

EDUCATION POLICY

The Jatiya Sangsad debate on national education policy highlighted the problems in the education sector and the imperatives in achieving the target of education for all by the turn of the century. Members from both sides of the house touched upon important aspects of the arena. Coming about the time when polls for Dhaka University students representatives were being held after a long intermission there had obviously been comments on campus discipline. Besides planning and management of education, including the desirability of making higher education selective, autonomy of higher seats of learning, ways of easing current session jam, effects of nationalisation of educational institutions, reforming the existing examination system were among other issues that came under close examination. But the emphasis understandably was on literacy programme.

In the sphere of higher education two more general universities, two affiliate universities and an open university would be set up. Even these expansions may not be adequate to meet the increasing demand. Indeed, inspite of several universities coming up the number of students at the lone such institution at the time of partition (1947) has since risen more than 20 times and the trend continues. Meanwhile, the President and Chancellor of the universities has stressed on efficient running of the universities, regularising academic sessions, restoring academic atmosphere and raising the standard of education.

At the bottom the enrolment at the primary schools has been steadily increasing but the dropouts continue to be a serious problem. Already about 70 percent of the children of the school-going age has been registered fulfilling the target for the current decade and a Tk 656 crore project is underway to reduce the percentage of dropouts. It is also encouraging that the ratio of girl students is rising, perhaps as a sequel to increasing recruitment of women teachers.

Though percentagewise the rise in the rate of literacy is negligible, in absolute numbers they are quite impressive. The physical condition of rural educational institutions, inadequacy of teaching equipment and shortage of trained teachers still stand in the way to further acceleration. To take care of these the allocation for education needs to be increased.

There were pleas for making education more vocation-oriented to reduce chances of educated youth remaining unemployed and to introduce uniform system in all public and private schools pending total nationalisation of all educational institutions. A suggestion for a new education commission understandably did not find much favour. It was pointed out that during the last four decades 10 such commissions had looked into the problems.

The socio-economic progress is inescapably linked with education and it takes years to reach the desired level through primary education programme. Prime Minister Moudud Ahmed was right in calling for a social movement for mass literacy, which should really be the cornerstone of our education policy.