

Dhaka Sunday, July 3, 1988

Primary education

The role of education in development has long been recognised. All studies so far undertaken establish education increases the productivity of workers. The average social rate of return on primary education is however much higher than on secondary and higher education. Education is again a basic need. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations about four decades ago says "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages."

The governments of most of the nations have since acknowledged their responsibility to provide basic education to their citizens as soon as possible. The expenditure on education is also increasing steadily and Bangladesh is no exception. Indeed the total budgetary allocation for education in the country for 1988-89 is the highest so far—Taka 1161 crores. But resources for education are not limited to public revenue. Private organisations embellish it. The circumstance also warranted that local initiative and self-help should be encouraged for expansion and improvement of education which continue to suffer on account of constraints of funds. We should also not feel complacent over only increase in allocation for the sector in absolute terms but try to increase percentage-wise allocation both in relation to total expenditure and also GNP. We are still much below the desired level by those standards.

While inaugurating the "Prathomik Shikkhak Bhaban" at Mirpur last week President Hussain Muhammad Ershad emphasised the basic objectives of education policy and fundamental issues related thereto. "We want to build an educated nation" he said and sought cooperation of the teachers to double the literacy rate within two to three years. The government attaches priority to primary education. The literacy rate depends on the effectiveness of primary education and not on the number of doctors and engineers.

The appraisal of the role of the teachers is also rightly reflected in the observations of the President. He called the teachers the conscious section of the society dedicated to the cause of educating the future generations despite constraints and urged for united efforts to remove the curse of illiteracy from the society and build a happy country.

The assurance of continued government efforts to improve the infrastructural facilities for raising the level of literacy was also there and that is encouraging. At the initial stages of the expansion programmes expenditure for construction of physical facilities constitute the principal outlay of education budget.

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