

## Teaching The Teachers

We have several occasions emphasised the importance of inservice refresher course for teachers at all levels as one of the ways of improving the quality of education in the country. Their nature will vary from primary school to university, but the cataclysmic fall in standards of parents and citizens in general complain constantly underlines the urgency of measures which must be taken to halt it.

It is not our intention to cast aspersions on the teaching profession as a whole, but the fact that the majority of teachers recruited during the past two decades are themselves the end-products of a system which began deteriorating towards the end of British rule has to be recognised and given careful consideration in any scheme designed to reform education. Many of these recruits have had for years no access to new books, journals or ideas. Institutions in the lower stages cannot afford even nominal libraries. The information at our disposal suggests that owing to foreign exchange constraints, even the universities cannot regularly purchase the books and journals they should have to sustain good academic standards. This is aggravated by the ridiculously low pay-scales which teachers receive. Unable to keep body, and soul together on their salaries, many teachers have opened private tuition centres or spend their time working as hacks for publishers who wish to market note-books. Students complain in letters they sometimes address to us of being neglected unless they agreed to join the private tuition courses.

The quality of guidance and instruction provided either in the class-room or in the private tuition courses is of course pre-determined by the intellectual alertness of the instructor himself. To forget this and to turn all our attention to expansions, the opening of new schools and new colleges and universities, will, we are afraid worsen the situation. We do not say that expansion is not necessary; the number of schools and colleges we have is far too inadequate in proportion to the size of the population.

The scramble for places at the beginning of each academic session testifies to the need for more schools and colleges, especially schools. But, unless care is taken to see that the teachers appointed to these schools and colleges can perform their jobs with a minimum degree of competence, all expenditure on their establishment will be a total waste. And that in many cases is what is happening.

Surprisingly there has been no commission appointed in all the years since Bangladesh came into being in 1971 to study this specific problem and make recommendations. Almost every body seems to assume that it is the present system, a legacy from the colonial past, which is at fault. But it needs to be reiterated that the functioning and efficiency of all systems depend ultimately on the quality of the teacher. Neglect him, and the best of systems will deteriorate into a shambles. The teacher in spite of all that has happened in the recent past, still commands an enormous volume of prestige. Quite understandably because of the responsibilities he carries. Society must not only pay him well but also provide him with the tools of his trade. Regular refresher courses, once every two to three years for the individual teacher, better equipped libraries, periodical seminars where teachers might compare notes and discuss their common academic problems must in our judgement receive more attention, both administrative and financial, than has been the case hitherto.