

Education must be practically useful

By A Staff Reporter

It will not be possible to obtain people's participation locally for a mass-oriented education policy, nor effectively check high dropout rates at primary and secondary school levels unless the education can be made to look materially remunerative and practically useful.

This appeared to be the conviction of many of the members of the National Education Advisory Council (NEAC), at its concluding round of discussions of the first working session on Friday. Kazi Zafar Ahmed, the Minister for Education, who is the Chairman of the NEAC, presided over Friday's round of discussions. The second working session begins Friday next at the Old Jatiya Sangbad Bhaban.

Friday's discussions were

highlighted by a soul-searching analysis of the ailments of the country's education by Mr.

Ataus Samad. The council also

heard an informative paper

by Mrs. Hosne Ara Shahed.

Among those who participated

in the discussions were Colonel

Shamsul Islam of the Army

Education Corps, Dr. Wahedul-
lah, Mr. Abul Kalam Azad, re-
presentatives of the Primary
School Teachers Association,

Mr. Abdul Khaleque, repre-
sentative of the Secondary School

Teachers Association and Mou-
lana Abdul Mannan of the

Bangladesh Jamiatul Mudarres

sen.

Mr. Ataus Samad's thesis — the aim of education in our context today has to be, one of survival, and the people who are keen on eking out an existence through some use ful work or the other should be provided with that much of education required for a modest survival — generated a great deal of interest.

SURVIVAL

Mr. Samad argued that since the question of bare survival is the reality for the overwhelming majority of the people and material remuneration for work is the crucial question, the aim of any education policy should be to lend them a hand in doing the job a little better. "Let us teach them whatever we may teach them in a qualitatively different way. Let us teach them something that they may expect to find in their own ambience around which his entire life will be spun."

He felt that the nation ought to go for such education as would not only help people get settled in life individually, but also help increase job opportunities for others. For instance, today's just-trained television or fridge repair-men may be

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the employer of a couple of apprentices six months later, he explained.

Mr. Samad pointed out that such a slant — a utility slant to education for the promise of materials return could go a long way in decreasing the rate of dropouts.

Mr. Ataus Samad said that such a practical-utility point of view made it imperative to cut down unnecessary formal education. Why not limit general qualification requirements for government jobs to the Higher Secondary Certificate level on the line of Western countries' school graduations? Mr. Samad drew the attention of the house to the case of commissioned officers of the Armed Forces all over the world.

"Cut down two to three years of formal education from the boys' life and give them instead a couple of years of office work experience, discipline and, may be, efficiency; perhaps we would benefit from this revaluation of the lower and middle levels of education," Mr. Ataus Samad proposed.

The task, he said, no doubt is gigantic and onerous, and would require for its success quite a large measure of people's participation locally. He suggested that the principle of decentralisation be also extended to this sector. His concrete suggestion was having given the policy guidelines and the initial material support, the responsibility of managing the affairs of the local education be placed with the Union Parishad education councils.

Mr. Samad referred to sev-

eral undesirable and unjustifiable bloomers in the text books meant for children and the juveniles. And there were omissions of very grave nature.

The 'history' section of this text book on social studies

mentioned about "Bangladesh

only towards the end, and that too, very inadequately. He

read out from the book, meant

for students of class seven,

which did not say about the

location of the country on the

globe, its area, population, eco-

nomy or culture.

He placed before the house a barely 160-word introduction

of Bangladesh, obviously more comprehensive, as ap-

peared in the 'World Almanac

and Book of Knowledge' 1976

(published for the Bridgeport Post Telegraphic and Sunday Post, U.K.)

Similarly, he went on, they have amply displayed

their callousness by putting a

full chapter on cooperative

societies in the science text

book for students of class

five.

When Mr. Abul Kalam Azad

tried to seek a clarification on

the suggestion for decentrali-

sation of management of pri-

mary schools on the ground

that it was a "touchy issue",

the chair gave the ruling that

no member shall interrupt or

disturb fellow members even

if they spoke touchy and sen-

sitive matters. All must be en-

couraged to make a clear

breast of themselves and one

will be guaranteed full mea-

sure of freedom of speech,

Kazi Zafar Ahmed said.

MINIMUM AMENITIES

In his turn, Mr. Abul Kalam

Azad discussed the institutional and administrative prob-

lems of primary education. He

regretted that notwithstanding all the official and formal im-

portance given to this sector,

it continued to be the sector

with the minimum physical

amenities.

He pointed out that the pri-

mary school teachers did not

have a set of service rule, and

hence, no job-security, no ex-

tra benefit, no right and not

even the human right to com-

plain of oppression and cor-

ruption. Yet, they had to sa-

tisfy greedy but powerful

quarters for getting their

schools on the government's

development plans, to save

their jobs, and even to collect

their monthly salaries, which

of course they get very irregu-

larly.

Another set of concrete sug-

gestions emerged from the dis-

cussions, the chief ones being

the following: (a) the various

target groups must be deline-

ated clearly; (b) the juvenile

and the youth target groups,

the most vitally important na-

tional productionwise, must be

educated within a given time

frame; (c) that there are far

far more wisdom scattered all

over outside the 32-member

council, whose criticisms,

views and suggestions should

be invited and, on receipt, be

given due attention for being

incorporated in the draft in-

terim education policy.

STANDARD

Moulana Abdul Mannan said

that the precondition of im-

proving the standard of educa-

tion was raising the standard

of teaching. We must have the

most talented boys in the tea-

ching profession. The reality,

however, is different. This

must have to be reversed, and

teaching must be made more

and more attractive. Moulana

Mannan emphasised.