

Can a public exams commission save examinations?



AND WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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AT LEAST in one case, the government has admitted defeat which is in holding quality examinations. Cheating and question paper leak have become a national industry. They have become a way of life for many students and selling questions has become one of the safest and most lucrative ways of making an easy living.

The education minister Nurul Islam Nahid has more or less admitted that stopping cheating or question selling is beyond him or the capacity of the education ministry. It is in a worse shape than the tender buying business in road building and construction. Nobody has called it corruption, just something that happens outside the vision and supervision of the gov-

ernment. Some think that the government does not want to stop it as pro-establishment people also involved in the trade.

The blame game syndrome

THE minister has blamed the teachers, the Anti-Corruption Commission has blamed officials and the rest of the people have blamed everyone. What we know for sure is that finding examination questions before its held is the easiest in the world, certainly easier than studying for examinations. Given that, it is a bit difficult to understand why people would go for coaching when passing examinations is just a few takas away. Obviously, it is those who cannot afford to pay for examination questions go to coaching. Or is discouraging coaching business a way to promote question leak business?

Bangladesh has a deep lack of trust in any official bodies which transacts with the public. This is because to get any services, one has to pay. Nobody has any problem with that since it has

always been like that. However, problems may arise if it interferes with livelihoods. Examinations are a way to that life-saving situation whereby people can economically flourish and keep the system going. But the examination question leaks are threatening the system and the helplessness of the education ministry is a good example of that. A flaw that is tied to economic interest can become a danger to the rest of the machinery.

But political governments are rarely moved unless there is a political threat and till date, the government has basically ignored the issue knowing that it poses no political problem. But in the past two years, as digital Bangladesh has exploded, so has corruption related to examination question leaks. Since everyone has smart phones, the process of cheating supply has also been facilitated and it has moved from cases of individual dishonesty to a systemic problem that has become bad publicity. Granted that the quality of education is not anyone's priority and exami-

nation question leaks have spawned a new economic sector, the inability of the government to manage a relatively question paper leak-free examination makes the government look bad. And in an election year, that may look bad political.

Saving the examinations is not a quality education issue, it is a political issue and that is why it needs to be taken a bit seriously.

A public examinations supervision commission

THE only way anyone can try to bring some respectability to any institution in the country is to make it independent from the political and the bureaucratic and provide it with some sort of constitutional protection. Though it does not necessarily mean the decline in corruption, it does seem that it provides some teeth to such bodies and they look better. Perhaps, performance is also affected positively. The examples of the Election Commission that looks much better even

after the failure of the previous one is one.

Though the Anti-Corruption Commission is more sound and fury than delivery up till now, the fact that it can speak of corruption and create some pressure is good enough. An examination supervisory commission could restore some confidence in the education system which has eroded significantly under the present regime and under the current education minister.

If the examination question preparation, including printing and publishing the question papers, becomes a centralised responsibility, physically or digitally, the opportunity for looking better will be created. If examinations are seen as separate from management of academic institutions and become a public administration issue, the chances of better examinations will arise.

Not quality education but exams

PEOPLE no longer expect quality education in Bangladesh which is a fact

we all should accept. Nobody thinks that education will lead to knowledge or that schools are equipped to do that. In fact, nobody thinks that knowledge itself is required in Bangladesh for socio-economic survival. That is another matter altogether and not anyone's concern. What is being asked for is a quality examination system like a quality election ensuring system as envisaged by the Election Commission. Right now, we are staring at the death of the education system and we really do not know what will happen if an entire education system dies.

However, as stated before, such a situation carries a political cost. So, it is in the interest of the present regime to at least make an effort and hand it over to a constitutional body which can at least look like it is capable of honesty in a digital Bangladesh where along with competence, honesty has become a very rare commodity.

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