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The Bangladesh Times

SCIENTIFIC, TECHNOLOGICAL EDUCATION

The ever increasing speed at which scientific and technological changes have been taking place throws overboard all projections about manpower requirement. With the development of technology the percentage of skilled jobs is gradually declining, rendering many who had no training jobless. The overall impact on the economy is simply incomprehensible with unemployment mounting on the one hand and many sectors suffering shortages of skilled manpower on the other.

It is not possible for any single country, specially those at the level of development like Bangladesh, to cope with this situation. The countries that stole a march on others set up chains of scientific, technical and vocational training institutes. They continue to spend huge amount of money and energy for keeping their curricula and facilities updated. We have neither the know-how nor the means to keep pace with them.

The alternative before us is to pool the resources of the countries similarly placed particularly in the neighbourhood. It is precisely this realisation that must have prompted the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to set up the Technical Committee on Education. The just concluded second meeting of the committee in Dhaka, attended by representatives of all the member nations.— Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka besides host Bangladesh — worked on a framework for mutual help in the field of scientific education. The delegates to the three-day meeting held 12 technical sessions to find means of addressing the challenge.

Inaugurating the meeting Prime Minister Kazi Zafar Ahmed underscored the need for concerted efforts and cooperation for promoting scientific and technological education in the collective interest of the peoples of the region. He said that the dynamics of social changes had necessitated radical transformation in the concept of education and increasing complexities of life had posed numerous challenges which could only be met with greater knowledge of science and technology.

Scientific and technological knowledge is indeed essential for preparing students for "the duties of active life". But literacy must get priority and some form of general education should accompany professional and vocational training. The strategy of Bangladesh reflects a pragmatic approach in the matter. While scientific and technological education is being encouraged, all-out efforts have been launched to remove illiteracy.

The government has already decided to make primary education free and compulsory. An action plan has been taken up for raising literacy level to 50 per cent within the next five years. This envisages setting up 4,500 primary schools within this financial year for which adequate budgetary allocation has been made. As an incentive to female education, tuition fee for girls up to Class VIII has been exempted in non-municipal areas and in the backward hill districts. If the programmes work we can look ahead confidently to universal literacy by the turn of the century.

We hope the SAARC countries would closely coordinate educational programmes so that their limited resources may supplement one another's efforts for the benefit of all.