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More teachers

Both qualitative and quantitative aspects of teacher recruitment for the base-level schools assume critical importance since we are at the threshold of making primary education universal and effective in five years. Odds against this programme are likely to be formidable requiring of us in immediate terms to completely shed the hitherto customary tendency of looking upon this phase of education as something to tinker with in a perfunctory fashion.

The label 'top priority' should be deemed to have been stamped on the question when not only the Education Ministry in its individual capacity but the Council of Ministers collectively gave clearance for filling up five thousand vacant posts of primary teachers, a matter which remained suspended due to an earlier ban on recruitment. On the face of it the decision may seem to have been taken to remove the immediate constraints encountered by many outlying primary schools due to shortage of teachers. But this deserves to be looked at a little more deeply vis-a-vis the perspective of primary education envisioned by us. Phase-by-phase government recruitment of teachers should be an integral part of the broader strategy to provide for a large number of instructors in addition to the existing staff strength so that the process of spreading primary education universally can be completed without any let-up.

The fact that a substantial number of vacancies arise out of the exit of employed teachers adds a significant dimension to the question of teacher recruitment for this area of education. Future appointments in the teaching line need be so made as to allow no frequent exodus of teachers from their profession. There must be a recruitment principle helping to differentiate between the candidates who promise to last as teachers and those who are merely making an attempt for stop-gap employment. The latest psychological and aptitude test methods have to be applied to those intending to be teachers even though they may have diplomas awarded to them by the training institutes.

In the order of first-thing first, the teacher training institutes themselves must be cautiously selective to choose their students on the basis of certain moral, merit and professional norms. This point is stressed to avoid any serious dislocation in the availability of teachers when we are in the midst of implementing the primary education programme.

But certainly we must have enough teachers to choose from and this is where we are faced with the challenge of annually turning out adequate number of them from the training centres. The existing teacher training institutes are a few in number, these are themselves short-handed and short-tooled, and their curricula evidently need recasting in order to be consonant with the proposed improved contents of primary education.