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The Bangladesh Times

THOUGHTS ON SSC EXAMS

AS NEARLY 4.5 lakh teenagers start sitting for their SSC exams tomorrow the entire nation will be in its throes. For these young people are our children and they are facing something that, for some strange reason, looks more like the life's greatest ordeal than an academic test. These exams have come to be regarded as nightmares by the pupils and their parents alike.

We have come round to a stage of development where we need to impose section 144 around each test centre and call upon a posse of police to keep peace from organised gangs who take it as sport to aid the examinees to resort to unfair means in writing their answer books. These are also the gangs who are out to tease and molest girls. In fact, during the ordeal period, no one can be sure if his or her wards will return home with their limbs in tact.

Today's scenario is the result of a curious combination of factors. If we had followed the practice of advanced countries and spread out the exams over a couple of years holding quarterly or half-yearly tests the SSC or HSC would not have developed into nightmares. The syllabus could have been made less books-oriented and more aptitude- or vocation-oriented. The test itself ought to have been made more wit-oriented than memory-oriented. A very small number of scholarships and the limited seats at the institutions of higher learning force the parents to spend huge sums of money on the reekets of private tutors and drive their wards to frenzied preparations to reach the top brackets in the results.

This madness born out of a fear of frustration could have largely been avoided if the number and amount of scholarships were in sensible proportion to the national need for education and if the scholarships were channelised through the local bodies. The district and upazilas could handle their own share of scholarships for a more equitable distribution of money. In fact, there is no reason why the entire course of higher education for students should not be fully financed by funds channelled through the local bodies. Merit, then, could be recognised on union, upazila and district basis. And this is the correct national basis to identify talents and guide their career to the desired national objectives.

It is time the government paid serious attention to the malaise that is afflicting our entire society. If it is not remedied now, only tragedies will lie ahead. The young and energetic Education Minister, Sheikh Shahidul Islam, should find it a challenging area to apply his mind to.