

Text of Zia's speech at C'wealth seminar on primary education

Following is the full text of President Ziaur Rahman's speech at the inaugural session of the Commonwealth regional seminar on universal primary education in Asia and Pacific, reports RSS.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, excellencies ladies and gentlemen.

I am happy to learn that the Commonwealth Secretariat has chosen Bangladesh to host the Commonwealth regional seminar on universal primary education in Asia and the Pacific and it is my particular pleasure to welcome you all to our country. I am gratified to note that although the majority of the delegates come from fellow-Asian nations, there are also representatives from other parts of the Commonwealth who will, I am sure, add the wisdom of their own experience to your deliberations.

During the period of its existence the Commonwealth Secretariat has held numerous conferences at ministerial and official levels which have done

so much to analyse common

problems and put forward solu-

tions amongst these confer-

ences the Commonwealth edu-

cation conferences have been

of particular value.

But by their very nature

they have tended to deal with

global issues and it is gratify-

ing therefore to see the emer-

gence of regional conferences

such as this one which can set

to grips with more specific

matters of regional concern.

UNIVERSAL

It is particularly appropriate

that this seminar, whose

theme is universal primary edu-

cation, should be taking place

in Dacca. The government of

Bangladesh is currently giving

its attention to the preparation

of its second Five-Year Plan

1980-85 and its perspective plan

1990-2000. In considering the

education sector of these plans

we have come to the conclu-

sion that primary education

must receive the utmost priori-

ty.

It is now realised that the

policies pursued in the 1950s

and 1960s, which placed parti-

cular faith in the expansion of

secondary and higher educa-

tion, have mostly proved costly

in terms of expenditure and

less than effective in terms of

investment. Remarkable chan-

ges which have taken place in

the present decade have upset

many of the comfortable theo-

ries and assumptions on which

our former plans were based.

It is not only the poorer coun-

tries which are now anxiously

reviewing their educational sys-

tems.

WEALTHY NATIONS

Even the wealthy nations

have had their confidence un-

determined and are painfully re-

appraising their policies in the

light of diminishing natural re-

sources, uncontrollable inflation

and mounting unemployment.

Recent advances in industrial

technology have brought with

in reach the prospect of trans-

ferring most of the repetitive

and dull tasks of production

from the hands of human be-

ings to automated machinery.

The effects of this new tech-

nological revolution on people's

lives have yet to be assessed

but will certainly be profound

and educational policies will be

profoundly altered.

EQUITABLY ECONOMIC SYSTEM

Meanwhile the less advanced

nations are looking for a

more equitable world econo-

mic system to emerge from the

present state of chaotic inequa-

lity, it has also become evident that foreign aid is not an effective substitute for self-help. It can facilitate the implementation of indigenous development but it cannot provide long-term solutions.

This need then to mobilize our own resources is the basis for our present political endeavours. The educational system plays a vital role in npolitical change hence our present concern with shaping a system to meet the challenges of the future.

In this respect we in Bangladesh see primary education as a crucial factor in the development of democracy at the village level and the encouragement of the spirit of self-reliance.

It is interesting to note that international and bilateral agencies are beginning to shift their emphasis in the education sector from prestige institution-building projects to the more mundane but more important field of primary schooling.

The World Bank for example during the period 1970-74 devoted only 4.5 per cent of its educational expenditure to primary education. During the period 1979-83 it proposes to increase this allocation to 28 per cent.

SOCIAL RESOLUTION

As I mentioned earlier Bangladesh is in the process of a social revolution. This can only be achieved if there is also a major change in the direction of education. Our

system must be adapted to pro-

duce the attitude of mind and

skills which are needed to

make the best of our own re-

sources and to attain the ma-

ximum benefit from the fore-

ign assistance which is offered

to us.

None of these objectives can

be realised unless our basic

education is broad in scope

and sound in content. We

therefore look forward eager-

ly to the outcome of this con-

ference in the anticipation that

it will give us both guidance

and inspiration in our forth-

coming efforts to expand and

improve our primary educa-

tion.

Over the past few years, at

conferences like this and in the

writings of many distinguished

people the economic managerial

training and curricular prob-

lems of education have been ex-

haustively identified and ana-

lysed.

Many valuable solutions have

been put forward to these prob-

lems. But as we all know, the

real difficulty arises when we

attempt to apply these recom-

mendations. For ultimately we are

dealing with human beings and

a remote authority cannot im-

pose solutions on a reluctant

population. However good and

well intentioned these solutions

may be.

For a reform (a revolution

if you like) to be successful it

must have the active support

and co-operation of the bulk

of the population. How we set

about this task of education in

educational changes is a topic

which this seminar may cer-

tainly consider. Educational sys-

tems are notoriously slow to

change. And even educationists

are not entirely exempt from

the charge that yesterday's re-

volutionaries became today's re-

actionaries.

For a revolution to succeed

it must be based on a solid

foundation of popular support

and participation. This is the

key to success. We must

not only change the system but

we must change the people.

And the sooner we start the

sooner our young people and

our country will benefit.

In conclusion I would like to

refer to some matters that con-

cern us in Bangladesh of which I

feel sure have wider im-

plications. First there is the

content of the primary school

curriculum. In many countries

the curriculum is little more

than a pious hope impossible of

implementation either because

the teachers or facilities do not

exist or because it is so com-

prehensive that there are in-

sufficient school hours to cover

it.

BASIC SKILLS

Bearing in mind that primary

education will be terminal for

the majority of people for years

to come the curriculum must

provide two essentials. First it

must inculcate those basic skills

— the ability to read to write

to calculate to measure—on

which all subsequent personal

and national development de-

pend.

Secondly the school must

actively encourage good social

attitudes moral values, if you

like—which are the cement of

a stable society.

My second point arises from

the first. Our responsibilities