

Dhaka Tuesday, May 19, 1987

Education priorities

In our struggle to bring back order into the education sector, we need some "spectaculars" to encourage the nation to take on the fundamental issues that have brought the campus situation to what it is now. These "spectaculars" which are so called because they are likely to catch public attention, are the timely holding of examinations and the untangling of the "session jams". They are much easier problems to resolve than the fundamental issues of stemming the decline in the quality of education and of cleaning the universities and major college campuses of violence.

This is the best of time to deal with problems of the education sector in the country. Never before has there been such a strong national consensus on curing the malaise in the education system. On the floor of Parliament, both the Treasury Bench and the Opposition members unitedly took a resolution against growing campus violence. The government is strongly inclined towards eradicating the ills. President Ershad during his meetings with the leaders of the associations of college and school teachers on Sunday said that his administration attached highest priority to the education sector which is reflected in the size of the education budget. Since a strong national commitment to the education sector visibly exists, there is no reason why this cannot be translated into some positive actions.

The education boards and the universities should be firm about the examination dates once these are fixed. This year the Dhaka University has set an example by holding examinations during the Ramadan vacation despite the murmurs of protest from some quarters. The examinations have been completed peacefully and the students are undoubtedly happy that they were able to cross the hurdle. Once a semblance of discipline can be brought back into the academic schedule, the university and the college authorities can look into the deeper malaise in the education system. Quality of education has been the prime victim of the malaise. The universities, which were once reputed for their scholastic achievements have degenerated into substandard institutions. And the more they degenerated public respect for them declined.

The government can take the responsibility of keeping peace on the campus, but for standards of education, the academic staff of the universities and boards have a lot to do. This is a duty that they will have to carry out. The time has come to pick up the challenge and forge ahead. They must defend academic standards as much as they defend academic freedom.

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