

## RESTRUCTURING EDUCATION

The Task Force report submitted to the Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed on Sunday said nothing short of thorough ideological re-orientation can wean us from aid-dependency. Values like equality, human rights, morality and patriotism must be inculcated in the minds of people and this can be done only through a rational, accessible and affordable education system. The one that exists, needless to say, is grossly inadequate and inefficient. The performance of the education sector has in the past decades become worse due to the tremendous increase in population and the inability of the authorities to provide proportionate additional facilities to cope with it.

We have never had an education system designed to reach the majority, for a minimum specified period, in order to equip them with basic reading, writing and counting skills. Primary education has always been the first casualty when funds become scarce and we have never had the insight and foresight to manage this sector on a priority basis.

More than a third of the primary school age children never have access to the limited services offered countrywide. Then again not even half of those who get enrolled make it to the fifth class and only three per cent who do reach secondary schools come out successful. The failure rate at higher levels is just as bad and has been getting worse in the past years.

Much has been written about the utter waste the system generates but we are yet to work out effective methods to make the expenditure meaningful in terms of increased literacy as well as the number of the qualitatively educated people in the country. More than two-thirds of the population are illiterate and many of those who are counted as literate actually have become "neo-literates"—having forgotten what they had learnt years ago.

In general our secondary and tertiary levels yield a crop that is "educated" as far as the certificate goes. It rarely has much to do with actual acquisition of knowledge, competence and enlightenment. The reasons, critics point out, behind this ineffectual education lie in the quality of the curriculum, the teachers and the very philosophy and method of instruction.

The poor quality of teachers at the primary level must be recognised and effective training facilities and refresher courses from time to time made compulsory in a sustained programme to improve the education base. The curriculum must be made attractive and relevant to their daily lives so that youngsters and their guardians do not consider schooling a waste of time.

There are not enough schools and teachers yet to implement the "literacy for all by the year 2000" programme. And an incredible number of schools and teachers are unfortunately on paper only. These have to be attended to. It is also necessary to utilise existing non-school facilities as feeder schools. Mosques, health centres, extension service offices — indeed any available shelter— should serve the purpose of reaching basic education to all. The primary level must be prioritised and emphasis shifted to rural needs, specially those of girls. This calls for community mobilisation and participation with the government in the role of facilitator. Basic education experts should learn from the successes of non-government initiatives and formulate a new education system that in the long term will yield valuable dividends.

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