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Maintaining Parity In Education

In keeping with the SAARC agreement on primary education, political manipulation of the education system, especially at the local level, must not be permitted and has to be resisted at all costs and, under no circumstances, can the curricula be permitted to be manipulated for political ends. This seems such a fundamental point that it should not need mentioning yet, conditions prevailing in Bangladesh are cause for us to continue to labour the point.

Although the non-formal mode of learning serves its purpose in bringing children within some form of educational routine, this, in itself, can never be anything more than a stop-gap arrangement designed to bring children into the regular system as soon as possible. But, while concentrating on the fundamental right of all children to education, no matter their economic or social status, the rights of others to an education more to their choosing must not be sacrificed. Yet, in the pursuit of this democratic idea, we have noticed a very dangerous trend which can no longer be ignored. Today this educational choice is open only to those able to buy their way into school by way of what is called in nice language, a donation. That such "donations" have reached ridiculous figures should send alarm bells for all. For, amounts to the tune of Taka Fifty Thousand per child have been quoted to us which, in effect, reduces the right of every child to an education and turns the system into a vehicle for the rich.

As a child's right to education should not be in question, it does seem that education is to be increasingly denied to children should such trends be encouraged and as this goes against all we hold dear in this country and in this region regarding education something must be done to put a stop to it. For, as we understand it, only a small portion of the established schools are not a party to such obvious attempts at extortion, and these are, without exception, the foreign run missionary schools, which ought to make us contemplate it with some sense of shame.

Yet basic education is meant to be a tool for social transformation by guiding people towards the pursuit of human values. Therefore, if this ideal, is to have any success, this sector must be more organised than it has been so far. Therefore, ideally, if we are to attain our ends, primary education must, of necessity, be compulsory and all standards of schools open to all, which is why compulsory education has been incorporated in the SAARC charter for action or in our national policy. Finding the necessary resources and working out more effective ways for reducing costs is, of course, a necessary but secondary issue to the planning which must stay at the top of the agenda. But this can only be done if we base it on our own experiences and not be deflected from our intent.

The lack of a reliable professional cadre at policy and management levels continues to handicap even the best of intentions and this has to be rectified early if the goals are to be reached. Therefore, a significantly higher percentage of national income must be earmarked for the education sector and utilised more effectively. No government can, however, be expected to carry the load alone. Therefore, the community must be motivated into playing its own part in this undertaking. But the core, of any undertaking for putting education on the regional map are the teachers themselves. Therefore greater attention must be given to their training which will automatically result in improved school efficiency.