

For A Work-oriented Educational System

There is a good deal to be said for an educational system that is not only oriented to the needs of the individual but to the needs of the nation too. But because this requires a full understanding of the economic needs of the nation as well as the need for future leadership, and requires long-term planning and a systematic approach, such a system is rare. However, if we are to be able to face the needs of the coming century with confidence, it is necessary for us to establish such a system. Industry must, therefore, join hands with the educational sector.

As we tend to think of education in terms of academic interest only or the search for knowledge, we often forget the practical aspects. In other words, education must go beyond purely the academic and take in a wider view of it as a basis for acquiring the skills a man needs for his future working life. Any re-organisation of education must therefore take this into consideration and must include a work-oriented approach. This can only be assured by including technical education at every level from primary up.

Although various regimes have from time to time tried to undertake various reforms in the educational sector, they have not had too much in the way of success nor have they been able to remove the bias we all have against technical education. Yet as a skilled workforce is essential for proper planned economic development, it is important to remove this bias before it is too late. Greater emphasis must, therefore, be placed on the practical aspects of training and technical education. This becomes all the more clear when we learn that only 2 per cent of students going for higher studies opt for a technical education. Efforts must be made to increase this percentage if we are to be able to face the needs of the coming century but as this will require the improvement of all the current facilities, the budgetary allocation for education must make proper provision for it.

That more technical institutions are now urgently needed is apparent for, at present, there are only 51 vocational training centres and 20 polytechnic institutes within the country, certainly an insufficient number to serve the student population. Although there is also a plan to set up 13 technical colleges as well as 44 polytechnic institutes and also a plan to introduce vocational training in 500 non-government schools, unless the money is forthcoming, none of these are likely to see the light of day, despite the current emphasis worldwide on the provision of technical education.

As technical and vocational education is our only salvation, we should think seriously about our system of education not only from the academic aspect but from this aspect too. Once this is done, it will be clear that there is a need to develop the basic infrastructure for imparting technical and vocational education at both the lower levels and the higher. Some private universities, realising the need, have already introduced a job-oriented curriculum, but this serves only the few who can afford to attend such universities and does not provide for the common man.

In other words, it is time for us to take stock of what we expect from our education system which means we must face ourselves squarely if we are to break away from our mind-set. This also means we must stop wasting money on the kind of education that leaves too many square pegs trying desperately to fit into round holes for the advantages to be gained from increasing vocational and technical education are many. Therefore the sooner we are able to set up the number of institutions we need, the better. If we do not we shall still be on the outside looking in.

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