficking.

Anwar Hossain, chairman of Jalia Palong union in Ukhia upazila, said a list of human traffickers of his area had been given to the police but they were not taking any action against arrest the culprits.

Habibur Rahman, chairman of Sabrang union in Teknaf upazila, admitted that the union was being used as the main point of human trafficking.

"It is difficult to check this problem because the traffickers are very influential and they are helped by law enforcers in most cases," he told The Daily Star.

Md. Ruhul Amin, Deputy Commissioner of Cox's Bazar and district president of the Anti-human Trafficking Task Force, said the law enforcing agencies had been directed to remain alert round the clock to prevent human trafficking. The upazila administration has been conducting awareness campaigns against traffick-

Arrest order for 46

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including Rafiqul's wife Farah Diba.

After issuing the arrest warrant, the court directed officers-in-charge of different police stations concerned to submit reports before it by July 13 on execution of the order.

The court also fixed July 13 as the next date for hearing of the cases.

The judge granted bail to Harun as he had secured bail from the High Court.

Rafiqul and three others accused are now behind bars while 46 others are absconding.

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) on May 4 pressed charges against the 51 people accused in the two cases.

They were charged with misappropriating funds through Destiny Tree Plantation (DTPL) project and from Destiny Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd (DMCSL), according to ACC.

The group's irregularities came under the spotlight in early 2012 after the central bank found that it had been involved in illegal banking.

Various newspapers, including The Daily Star, ran reports on massive irregularities in the group's cooperative, tree plantation and multilevel marketing wings.

In July 2012, the ACC filed two cases against 22 Destiny officials on charges of laundering money.

Top officials of Destiny misappropriated about Tk 4,200 crore through its tree plantation project and the cooperative firm and laundered this money abroad, the charge sheets state.

The officials embezzled the money in the name of paying salaries, honoraria, commission, incentives and promotional costs. They transferred the money to their bank accounts and those of the 20 companies under the group.

At the same time, they also misappropriated Tk 2,433 crore from 17.5 lakh investors by claiming that they had sold 6.18 crore saplings under the tree plantation project. In reality the group planted only 32 lakh trees, according to the ACC's findings.



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