

Science-based activities must be introduced in schools

IT IS disparaging that schools take limited or no interest in science-based co-curricular activities that could help develop students' interest in studying science and their scientific outlook. According to academicians, as New Age reported on Saturday, science Olympiad, a competition in which students compete in events relating to various scientific disciplines, also has turned out to be a distant dream for our schools. Absence of co-curricular pursuits in various branches of science has confined education in science to studying textbooks alone with little practical exposure that could widen a student's horizon. The high sounding declarations by the government to spread education in science sound absurd and ludicrous as they are, seemingly, nothing more than political rhetoric. The unpalatable truth is that shortage of laboratories and apparatus in schools also discourages study of science and reduces the number of learners opting to take science at secondary schools. This is one of the reasons why out of the country's 1.25 crore secondary school and madrasah students, hardly 8,000 participate in science Olympiads organised by Bangladesh Academy of Sciences.

According to another New Age report, which is based on the report published in February of the 5th Annual Education Institution Census of the Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project under the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, only 34 per cent secondary schools have separate science laboratories. While, as per a study conducted by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board in 2011, 55 per cent of the secondary students and 73 per cent of the higher secondary students surveyed said there were no science labs in their schools, another study carried out in 2011 by a national education watchdog Bangladesh Freedom Foundation found 65 per cent of the students surveyed saying their schools lacked labs and 58 per cent saying their schools did not have necessary instruments. What is worse is that more than 50 per cent of urban schools and around 70 per cent of rural schools do not take regular practical classes. As the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics reveals, 22 per cent of the Secondary School Certificate examinees in 2012 belonged to the science group, down from 33 per cent in 2001 and 44 per cent in 1991. Suffice to say, rural students are hit harder than their urban peers in this regard.

Since its assumption of office, the Awami League-led government has repeatedly professed its commitment to improving the quality of science-based education at every level. The facts mentioned above tend to suggest that the incumbents may not have lived up to their words, especially when it comes to secondary education. After all, proper education in science for all students, which is essential for a nation striving for prosperity, could prove to be a remote reality when thousands of schools are left in the lurch and science is neglected.

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