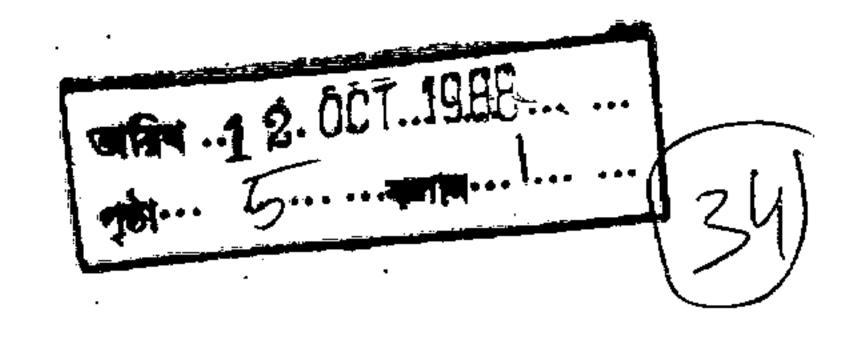
The Bangladesh Observer

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Changing The Examination System

While we fully agree that something needs to be done to remedy dishonest practices in public examinations we are inclined to treat the proposed changes with some reservations. A change from the current system of essay type questions to an objective-type alternative will not, we are afraid, necessarily spell an end to cheating. On the contrary, objective-type questions which demand of candidates only the ability to tick off the right answers might even make cheating easier.

A great deal can of course be said for the introduction of objective-type questions on purely academic grounds in certain areas at least. But to imagine that it is the current pattern of questions which facilitates cheating is perhaps to confuse issues to diagnose the malady afflicting the education system incorrectly. Widespread cheating, from the primary school to the university, from institutes of general education to madrasas which teach theological subjects, is a manifestation of a laxity in our moral values, a proof of the price we put on success regardless of the manner in which it is achieved. The astonishing spectacle of teachers, reportedly, helping their charges to cheat, of authorities viewing with an indulgent eye open railies in support of the right to cheat, is a demonstration of the same unpleasant truth. It is widely alleged that there is a scale of price which, duly paid to the relevant agencies, will guarantee a student a place in the class or division for which he has paid. Some of the stories, if true, are appalling, and point to the existence of corruption among the academic authorities themselves.

There are two parties to any examination: those who take the tests and those who examine them or correct their answers. Confronting students with a different type of questions, supposing it were an efficacious remedy against dishonesty among candidates, would leave the other aspect of examinations exactly where it is or has been.

We are not consequently sanguine that action against students alone will be a panacea, unless we can devise a system which will take care of both students and their examiners.

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What the country needs to decide urgently is whether it will continue to treat dishonesty and corruption in education as a phenomenon to be viewed indulgently and whether it will refrain, as it has hitherto done, from enforing the penalties against these crimes which are already on the statute book. We have in recent years seldom heard of anybody being drastically punished. Dishonest students expelled from one centre, can easily take the same examinations in the following year without loss of face. Schools and collèges which transform examination into a disgraceful farce are let off lightly and allowed to function, maybe with a warning. There has been, to the best of our knowledge, no enquiry into the allegation that scores in examination can be purchased.

The result of what we have called laxity in our standards encourages an ever increasing number of students to resort to dishonesty, and, we regret to say, an ever-increasing number of guardians to assist them in this practice in the belief that a certificate or degree, however obtained, would be worth any price.

Reform of the examination system may be necessary from time to time, but in our opinion the evil which has made nonsense of it springs from causes unrelated to the system. But it is not beyond remedy. Once the country begins enforcing the rules and penalties seriously, if necessary drastically, the tendency to cheat will be checked to a great extent. The difference between what we say in public about examinations and what we do in private, the way many of us turn a blind eye to evil even where we may not directly encourage dishonesty, seldom goes unnoticed. It is this which acts as an incentive to potential evil-doers and perpetuates the very practice against which we fulminate occasionally. Let us try once to insist on the rule of law in academic institutions, and we believe the reaction is bound to be a change for the better.

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