

## 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 Sangshad 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 Shaked. Among those who participated in the discussions were Colonel Shamsul Islam of the Army

Education Corps, Dr. Wahidullah, Mr. Abul Kalam Azad, representatives of the Primary School Teachers' Association, Mr. Abdul Khaleque, representative of the Secondary School Teachers Association and Moulana Abdul Mannan of the Bangladesh Jamiatul Mudarresen.

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 useful 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-man 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 or 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 several

undesirable and unjustifiable bloomers in the text books meant for children and the juveniles. And there were omission of very grave nature. The 'history' section of the 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, economy or culture.

He placed before the house a barely 180-word introduction of Bangladesh, obviously more comprehensive, as appeared in the 'World Almanac and Book of Knowledge 1976' (published for the Bridgeport Post-Telegramme 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 decentralisation of management of primary 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 sensitive matters. All must be encouraged to make a clear-breast of themselves and one will be guaranteed full measure of freedom of speech, Kazi Zafar Ahmed said.

**MINIMUM AMENITIES**  
In his turn, Mr. Abul Kalam Azad discussed the institutional and administrative problems of primary education. He

regretted that notwithstanding all the official and formal importance given to this sector, it continued to be the sector with the minimum physical amenities.

He pointed out that the primary school teachers did not have a set of service rule, and hence, no job-security, no extra benefit, no right and not even the human right to complain of oppression and corruption. Yet, they had to satisfy 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 irregularly.

Another set of concrete suggestions emerged from the discussions, the chief ones being the following: (a) the various target groups must be delineated clearly; (b) the juvenile and the youth target groups, the most vitally important national 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 interim education policy.

### STANDARD

Moulana Abdul Mannan said that the precondition of improving the standard of education was raising the standard of teaching. We must have the most talented boys in the teaching profession. The reality, however, is different. This must have to be reversed, and teaching must be made more and more attractive, Moulana Mannan emphasised.