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THE INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION

A remarkable achievement of the present democratically elected government has been its great emphasis on education. There had been several governments in Bangladesh in the past and all of them had their different priorities. But it is the present government under Begum Khaleda which allocated the highest sum ever in the national budget, Taka 3,750 crores, for the education sector. Needless to say, this pattern of allocation has earned for the government due admiration from various quarters both home and abroad.

Under that autocratic government areas such as education, health, human resources development, etc. long ago identified as the key areas for uplift and deserving higher allocations of the national budget, were relatively neglected. But the present government appears to have correctly estimated that education in one area which holds in its hand the key to unlocking the full development potential of Bangladesh.

A conspicuous feature of the present drive in education is the step to encourage higher enrolment, particularly of girls in schools. A new scheme has been introduced whereby 31 lakh girl students in secondary schools, will receive scholarships and stipends during the year 1995-96 fiscal year. Plans have been drawn up also for infrastructural developments of all schools. By next year, each and every school at primary and secondary levels are expected to get assistance for their infrastructural development or expansion so that they can accommodate more students. Besides, a large number of new schools are also expected to be set up in the same period.

Side by side, steps have been taken to introduce agriculture science as a compulsory subject in secondary schools along with a vocational training course as an optional subject. Plans are

underway to completely recast the syllabuses of schools and colleges with greater stress laid on utility oriented education and science education. The bringing about of sweeping changes in the education sector of the country has just started in some areas and a momentum in these activities is expected in a few years from now on. But when these tasks will be completed, education availability in Bangladesh in both quantitative as well as qualitative sense, will be much improved. The government policies being adopted in relation to the education sector promises to be almost revolutionary in their sweep and objectives.

Apart from primary, secondary and higher secondary stages of learning, the present government has also put due emphasis on revamping and widening the scope for utility oriented higher education. Public sector University level learnings in Bangladesh during recent years became very complicated and in some cases fruitless for a large number of students because of session jams, campus violence and the non-relevance of courses offered by these institutions in relation to the occupational needs of students on passing out. The present government for the first time through an act of parliament approved the setting up of universities in the private sector. As a result, a number of first class private universities have been set up in the country where the students need fear no violence, session jams and student politics. More significant is that these new universities are offering tailor made courses to their pupils which almost assure them gainful employment on different professions after completion of studies. These institutions even start associating their pupils to their future employers while they still remain students. The growth of such institutions has indeed added a bright new chapter in the sphere of education under the able leadership of the present government of Begum Khaleda Zia.