

School Drop-outs

People can be an asset to any economy only if they are productive, and to be productive they must be educated and trained. In fact, human resources development is a pre-condition for economic and social development. In a country like Bangladesh, this assumes a special significance because the only resources we have are human resources. The 100 million people we have will be an asset to the country only if proper education and skill can be imparted to them, otherwise they will be a liability.

It is a fundamental right of every human being to receive basic education at the primary level. 'Universal Primary Education' is now a popular slogan in this country. But what is the actual situation there? Only 54 per cent of our children in the age group of 6-10 years are enrolled in primary schools, which means 46 per cent of the children in the age-group have never been admitted into a school. Only 23 per cent of our children in the age cohort 6-10 years attend school. It simply means that 31 per cent of the children in this age group have once enrolled in schools, but they do not go there. Thus in the age group of 6-10 years, 31 per cent are simple school drop-outs. At the secondary level, the enrolment rate is about 20 per cent only implying that about 80 per cent of the children in the age-group 10-15 years have never got themselves admitted into schools. Here also even those who are enrolled in schools, a large part of them drops out ultimately. At a higher stage, we observe that in the Secondary School Certificate or the High Secondary Certificate examination, about half of the examinees cannot pass.

Thus school drop-outs and those who fail to succeed in examinations become a burden to society. A vast amount of human resources is thus not only wasted, but these young people, after being frustrated and hopeless, resort to anti-social and criminal activities. Such activities must be denounced, public opinion must be mobilized against them and public committees must be formed to prevent such activities.

But at the same time, constructive measures must be undertaken to train the drop-outs as well as unsuccessful students in general education in certain vocations or crafts so that they can at least be self-employed. But vocational education has long been neglected in our society, for we attach a prestige value to general education. Thus by 1986, we had only 18 polytechnique institutes, 1 institute of graphic art, 1 textile college, 1 leather technology college, 16 commercial institutes, 55 vocational training institutes and 1 glass and ceramic institute. In all these institutes, compared to our youth population, this number is wholly insignificant. As a result, a large portion of our youth labour force, which is estimated to be 10.8 million or 38 per cent of the total labour force, remains unemployed throughout the year.

In order to make these huge human resources productive the scope of training and skill formation must be extended. At the same time, financial institutions must be set up to advance credit to the trained youths so that they can start a business of their own. In India, there are so many vocational institutes—both private and public and there are numerous small financial institutions to help trained unemployed youths to get self-employed. In Britain, every year billions of pounds are spent for youth training and employment. But in our economy, in the original 1986-87 budget, for instance, for labour training the total allocation was about 9 crore Taka which, then was revised to about 8 crore Taka. In the 1987-88 budget, the allocation for this purpose has been proposed to be reduced to Tk. 6.96 crore only.

The administration must understand that there is no alternative to education and training if we want to create skilled manpower out of our huge population and the major responsibility of it must be undertaken by the government. If the administration fails in this regard it will only help in enlarging a liability, which cannot be desirable to it or to society.