

Failure of history education that warrants attention

NOT knowing all is not, and should not be, a fault. But when ignorance of such issues comes to the history of the nation, it certainly leaves the managers of the nation, and society, with a big task to attend to. A few questions that New Age weekend supplement Xtra asked a few people to answer on the occasion of Victory Day show that events of historical importance have hardly been ensconced on the collective of the people, more so with the young. While someone came up with the figure of six when asked about the number of sectors that the Bangladesh Forces were divided into, someone else gave the figure of 20 as for Bir Shreshthas, the freedom fighters given the highest gallantry award for showing utmost bravery in the war of independence and dying in action for the nation. While someone said that General MAG Osmani, commander in chief of the Mukti Bahini, had represented the Bangladesh at the surrender of the Pakistan army, someone else said that it had been between Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from the Bangladesh side and Jawaharlal Nehru from the Pakistan side. Someone even could not name the 'razakar' from Pakistan who signed the instrument.

Such answers only show that while people are not attuned to the history of the nation, they are also confused about the words that come up in the discussion of the independence war and the emergence of Bangladesh. It is true that the survey was not representative, but it is equally true that if it had been a proper survey, the findings, to an extent, could have been the same, bringing to the fore collective failure of the nation in shaping up the mind, in terms of knowing the national history or events of history of national importance as the situation at hand is enough to indicate how strongly people embrace the events in their collective psyche. The respondents all appear to be educated individuals and this should not have been the case, especially after the reading of history in their school and college years and having to live through the celebrations or observance of such national occasions every year. This further indicates that people, after so many years, have grown to look at these as events of bygone times and not as events that brought the nation its freedom and sovereignty. This tends to highlight a national failure in the education of students in national history, which should be reviewed and, if there remains any flaw in the process, mended.

The government, under the circumstances, must have proper plans to execute at some levels – at educational institutions, in the curriculum and within society – so that failures of history education can be properly addressed. Society must also come forward with proper discussions on history to make for a lasting impression on the collective psyche.