

The Bangladesh Observer

11 JUL 1993

In The Matter Of Education

With education today considered one of the most basic of human rights there are few who bother any longer to debate this as an issue but for millions throughout the world this is one basic right which continues to elude them.

Concern for the multitudes who lack even a basic knowledge of the Three "Rs" is now spreading worldwide and international pressure is being brought to bear on countries who have not yet introduced a programme of compulsory primary education. But governments are discovering this is easier said than done and numerous problems are arising ranging from insufficient infrastructural arrangements like school rooms, books and other equipment today considered essential to imparting education. Gone is the concept of teaching in the open under a tree as was once common to these parts.

For instance, given the country's economic condition, it is extra-ordinarily difficult to realise this lofty goal and much of the success of any programme to impart basic education through the expansion of the Primary Education will depend on the collection of financial resources. For in this day and age education is costly business. Yet no country can afford not to invest in what is basically the foundation for the future.

Of late the enrolment drive undertaken has brought some return in higher enrolment figures particularly noticeable among females who previously slipped through the net.

With an eye to better family health and smaller family units, the concentration on female education increases for it has

been clearly established there is a marked correlation between the two. For armed with the cliches of old like, "educate the women and you educate the nation", or "when

you educate a woman, you educate a whole family" females are steadily being encouraged to get an education which will stand them in good stead throughout life.

As in most developing countries, there is a strong argument for reform of the curriculum to meet the needs of the rural majority, but this too is not without its problems for education is not just providing practical skills but is also the "open sesame" to further learning and making the two concepts meet is proving difficult. The need is to devise a system which will permit students to continue their studies should they desire, but, at the same time, equipping the vast majority who will not go further than class five or eight with enough skills to find employment, is, an ideal proving difficult to attain.

And there is something which receives little mention in our lofty ideas to impart education to all, which is the sorry fact that, due to years of malnutrition, many of our people are incapable of learning. The question then arises what are we to do with this vast crowd? Some NGOs have approached this problem by imparting functional literacy, so to speak, on their doorstep, believing an ability to count and write in simple terms will suffice. Whether it will or not we cannot say but the fact remains most of our people will not be able to retain even this small amount to learning.

As things stand within the formal education system in the country, primary education will still be a waste of time, money and effort without a practical approach to the needs of children. That this continues to be supported as a statement by the continued number of drop-outs should not be ignored. Therefore, it is imperative to reconsider the whole gamut of a compulsory primary education scheme if it fails to do what it is supposed to which is get the children in school and keep them there.

With many governments conscious that the former system of learning by rote is no longer applicable as it bears little relationship to every day living experiences, the search

continues for a more pragmatic approach to education.

result, most educationists would like to see an end to education which demands little more from students than ability to memorise facts and figures and would like to

them concentrate instead on "real" learning about the surroundings in which they must live and learn to relate