

FROM CHALLENGED BEGINNINGS TO STANDING TALL

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Finding a new trajectory for education

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GOVERNANCE, SYSTEM MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING

Major structural and operational issues in education with significant governance and management implications have come to the fore from studies and public discourse. The structural issues, left unaddressed, impede operational steps to improve system performance. An analysis regarding the structural and operational issues was undertaken, in which this

jurisdiction for school education, a comprehensive law for education, effective public-private partnership building in education, and establishing a permanent education commission.

Various operational issues arise from the long-standing structural weaknesses and the consequent deficiencies in the governance, management and decision-making process in the education system. These cannot be discussed within the scope of this paper, but some may be mentioned by way of example—



foundational principles to uphold the aim of a just and progressive society, promoting human dignity and rights for all in unity, while celebrating diversity and multiple identities of people. The imperative now is for the education endeavours to be dedicated to the four fundamental principles of the constitution—the “high ideals of nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism” and to fulfilling the “fundamental aim of the State to realise through the democratic process a socialist society, free from exploitation, a society in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom, equality and justice, political, economic and social, will be secured for all citizens” (Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Preamble, 1972). Abiding by these principles and fulfilling the fundamental aim are noble challenges for the education system and for all concerned with education.

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End Notes

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writer participated, to develop an action plan for implementing the Seventh Five-Year Development Plan (PRI, 2017). The action plan remained a draft and was not acted upon, though the issues remain relevant. This is symptomatic of governance weakness. The issues identified were: Resource inadequacy, decentralisation of education governance, effective skills development strategies, quality control in higher education, need for one ministerial

student learning assessment, process of curriculum reform, harmful political interference, policy implementation mechanism, use of digital technology, and so on. Important as these are, these need attention in a holistic way, not piecemeal, within a framework of necessary structural changes noted above.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The political power structure and

dynamics of decision-making have led to continuing reluctance and resistance to addressing the structural and operational problems of the education system noted above. To illustrate the point, school education remains bifurcated under two ministerial jurisdictions; there is silence on the 2010 Education Policy recommendation for a permanent education commission as an oversight body for monitoring education reforms, and there is no visible effort on a unified curriculum and common standards for all children in primary and secondary education. There is the inability to address the dilemma of major public funding support for a parallel system of madrasa education that send millions of young people to a dead end in terms of jobs and life opportunities in a modern society. A comprehensive education law that recognises and fulfils the right to equitable education has not been adopted. Repeated political pledges to raise public spending as a ratio of GDP and promises to decentralise education governance have not been translated into concrete action. New thinking about teachers’ professionalism, status, role and means of attracting the best and the brightest into the profession is yet to become a national priority.

The gatekeepers of education, the senior officials and the political decision-makers, have not shown an appetite for

addressing the critical issues. They have remained satisfied with managing the status quo. The transformation needed in the education system to meet the challenges of the 21st century cannot be achieved by the status quo.

The existential challenges humanity faces today may result in the end of human life on the planet. The advent of machines that think requires us to imagine work, managing production and services, and organising distribution of income and entitlements in new ways to avert dooming the life and livelihood of millions of people. Coping with these challenges requires how people acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes is revamped and organised differently.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Time is fast running out for decisive climate change action, balancing the needs of the present generation and the future ones. The pandemic, not likely to be the last one, is a tell-tale consequence of human transgression into the sphere of nature and biodiversity. The new form of globalisation driven by artificial intelligence, automation and Internet of Things pose dilemmas about upholding justice, social cohesion and human dignity. Societies and individuals need a moral compass to guide themselves more than ever.

On the 50th year of independence, the nation needs to recommit itself to the

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