

Private tutoring isn't the problem, our education system is



NAZMUL AHASAN

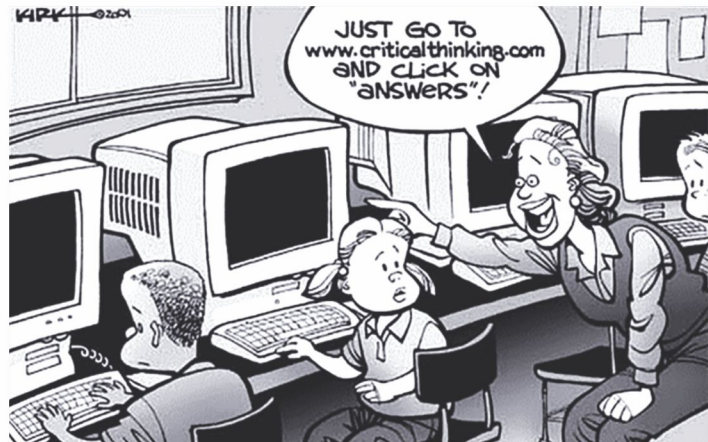
WHILE announcing that a new education law is in the pipeline, the education minister warned that it would impose a restriction over private tutoring by school and college teachers. Some of our top

educationists have long campaigned for this measure to be introduced and implemented. There's also a popular belief that the quality of our education has eroded because teachers nowadays give less time and effort in classrooms. It's true in many cases; however, one is still not convinced how prohibiting this practice altogether would revive the erstwhile 'glory' of our education system.

One of the primary reasons put forward to make a case for outlawing private tutoring and coaching is that it is discriminatory. In a country where one in four students drop out of school before completing their primary education due to poverty, tutoring being a necessity, certainly adds extra pressure on the economically less fortunate parents. If teachers compel students to go to private tutoring by not giving them enough time in classrooms, then, indeed, the poor students would fall behind because they will not be able to afford it.

However, it is not clear how an overall ban on coaching would necessarily result in improved classroom-teaching. It will not magically intensify or force a teacher to do his/her best in classrooms, if he/she is restricted from tutoring privately. Is it not easier to identify and take action against a handful of immoral teachers than to implement a blanket ban on private coaching? The ban, assuming it is implemented, would not bring any equality either. Those who could afford it would still be able to get help from private tutors, but without improving the persistent problem in our schools and classrooms—the poor will remain exactly where they were previously.

Private tutoring is not the problem per se; its very existence is a symptom of the existing disease. The problem is rooted in the existing system which cannot ensure quality educa-



tion. Even if a teacher wants to perform his duty honestly, an overcrowded class comprising of a hundred pupils would certainly make his mission impossible. In fact, this is precisely why many students feel the need for private tutors: to have the chance of asking a teacher a question and get a detailed answer. Common sense (and peer-reviewed research) tells us that a small-sized class improves student achievement. The government would be better off smartly investing in educational infrastructure and human resources rather than expending its resources aimlessly.

Similarly, the main objection to 'coaching centres' is that some of them are involved in the illegal leakage of exam-papers. That's not a problem with the way coaching centres are run. That's a criminal offence, which needs to be dealt with in

accordance with the law. Another allegation is that university admission test papers, at times, contain identical questions from the model tests of coaching centres. Again, if there's an illegal collusion between university teachers and coaching centres, it's simply a law enforcement issue: shutting down or criminalising coaching centres will do little in this regard.

What about that ineffective 'creative system'? In 2011, academic observers criticised this so-called 'creative system' for that year's massive boom in A+ grades. Now, six years later, two consecutive years of devastating results have made us think twice. A recent government report based on inspections of thousands of secondary schools found that more than half (52 percent) the teachers did not understand the system themselves. It explains why students

tend to rely on external help more than before. What if one asks that extensive training be facilitated for teachers instead of imposing a meaningless ban on private tutoring?

One of the main problems with teachers offering private tutoring is the conflict of interest associated with the practice. You privately tutor a group of students and not of exams. Therefore, there is a genuine conflict of interest. One way to resolve this problem would be to require a teacher to register as a tutor. And then, the permitted teachers could be stripped of their power to grade their students in classroom exams. Traditionally, in schools and colleges, students need extra attention in English, mathematics, accounting and subjects related to science. While the teacher can evaluate a student best,

grading students in those subjects should not be a difficult task for another teacher with the relevant background because these subjects mainly deal with static (i.e. scientific or mathematical) facts.

Furthermore, there should be a mechanism in place for students to scrutinise their teachers so that they cannot coerce their students into private tutoring. The local administration can launch a campaign to encourage students to speak up, not just in case of unfair treatment, but also other serious issues. Another step could be to allow students to evaluate their own course teacher anonymously. If a teacher consistently gets similar feedback from students of different classes, then there must be some problem with his way of teaching.

However, it would not be wrong for one to contend that private tutoring and coaching retards students' distinct and individual intellectual growth. It also leads to a suffocating environment of excessive competition, which, especially in the case of kids, severely hinders emotional growth. The shortcut technique of rote memorisation practiced at coaching centres underscore that our education system does not encourage the development of students' analytical abilities. The academic sentiment that overemphasises GPAs and academic credentials has also contributed to this phenomenon. Private tutoring did not give rise to this situation; in fact, it is the other way around. An outdated result-oriented system that measures performance based on exam scores will inevitably lead to such a stale intellectual culture.

This piece does not advocate for coaching or tutoring whatsoever. If the government is determined to end this practice, so be it. But to introduce this measure as a remedy to all the problems that our education system faces will be delusional, at best, or self-defeating, at worst. Instead, our resources should be directed at improving our classrooms, making academic curricula and evaluation systems more diverse and appreciative of analytical abilities and real-life application, and facilitating extensive training for teachers.

Nazmul Ahsan is a member of the editorial team at The Daily Star.
E-mail: nazmulahsanlive@gmail.com

A victim of an ugly conspiracy?



MEER AHASAN HABIB

But there are many questions that need to be answered. Why did the plaintiff wait for so long to file the bribery case? Why did she become active only after a local leader was blamed and strongly condemned for his act? Even if we get answers to all these questions, we will not get anywhere.

On September 27, a Narayanangji lower court accepted the bribery charges pressed against Shyamal Kanti Bhakta, the headmaster of Piyar Sattar Latif High School. In August last year, the high court rejected a police probe report and ordered judicial inquiry into the public humiliation Bhakta had been subjected to on May 13, 2017. The judicial probe report by the chief judicial magistrate of Dhaka was submitted before the same court in January this year. While we are still waiting to know its contents, we cannot help but feel dismayed by the outcome of this case. Shyamal Kanti Bhakta was disgraced and humiliated by a local leader and his acquaintances for making anti-religious (later proven to be baseless and staged) comments. People from all walks of the country protested this humiliation. We stood by him, chanted slogans, flooded social media with reactions and wrote opinion pieces demanding justice. With the high court's move, we thought that justice had found the right course.

Two months after the incident his fellow English teacher Morsheida Begum filed a bribery case against Bhakta on July 27. She claimed he had taken a bribe even before the November 2014. Morsheida Begum alleged that she bribed Shyamal Kanti a total of Tk one lakh and thirty-five thousand in two instalments to get her enrolled in the monthly payment order (MPO) system.

The curious part of this case is that she waited more than 18 months. The whole country was shocked to see a lawmaker involved in such a disgraceful act. The police probe did not find any truth in the incident involving Shyamal Kanti.



Narayanangji school teacher Shyamal Kanti Bhakta, being taken to jail on May 24, 2017, after a court rejected his bail petition in a case filed for "taking bribe".
PHOTO: STAR

But there are many questions that need to be answered. Why did the plaintiff wait for so long to file the bribery case? Why did she become active only after a local leader was blamed and strongly condemned for his act? Even if we get answers to all these questions, we will not get anywhere. Why did she have to bribe for MPO enrolment? Is this a very common practice in Bangladesh? The amount she bribed is not a small amount of money and it is somewhat difficult for a non-MPO teacher to collect this amount. How did the manager to get this much money to bribe her boss? Bribery is such a disgraceful and punishable offence that everyone will think twice before lodging any case that s/he has done so. State agencies like Anti-Corruption

Commission may file a case if they obtain any hard evidence of bribery or attempted bribery. But it is almost impossible that someone will willingly file a bribery case in which s/he paid a sum of money with a specific purpose to get unlawful or unethical benefits. Because bribing someone is also a criminal offence according to the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947—an offence punishable under section 161 or section 165 of the Penal Code of 1860, it is proved that an accused person has accepted or obtained, or has agreed to accept or attempted to obtain, for himself or for any other person, any gratification (other than legal remuneration) or any valuable thing from any person. The Penal Code also prohibits a public servant from accepting a

bribe (sections 161 and 165 Penal Code) and penalises the abetment of this offence (section 165A Penal Code).

When Shyamal Kanti was humiliated, at least two influential ministers came down heavily on the incident and promised to bring the perpetrators to justice. The education ministry probe committee found no evidence against the allegations but found a longstanding dispute between the headmaster and the SMC over financial matters which led to this conspiracy. Based on the recommendations, the ministry also recommended the decision of the School Managing Committee (SMC) and reinstated him. Taking into cognisance of the then ongoing investigation, the high court scrapped two cases filed by Rina Begum (May 8, 2016) for torturing her son and Sanjib Faque Sattar (May 13, 2016) for hurting religious sentiments of the Muslims.

The third one was a different one that landed him in jail. As it is a *sub judice* matter, it would not be right to comment on this. But there are a few issues that need to be analysed and answered. On law enforcing agencies have their achievements. But when it comes to Narayanangji, we all see a blurry picture of the influence on every single affair of the district. As if, it is an independent state and above the constitution and laws of Bangladesh. According to a police report, Shyamal Kanti took the bribe. But as stated above, Morsheida Begum also committed a crime by bribing him (according to prevention of corruption act 1947). Did the investigation officer take this fact into consideration? If not, we can assume that this is yet another attempt to defame Shyamal Kanti. We can only hope that might will never over right and Shyamal Kanti will just live.

Meer Ahsan Habib is a communication for development professional.
E-mail: meer-riyad@gmail.com

QUOTABLE Quote

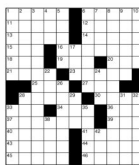
CROSSWORD by THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Prison-based
- 6 Stun gun
- 11 Last letter
- 12 Not out of it
- 13 Rat's home
- 14 Camp craft
- 15 Attempt
- 16 Noisy
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DOWN

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- 30 Take a nap
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- 39 Linking word
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- 46 Bring to bear
- 31 More madcap
- 32 Heir, often
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- 38 Watch over
- 42 Indulgent



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER
BREAD STRAP
RITE STOOGES
ATOP HALTIER
GAME A LIE
DAWLED DINA
AROSE RUDE
MER TASSEL
SAMEPAGE
POLICE CLUE
ORATED ANTE
PETER RASP

BEETLE BAILEY



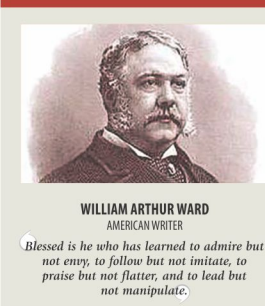
BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



WILLIAM ARTHUR WARD
AMERICAN WRITER

Blessed is he who has learned to admire but not envy, to follow but not imitate, to praise but not flatter, and to lead but not manipulate.