

Education's Malaise

The state of education in Bangladesh continues to be a source of major concern for anyone willing to devote time to the problems facing development prospects of this country. One such person is President Shahabuddin Ahmed who has, time and again, voiced concern about the deterioration of the environment in educational institutions. The president has long been a stern critic of the involvement of political parties in campus politics, and the criminality, which often characterises activities of major student groups at universities and colleges. But in a seminar on Saturday, the president went a step further and listed six problems, which are threatening to destroy the education system in the country.

The list presented by Shahabuddin makes it apparent that the problems have been created over the years by the way the education system has been managed. The lack of investment and efforts to create a pool of trained, highly motivated teachers have taken its toll on the quality of education at both primary and secondary levels. The administration and management of the system has been allowed to become as inefficient and wasteful, devoid of innovation and motivation, as any other government department. The lack of accountability means there is no incentive to improve the system. Consequently, nothing has been done to reform teaching methods, the syllabus and the examinations systems. On top of it all, politics has eaten away at higher education, turning universities into battlegrounds for political parties.

What all these mean is that the government has to effect fundamental and quite drastic reforms in the system in order to pull education out of the doldrums. This means giving education top priority in resource allocation, while ensuring effective accountability of education administration and management through decentralisation. Most critically, drastic improvement in the teaching methods as well as the system of secondary and intermediate level examinations would be required to bring education up to international standard. Campus terrorism needs to be handled as a law and order issue, with total disregard for political affiliations of the suspected criminals. All these would require strong political will, and the government would have to demonstrate such a will if its pronouncements on education are to be taken seriously.

