

Achieving Universal Primary Education

091

Times Report

Introduction of Universal Primary Education in the country by 1985 was one of the objectives of the Second Five Year Plan (SFYP). The Third Five-Year Plan (TFYP) document released in December says — despite provision of incentives to the children, enrolment ratio at the end of the Second Plan still remained near about its starting level.

So the planners who have framed the SFYP have become very cautious about setting the target, and said the objective of the current plan would be the enrolment of 70 per cent of the primary age-group children in schools by 1990, in order that UPE might be achieved by the close of the century.

The plan document says, "Though modest compared to the SFYP enrolment target, achievement of even this target would be difficult unless all other socio-economic conditions become favourable".

So the time-frame for achievement of UPE had not only been expanded by another 15 years, the planners have also cast doubts whether or not even this new time-frame would bring about the much desired UPE.

The current plan aims at bringing an additional 26.8-lakh children to schools by 1990. The SFYP had the aim of enrolling an additional 60 lakh children to schools by 1985 — it could not be achieved.

An average citizen cannot but raise his eyebrows and look at the planners with the question — what they would retain in their store for incorporation in the Fourth Five-Year Plan document which should be made public by the year 1990.

SFYP had given top priority the introduction of UPE and about 47 per cent of the total allocation in the education sector was earmarked for the programme. Of the total allocation of Taka 707 crore, Taka 331.7 crore was allocated for the development of primary education. Actual expenditure on UPE was, however, Taka 210.7 crore (or 41.4 per cent of estimated expenditure on education).

The programme had focussed on the development of physical facilities, distribution of free text books and uniform, and training of teachers. The TFYP document says during the SFYP period there was a substantial shortfall in the creation of physical facilities for UPE. Only 47 per cent of class room construction target was realised; supply of benches was realised to the extent of 74.38 per cent, tubewell sinking to 30.73 per cent and toilet construction to 15.41 per cent only.

The TFYP document ob-

serves, "Unsatisfactory performance in respect of class-room construction may be one of the causes for the shortfall in expansion of enrolment in primary schools. Though the targets for teachers' training and distribution of books were exceeded, enrolment in primary schools increased by 6.34 lakh only against the plan target of 60 lakh . . . This achievement is disproportionately low when compared with the level of expenditure which was 66 per cent of plan allocation for primary education." The provision for distribution of uniform was halted by the end of 1982. "This the plan document says" means ineffective use of

resource from enrolment point of view. Surprisingly, the number of primary schools also increased by about 10 per cent from 40,445 in 1980 to 44,200 in 1984-85."

"The expansion rate of enrolment relative to the number of schools and teachers shows a diminishing trend . . . This is a serious issue that must be addressed by education planners, administrators and social thinkers in view of existing low level of literacy as well as severe resources limitation as the problem appears to exist beyond the problem of providing facilities . . . high rate of dropouts indicate problems with demand also."