

'Inequality in education must be addressed'

Speakers at Bishwo Shahitto Kendro event urge govt to form education commission, ensure equal access



Bishwo Shahitto Kendro founder Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed awards a student at an event at the Bangla Academy auditorium yesterday. Bishwo Shahitto Kendro in collaboration with Grameenphone organised the two-day award ceremony of the School Students' Reading Programme. A total of 2,563 students from 31 schools in Dhaka received awards across various categories. Photo: Star

The interim government should prioritise reducing inequality and ensuring quality education, said speakers at a programme yesterday.

Education is the sector most affected by inequality in Bangladesh. As a result, children and adolescents are being deprived of quality education, which stands as a barrier to building a prosperous country and society, they added.



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The remarks came during a two-day award ceremony of the School Students' Reading Programme, organised by Bishwo Shahitto Kendro in collaboration with Grameenphone, held at the Bangla Academy auditorium.

"There is no joy in our textbooks; they are not written to enlighten lives," said BSK founder Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed.

"Textbooks are not really books. If you define textbooks, they are just money. Textbooks mean jobs; textbooks mean material advancement in life," he added.

Sayed said studying and memorising textbooks often leave students tired and frustrated.

"We dislike many things in this country, but perhaps the thing we dislike the most is books. If I attend a wedding with a gift, do people expect that it will be a book? Books have become the most unwelcome thing for us because we only turn to them during exams," he added.

Speaking at the event, Centre for Policy Dialogue's distinguished fellow Debapriya Bhattacharya said while Bangladesh faces many major issues, the most deep and widespread structural problem is the lack of quality education.

"If we aspire to build a new Bangladesh driven by Artificial Intelligence and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, none of it will be possible without ensuring quality education.

Debapriya expressed disappointment that, despite forming numerous commissions, the interim government has yet to establish an education commission.

"I cannot explain the reason behind this. At one point, they even formed a committee to review the curriculum, but after facing criticism, they backtracked, and nothing came of it. This remains a matter of deep regret."

He added, "If there is one area where inequality is most deeply rooted in Bangladesh, it is education. The system itself creates this inequality. Some receive quality education, while others receive none."

Those who are financially well-off send their children to one type of school, while those without means are left with no option but to enrol them in under-resourced village schools, he said.

He further said that if we cannot eliminate inequality in education, then those who speak of fighting inequality are missing the very foundation of that struggle.

"Educational inequality must be eradicated by ensuring there is no gender discrimination, and that underprivileged communities, such as indigenous groups and children from remote char areas, are not left behind," he added.

Explaining the reasons behind students' opposition to the quota system, Debapriya said private sector investment has remained stagnant for the past decade and a half.

As a result, new jobs are not being created in the private sector. At the same time, due to poor quality education, many graduates are not considered suitable for the few available roles, he said.

"Yes, foreigners are coming and taking our jobs. But employers often argue that they cannot find qualified local candidates," he added.

Debapriya questioned how jobs could be created when, on one hand, the quality of education remains low, and on the other, there is a lack of investment.

"Right now, only the government is creating jobs. That's why we must understand how this structural failure has contributed to democratic unrest. It must be taken seriously, not dismissed," he said.

Badiul Alam Majumdar, secretary of SHUJAN, said if students remain committed, a prosperous Bangladesh can be built.

Siddique Zobair, senior secretary of the Secondary and Higher Education Division, renowned magician Jewel Aich, noted actor Khairul Alam Sabuj, and Grameenphone's Chief Corporate Affairs Officer Tanveer Mohammad also spoke at the event.

At the two-day award ceremony, a total of 2,563 students from 31 schools in Dhaka received awards across various categories yesterday.