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The Bangladesh Times

PRIMARY EDUCATION

The central role that education plays in development needs no reiteration. It is not only recognised as a basic human need but also as a means of meeting other basic needs and as an activity that sustains and accelerates overall development. Education may also be used as an instrument for promotion of equity.

The spread of educational opportunities in rural areas may help quicken adoption of improved agricultural methods and development of industries generating higher income in the neglected remote villages. Similarly education of women not only contributes to family welfare and planning but also boosts equity and fosters national development.

Recent studies have indeed established a positive three-way relationship among primary education, agricultural extension and productivity on the farm, and an inverse relationship between the size of family and the level of education of both parents or of the mother. But to be effective education not only has to be relevant to the needs of the society but also essentially multi-disciplinary in nature.

The UNESCO noted as far back as in 1978 that "by the very complexity of the problems which it must help solve, education must be conceived in an interdisciplinary context as factor of multidimensional development of which man is both the end and the instrument."

The progress made in educational development over the recent decades is substantial. Nevertheless, a vast number continues to be deprived globally of the benefits of learning and we have more than a fair share in it. The efforts are now on to reach the goal of Education for All by the Year 2000. Bangladesh is also committed to the target.

In this backdrop the emphasis of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on the twin objectives of increasing the rate of literacy and raising the standard of education in the country is very significant. She rightly contended before the members of National Federation of Teachers' Association when they called on her on Saturday that there was no alternatives to education for the development of the country and said "primary education is the main pillar upon which our total education system would depend."

The importance being attached to primary education is also apparent in the advice to set up an independent ministry for primary education headed by the Prime Minister herself. Talking to the newsmen about the Planning Commission advice in this respect, Minister Saifur Rahman said it was aimed at removing the curse of illiteracy from the country through a revolutionary change in the primary education system.

All the children of school going age would be brought on roll within the next three years through the programme. There are at present some 42,000 primary schools in the country employing over four lakh teachers. The number of schools and the teachers need to be raised substantially to accommodate all the children of the age group. Local committees may also be formed to monitor the functioning of the primary schools.

We really feel assured at the priority attached to primary education and would welcome the suggestions of entrusting the responsibility to a separate ministry if that really helps reduce bureaucratic complications and infuses vigour into the drive. What, however, seems to be more necessary is to keep the issue above party politics, setting up a National Committee at the apex with representatives of all shades of opinion to monitor implementation and generous provision of funds in consideration of multi-dimensional impact of the programme. All these must again be supported by dedicated teachers and motivational work by the media.

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