

Examination Schedule

THE BANGLADESH OBSERVER

1986 S.S.C. examination under the four boards, Dhaka, Comilla, Rajshahi and Jessore, as originally announced, was scheduled to be held on March 6. But the 7-day strike including a sit-in one before the Dhaka Education Board and the clash and arrests have thrown into doubt the possibility of the examination being held at all. About 5 lakh students under the different boards have not sat for the examination but are now placed in great uncertainty, as well as their guardians whose worries have naturally increased about the fate of their wards. Meanwhile, the government has announced that the examination will be held on schedule and has asked for cooperation from guardians and others to help in the smooth conduct of the examination. There are also reports, contradicting each other, about the despatch of relevant papers and documents to the respective examination centre authorities. The situation, therefore, has become confusing enough for all concerned and needs to be sorted out immediately with only 4 days to go before the examination.

It is unfortunate that a new element of uncertainty should be added to the existing state of disorder on the education campuses around the country, which the administration in cooperation with campus authorities has been trying to set right. And there has been some improvement over the past weeks, thanks to cooperation extended by students and teachers at the trouble spots, including Dhaka University. It may be recalled that so far as examinations are concerned, particularly at the higher level, some of them held over due to disturbances, are yet to be held or, at any rate, the results of some to be announced. That such dislocation, particularly of examination schedules, should filter down to the school level and be allowed to be compounded by teachers' strike must be considered a severe blow to education, to say nothing of the damage done to a student's career or the finances of his poor guardians. The school final examination, it must be noted, is the first public examination for a young man launching into a career of higher studies, or at least acquiring a degree with which to eke out a living for himself and his family. Anything coming between him and the chance of his doing so is bound to demoralise him heavily.

It should be possible to spare him such a trauma right at the beginning of his career by keeping teachers' protests on demands for pay-rises or other facilities from interfering with the interest of students, which lies centrally in their being enabled to prosecute their studies, take their examinations, received their results etc. In fact the ultimate loss is one incurred by a nation whose literacy is one of the lowest in the world, and whose progress in knowledge and education has suffered repeated disruptions over the past one decade or so.

As for the teachers' demands that have led to what looks like developing into an issue pursued by rival teachers' associations, and eventually taking on political colour of sorts, the sensible course would be to make them a matter of peaceful negotiation with the administration rather than turning them into extreme steps of strikes and clashes. It would be seen, over the period from 1982 to 1986, negotiations between government and teachers have led to enhancement of salaries and other benefits to the extent of 60 per cent under the new pay structure from March 1, an increase of government grant to 70 per cent from the next financial year, as well as an enhancement of medical allowance from Taka 60 to Taka 100 together with the increment benefits of the new pay structure from January 1, 1986. Demands such as the equation of the non-government pay scale and benefits with those of the government schools, and similar other demands are, reasonably, a subject of long-term policies and have to take into account the limitation of resources in their final settlement.

A total amount of Taka 150 crore would be needed to meet the expenditure of enhanced benefits for 1984-85 while the total requirement for 1985-86 would be around Taka 172 crore. The possibility of meeting most of the legitimate demands, resources permitting, also lies in the enhanced Third Five Year Plan outlay of 1170 crore on education, an increase of about 623 crore over the 2nd five year plan.

The immediate need is providing a congenial atmosphere for holding the examination without trouble. Anything happening to prevent it from doing so would be a matter of real concern to guardians, and students besides being a new problem added to those with which education is already beset.

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