

NEWAGE

A worrisome decline in quality of public university graduates

A DECLINE in the quality of education in public universities, as it has become evident in the poor performance of university graduates in the Bangladesh Civil Service examinations in the past four years, is worrying. Nineteen out of 20 students who are enrolled on the universities come out successful, a New Age reported on Saturday, yet only seven out of 200 graduates, still mostly from public universities, who take the preliminary test, the first in a series of examinations needed for a place in the civil service, came out successful in the 37th examinations in June 2016, according to the Bangladesh Public Service Commission annual report for the year. This is a decline to reckon with as in the 34th examinations of May 2013, out of 200 graduates, 20.87 per cent to be specific, could get past the preliminary test. The decline is gradual as in the 35th examinations, it was about 21 out of 250 graduates and in the 36th, it was about 13 out of 200 graduates. While this paints a grim picture of higher education in Bangladesh, the University Grants Commission in its latest annual report for 2015 questioned the quality of graduates from many institutions of higher learning, especially the National University.

Ten public universities had 62,095 students in 1999; the number of public universities has now increased to 39, with the number of students going up to 3.4 million. With such a picture of tertiary education at hand, it shows that the scale for higher education has increased, but the managers of public universities have failed to improve the quality of education commensurately. It has, in fact, declined drastically, and more so in recent years. A more serious concern that has come up is that students fail to keep abreast of issues outside the syllabus and are less innovative. This shows that their education, especially at the higher secondary and the secondary level, or even at the primary level, has failed to instil in them the inquisitiveness demanded of the students. Educationists and educationalists alike blame lack of motivation, of both teachers and students, recruitment of teachers on political consideration which could often lead low-quality people being appointed teachers, partisan university administration and poor budgetary allocation for such a deplorable condition. But a falling standard of primary, secondary and higher secondary education is no less responsible for this.

While all such allegations appear to be reasons for the decline in the quality of education, the University Grants Commission, which is procedurally a weak agency for the enforcement of related provisions, is also another reason that needs to be attended to. Yet, a falling standard primarily speaks of a failure of the management of the public universities, with a negative spillover effect on the nation. It is, therefore, primarily the duty of the public universities to step up to the plate in improving the quality of education if they need to live up to their name, the university or the highest seat of learning that is.