

157

তারিখ ... 2.7 FEB 1997... ..

পৃষ্ঠা ৫ কলাম ... ৭.....

Crisis In Schooling

English Medium Tutorials that are proliferating in the large towns and cities attract a predictable class of people, known collectively as the nouveau rich, plus surprisingly, a large number from the poorer middle classes who realise the value, even the necessity of a modern education in the medium of English. But the education that is available from these privately-owned and run organisations are now the focus of constant criticism not all of which is unfounded. But people in search of an education for their children, an education they see as relevant in a fast-developing highly technical environment, ignore the drawbacks, lack of physical facilities, over-crowded classrooms and often low standards of some of these institutions because they have no alternatives. Dependable schools are simply not keeping pace with the growing number of school-goers.

As a consequence these tutorials become the only option available that offers their children a jumping-board to the higher education as available either at the private universities or abroad. Parents planning their children's future know the futility of searching for a suitable alternative in an educational system that has long since atrophied. Increasing financial stringency as well as a kind of apathy afflict the education sector. Therefore guardians feel that in these tutorials lie their only hope despite being aware of the defects. That this is an indictment on the government for its failure to provide the type of education demanded by the middle and upper classes seems to be missed, but the paradox of this is that many of these tutorials do not fit the bill either.

There are allegations that several tutorials are less concerned with promoting a proper academic atmosphere or even the standard of excellence they claim to promote, than accumulating more and more money, for they freely admit children whether or not they are up to standard or whether or not they have the space. In many cases, it does not seem to matter if the children can pass their final-term exams for most will be promoted anyway. Some questionable schools are said to be more interested in making sure no student "slips through their fingers" and goes away to join another school than in the education of the child.

As parents (and children) discover with what ease pressure can be applied on tutorials, the morals of both the school and the parents are soon called into question. But what this can do to the school and more to the point, what this can do to children, most of whom are already too "worldly wise" for comfort, should be carefully considered for, when children come to understand that their parents will go to any length, including "bailing them out" by forcing the issue or transferring them to another school willing to take them, just to avoid the social embarrassment caused by a child who has failed, we must despair for those who will one day, be future leaders of our country.

But this is not the only social problem that is being created, for which we as a nation will not only suffer but will be taken to task, for with two standards of learning available to people in Bangladesh today, one clearly intended only for the super-rich, the business of planning the nation's educational policy becomes even more complex than ever for this raises two questions. How to get ourselves out of the mess we have created for ourselves in education, and how to control the monster we have created in the name of better quality education? For by continuing to patronise English Medium Tutorials without ensuring that children attending these "schools" obtain the good all-round education which will enable them to make a contribution to the home economy.

This means that the country's educational planners cannot be absolved from their responsibilities, even for those who can afford the cost of such education, for they must protect and care for all children. At the same time they must also tackle the broader question—are students graduating from these private "schools" and private universities migrating abroad thus contributing to the country's brain drain? And they must also be mindful of the fact that in this backdrop, the rest of the country is waiting patiently for the same good standard of education available to the rich for continuing to patronise such wide discrepancies only serve to deprive the poor of opportunity, thus widening further the social divisions that exist in society. The education ministry's reported plans to bring all these English medium kindergartens and tutorials under a common policy would hopefully get the best out of them.