

National Education Policy

The draft national educational policy is almost at its final stage. After its submission to the ministry of education by the framing committee, it has been subjected to a review by yet another committee charged with implementation and budgeting. The second committee has also discharged its responsibility. Now the education policy, according to a report carried in a Bangla daily, is awaiting the final approval. For the committees to have accomplished such a job within less than two years' time is a feat by itself. Although the contents are yet to be available for detailed and minute examination, the main features as introduced by the report are quite impressive.

No doubt the proposed national education policy has sought to bring about a radical change in our education system. It looks extremely bold and highly ambitious too. Whether it will be able to help resolve the endless crises in the educational arena and improve the quality of education is however a different matter. First, let us take the proposed breaks in the three-tier system of education. In the changed format, the primary tier will ultimately be an affair of eight academic years, instead of the present five years. The secondary tier will be of four years from class IX to XII. There will be no public examination after class X. To facilitate the process it has proposed that the existing high schools introduce two more classes, XI and XII, and the colleges add classes IX and X. The students will face the first public examination after completion of class XII and the results will be settled on the basis of grading. The universities, that is at the tertiary level will have four years' co-ordinated degree course with provision for honours and one year's master course. Colleges with proper facilities will offer similar education along with the normal courses. Other colleges will have three years' degree course.

Clearly, the radically changed format has merit. No doubt about that. But there are troubling questions that need to be answered first. Although there is a provision for adding a year with each academic session of primary education beginning from the year 2003 so that by 2010 the eight-year primary education is incorporated gradually, we doubt the home work most essential for its success will be complete by that time. Even though there is no mention that three more classes will be added to the primary schools as they now exist, there is every likelihood of such incorporation. Can we build up the infrastructure by that time?

Even more challenging will be the inclusion of are qualified teachers with the primary wing. We cannot expect the present primary school staff to take up the responsibility of teaching students from class VI upto class VIII. Equally daunting will be the problem of converting the high schools into the proposed institutions capable of handling students of classes XI and XII. If this upward integration poses a problem from the teaching point of view, the downward integration for colleges may not. But then the colleges will be required to employ more teachers. Even then there will remain one more problem to solve—the problem of accommodation. There is a proposal for an additional expenditure of Tk. 30,000 crore. We are not competent enough to say whether the proposed money is enough or not for the purpose. But we understand that the whole programme will call for extensive co-ordination and ground work. There are other intricate matters that will need to be attended. For example the scholarship examination for class V and the district-wise public examination for class VIII will pit different schools against each other but will certificates of sort be awarded at that level? In a system like this each school or educational institution needs to be self-sufficient and the teachers' integrity has to be beyond question. Can we guarantee these? If the answer is a 'No', we may find a programme fizzling out.