

Monday, August 31, 1992

SPREAD OF EDUCATION VERSUS SPREAD OF TERRORISM

The present government has rightly identified education as a priority sector. So it has been given highest allocation in the current budget. At the same time, the present administration though faced with the vicious problem of containing inspired terrorist activities in the various educational institutions including the seats of highest learnings, the universities, has taken up ambitious programmes ensuring education for all by the year 2000. But however ambitious our programmes are, those will remain as pipe-dreams and our people will remain uneducated much beyond the year 2000.

The education programme for 1992-93 has been drawn up within the framework of the objectives and strategies of the Fourth-Five-Year Plan. During 1992-93, the emphasis will be given on management and supervision of primary, secondary and mass education to enhance the functional character of technical and vocational training and to develop general and professional universities.

The major objectives of primary education during the current plan are to provide educational facilities to all school-going children through compulsory primary education and integrated non-formal education. The government has already enacted law and issued notification declaring primary education compulsory from January 1, 1992. According to official statistics, there are 18 million children of the age of primary education in the country and 70 per cent of them are enrolled in some schools. But the rate of drop-outs is very high. So the administration's task should be to keep these children from dropping out before the completion of primary school education.

The authority is very much aware of it and steps are being taken to check the rate of drop-outs from the primary stage. The compulsory primary education, with particular emphasis on girl children, has already been taken up on an experimental basis this year in the municipal areas of 64 districts.

In rural areas, the spread of education depends mainly on poverty alleviation and rural development. Education of women is indispensable for overall development of society. The staggering growth of population is a serious challenge. The role of basic education is most effective in making women conscious about the usefulness of family planning. Sensing the urgency of the problem, tuition fee has been exempted for girls up to class VIII in rural educational institutions.

However, the free compulsory primary education is no longer a dream or mere slogan, it is target of a well-thought out plan. The seriousness manifested by the government in implementing the scheme is encouraging. It also reflects the earnestness to educate the nation which does not confine to the primary level but extends over to the secondary and higher levels and encompasses the technical field.

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The government announced Taka 50 crore would be spent to fund a three-year-long non-formal education programme aimed at building up of adult literacy and roping in the primary school drop-outs. The programme dovetails with the compulsory primary education.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia described education as the yardstick of progress and said 'if we want to achieve quick progress, we will have to attach importance to it'. Everyone has a right to education, she said. The Prime Minister is true to her word. She assured her financial help for higher education to Anwar Hossain who stood first from Jessore Board in Social Science group. Giving his reaction immediately after getting the assurance from the Prime Minister at her office on Saturday, Anwar Hossain said, 'I am grateful to the Prime Minister for this generous gesture. Without this help I could not continue my higher education'. It was no doubt a remarkable incident for the poverty stricken Anwar. Begum Zia's enthusiasm does not end there. She is taking with her the first boy of the combined merit list of recently published SSC results to Jakarta Summit. This is symbolic. Her husband Shaheed President Zia used to call meritorious students at Bangabhaban and discuss their problems on a cup of tea. He also introduced a system by which every SSC and HSC candidate was compulsorily required to educate at least one person for which 25 marks were earmarked. This resulted in the speedy growth of education but was discontinued by Ershad.

Besides, these small tokens Khaleda Zia's government sensing the importance of education, has chalked out several other programmes to spread education in every nook and corner of the country. The Education Minister has elaborated those many a time.

So far so good. But terrorism is eating up all the vitals of these well-planned programmes. The nation witnessed with dismay the murder and the mayhem in the educational institutions and the state of insecurity among the general mass of students. Much of those are engineered and avoidable but who does not know that since 1973, the universities have become breeding grounds of violence. Academic pursuits have been relegated to the background. The nation will run short of qualified people if our higher educational institutions are not allowed to function. There must be an end to it.

So cooperation of all particularly the opposition parties would be needed to successfully uproot the anarchy from the educational institutions which vested interest groups encourage in the name of politics. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia called upon all to work unitedly for resisting terrorism. Otherwise, the objectives of education programmes would go in vain, she said.

In fact, education is the key to all success. It is the foundation of all development and without education our development efforts will not reach the desired goal.

And if terrorism is not uprooted or at least curbed, all our efforts will go in vain. Even highest budgetary allocation to this sector will be of little consequence.