

Education reform deformities

Mohamed Jamil

To raise the quality of education is, indeed, a laudable objective. However, if the means employed to achieve the objective smack of ill intentions, it can lead to disaffection. The government has replaced University Grants Commission with Commission for Higher Education with a view to improving the quality of education and supporting the colleges and universities. But this was exactly the objective of the University Grants Commission as well. Anyhow no sane person can dispute the necessity of reforming the education system, but why the teachers, students and their parents were not taken into confidence, nor the contents of the Model University Ordinance were made public to elicit their views. A panel discussion on higher education reforms was held in Lahore on 19th December by the Center for Policy and Development Alternatives.

Dr. Zulfikar Gilani, Vice Chancellor Peshawar University and Salman Raja advocate who authored the Model University ordinance, briefed the audience. They stated that seven Vice Chancellors of various public sector universities, four high government officials and five experts from private sector were consulted before the reforms formula was finalized. But is it logical or democratic way of deciding matters of national importance, to consult only those who have identical views with the members of the steering committee? Professor Abdul Qadeer from Karachi University and Dr. Mohamed Nawaz Chaudhry expressed their views against the Model University Ordinance explaining its downside and tried to expose the intentions of those who stand for commercialization of the education. Professor Abdul Qadeer referred to the "tenure track" and considered it as an attempt to rid the universities of the "dead-wood", the term coined by the proponents of the ordinance. According to the ordinance, the Syndicate will consist of 15 members: Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Representative of HEC, Additional Secretary, 4 university teachers, 4 members of the civil society, 2 members from other universities and one member from the old students. This means only four members from the university. What a "novel" way of making the univer-

sities autonomous and getting rid of government interference?

According to the original program the discussion was to be confined to higher education but the participants chose to dwell on the gamut of education: from primary to higher, because it is not possible to have the desired edifice on weak foundations. There was consensus that parents and students are looking for quality education. According to a member of Joint Action Committee, in Pakistan 70 per cent of the schools and colleges are run by the private sector, and only 30 per cent by the government. If this small percentage falls a prey to the whims and fancy of the vested interest, many children from poor and middle classes will not be able to get any education at all; not to speak of quality education.

Now some comparison with developed countries. A survey conducted in 1983 revealed that about 93 per cent of British chil-

dren go to state-run schools. For students over 16, not attending universities or polytechnics further education was provided mainly by the local authorities. United States has no national education system; instead each state is responsible for organizing and regulating its own system of education. The state provides schooling at all stages of education, but parents if they so desire, can send their children to private schools. Most states, however, transfer management of educational institutions to local districts. In eighteenth century France started developing an education system under which all children attended schools, financed and regulated by the state. No wonder it is one of the most developed countries of the world. Germany and Japan having been destroyed in Second World War, could quickly rebuild their countries only because their successive governments had laid solid foundation for education

system. In Europe and Scandinavian countries even today majority of the students get education in state-run schools. Their governments still allocate from 30 to 40 per cent of the budget for the social sector.

People in rich European countries like Germany and others prefer to send their children to government schools. No doubt the standard of education in government educational institutions has deteriorated. But is it reasonable and logical to expect from colleges to attain high standards and universities to perform miracles in research when very meager amounts are allocated for this purpose. Secondly, in a degenerated society all the institutions are impacted due to corruption, inertia, incompetence and ineptness of the ruling elite. If the rulers were honest, it would have given them moral authority to enforce discipline. The ruling elite, corrupt, self-serving, sub-

