

THE BANGLADESH OBSERVER

DHAKA WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 22 1986

Reorganising The Education System

Results of the H.S.C examination held under the 4 Education Board announced on Saturday repeat the same story of upwards of one lakh students getting through and about the same number going under. The pass percentage of 56.44% recorded in the past few years has been around the same average. While, to individual students and guardians, the results would bring either joy or sorrow, the fact is that even within the frame of a literacy rate of 22% this creates a problem of surfeit involving both those who have passed and those who have not. Hence the urgency with which to try and see what has gone wrong with the education system itself and why the most creative national manpower should be let go waste in a manner that can hardly be justified.

The total expenditure on education involves 1.74% of the GDP. The obvious question that it raises is how far education, under the present system, from the primary to the university level, has contributed to growth and development in the economic sectors, the improvement of the quality of life and the standard of living. That it does not provide the wherewithal is explained by the deficiency of the system and the relative irrelevance of the content to the fundamental needs of development:

The system is based on a colonial legacy that educational planners have done little to revise, and harness to the pragmatic demands made on it in almost all development sectors. Countries like Japan, China, Soviet Russia and the two Germanys, for example, went for radical changes in their education systems during the period following the second world war. It was the time when both historical forces and pressing socio-economic needs called for new initiatives among nations towards intense reconstruction activity.

Its thrust was on the redirection of their education policy and system to economic growth as the foundation of national viability. Japan, for instance, reorganised her entire education system basing it on that of the United States with the result that her literacy rate is now among the highest in the world, (98%). Similar attention given to the content of education enabled Japan not only to raise the standard of work-efficiency but also to make giant strides in science and technology, eventually to catch up with the most industrialised west. Both system-and-content-wise the story of China's educational renewal is as spectacular, wriggling out of an 85% illiteracy rate, before 49, to the present 70% literacy.

More rigorous and scientific was the reorganisation of education in the USSR. Its content is determined by standardised academic plans and programmes. General education schools (grades 1-10) teach fundamentals of the sciences and humanities and prepare pupils for a vocation, or selecting a future course of specialised education. To train skilled workers for the various sectors of the economy there are vocational-technical schools (1-3 years). Semi-trained technical personnel are also developed by specialised secondary schools to achieve the same economic goals. The shift from general to special is to be noted.

These are among the examples available regionally or abroad that might have a good deal for us to pick up and remould our education system to accomplish our own socio-economic objectives. In other words, our system could be an elective one, based on the relevant elements derived from those of other countries, keeping in view our imperatives.

General education with the preponderance of the humanities and, as yet, a relatively peripheral emphasis on science and technology has so far only resulted in massive waste, with all its social and economic consequences. In the name of reforms such as changing the curriculum or syllabus or rewriting the text books, keeping the outdated system intact, has done little to make education productive in our sense.

Replanning of our education must therefore be in the direction of technical and vocational training within a frame of selection carried out from after the primary stage, and increasing the number of technical and vocational institutes to train pupils in various trades and skills. Born of a revolution Bangladesh has reason enough to direct its energy and policy towards attaining a level of literacy or education which is what could help her run more efficiently and fruitfully everything from politics to poultry-raising.