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Education scenario

Parliament on Wednesday was the scene of a lively discussion on the education sector. Members from both the Treasury and the Opposition benches voiced their concern at the falling standards in education, the violence on campuses, the general trend towards adoption of unfair means during examinations and the lack of an education policy suitable for the country's future needs. The Education Minister, Mr Anisul Islam Mahmud, revealed, however, encouraging statistics, about growing literacy rates and stressed that more women were receiving the light of education than before. Contrary to popular belief, the attendance at primary school level is increasing and has reached 70 per cent according to the latest survey. The government, meanwhile, has nationalized 146 colleges, 182 secondary schools and over 37 thousand primary schools. It is obvious that there is a constant demand for nationalizing more educational institutions. That this demand is still persistent is evident from the questions of the Members in the House.

Several years after the government went about taking control of one college after another mostly due to pressure from the local people, it became clear that mere nationalization would not check falling standards. In fact, because of a large number of educational institutions at the secondary and higher secondary levels in the hands of the government, the state's resources are spread too thin. No wonder one sees often a government college without proper educational aids—a science laboratory and a library. The nationalization of colleges also precludes the financial assistance that colleges could get from local subscriptions.

Decades ago many of the country's then famous educational institutions were set up by local philanthropy and used to run under local charity. These colleges or high schools had often standards which were the envy of their counterparts in the nationalized sector. But this scenario changed as the government began to assume a greater financial role in the education sector at the lower levels and as local charity and contributions receded to the background.

It may appear coincidental but it is true that with the decline of local participation in the educational institutions the standards also fell.

Other issues like the adoption of unfair means at examination, campus rowdiness and session jams have to do with the socio-political environment of the country. These cannot be eradicated in isolation. The society as a whole will have to take responsibility for the lapses in the education sector and then strive collectively to remedy the ills. The problems which we face are the result of the accumulation of years of national indifference. The burden of seeking a solution has to be shared together.