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NEW THRUST PROGRAMMES IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

The Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, has announced a very inspirational programme for the uplift of education in the country, specially education for girls. Under the new programmes, more than one crore girl students at secondary levels will get the facility to study free of tuition charges. Further, they will get a regular stipend throughout the duration of their study at secondary level in addition to a one-time annual grant to buy books and stationery.

The receipt of the stipends, tuition waiver and grants have made conditional. The conditions for getting the awards and their continuance are regular attendance, maintaining a level of class performance and the commitment of not marrying during the period when they would be receiving the benefits of these schemes. The obvious emphasis of this programme is to rapidly improve the state of female education in the country and at the same time to get the family planning ideals firmly embedded in the minds of the young generation of the country.

The successful execution of this programme, we believe, is likely to have far reaching effects. The female part of the population of Bangladesh is generally considered backward and through this programme an opportunity will have been created for their come uppance. As our females become more educated and conscious members of society, they will not only be inclined to practice family planning but their productive capacities are also likely to increase along with their ability to adapt to changing occupations.

There is however need to be wary about the implementation part of this programme. There is hardly any sphere of official activity in Bangladesh which is not plagued in one way or the other by maladministration and corruption. The family planning programme is a case in point. The population control programme has no doubt achieved some successes. But experts are of the opinion that population control activities would be successful to a much higher degree had it been run free of corruption and insincerity. Keeping this example in mind, we have to ensure that this programme of financially aiding school girls is not allowed to even partly degenerate into a game of disbursement of funds among seditious students and the like. The incorruptible administration of this school stipend and grant programme must be ensured all through and for this purpose proper steps should be taken right from the outset.

The special education incentive programme which has been introduced for girls is certainly welcome. But in the long run we would also like to see the same facility extended to boys. Poverty is common to both sexes alike and the male lead in literacy is not significantly higher over girls. In order not to encourage charges therefore that the new programme exceptionally favours girls and discriminates against boys whose circumstances on the whole are no better, everything must be done as soon as possible to subsidize education at the State's expense for boys as well as girls as widely as possible.

The introduction of agriculture science compulsorily in school texts has been a timely move. It would be extremely rewarding if this sound step is now followed rapidly with more steps aimed at introducing other subjects in the school curricula which can equip learners with the know-how of earning a living for the future. In other words, education should aim to be more practical and utility oriented and the whole process should start early in schools. For this purpose, the necessary recasting of the education system should be effected at the earliest.