

## ON EDUCATION

A country which has a literacy rate of less than 30 percent must make education a priority area for investment. It is not unnatural that Bangladesh spends a lion's share of the annual budget on education, particularly on primary education and adult literacy programmes. These investments have been useful. The enrolment in the primary schools has risen and the dropout rate fallen. There has been a significant development in the education of girls, which is evident from recent statistics on primary students enrolment. One of the targets in the education sector is to attain 70 percent literacy by the turn of the century. It is ambitious but not unachievable. If literacy programmes are taken up as a popular movement with community participation, the pace of progress can be speeded up.

While primary education will form the base of a literate nation, a country is known by its institutions of higher studies. The prestige of these institutions is a national honour shared by every citizen. Moreover, with a higher literacy rate in the future, there will also be a greater aspiration for higher studies and such facilities have to be provided by the state. The foundation of the seventh university in the country in the growing southern metropolis of Khulna is a step in that direction. While laying the first stone of the university building on the proposed campus on Thursday President Ershad called for an academic climate which will enhance the quality of higher education in the country.

In the past few decades, the quality of education has suffered for socio-economic reasons, not the least of which is a general mood of unrest among the youth contributed partly by the overcrowding on the campus and the frustrations over unemployment. The influence of politics on students led to unfortunate incidents on the campuses which in turn caused forced closures and loss of academic sessions. Session jams is a chronic problem for all aspiring for higher education. The whole issue turns out to be an economic burden for the students and their guardians who are financing them.

There is a national awareness however that a congenial climate for education must prevail on all the campuses. Extraneous political factors which do not concern students should be kept out of the campuses as far as possible. Even Parliament passed a resolution unanimously which stressed that the campuses must be kept free from violence. Some of the universities have taken actions, which have been approved by the guardians and students in general, against elements creating a law and order situation. Another reassuring factor is that students are being increasingly associated with the maintenance of peace on the campuses by the university administrations.

The teachers have to play a more active role in creating and preserving a proper academic climate. They may involve the guardians which can have a sobering effect on the campus. At the same time, disciplinary measures have to be applied without fear and favour whenever laws are violated.

The new university in Khulna should reduce the crowd of applicants in other already established universities. Nevertheless, the problem of crowding will remain unless there is an attitudinal change in the society towards job-oriented education. Higher studies in many countries are limited to those who will go for academic or specialized careers. Others prefer technical or vocational education instead of wasting time in the university class rooms.



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