

Science education in dire straits

Improved quality emphasised by experts

THE state of science education in Bangladesh is not at all satisfactory and it needs a major overhauling to help us become competent enough to face the future world, which will have to depend on science to solve most of its problems. This is the overpowering concern that was expressed by eminent scientists and academics of the country at a roundtable conference on the subject held on Saturday. The experts were unanimous in their opinion that be it agriculture, climate change, health or education, a nation will have to have a good grasp of scientific knowledge to progress and prosper.

We note with discomfiture that there has been a gradual but steady decline in both quality and quantity in enrolment of students, teaching standard, laboratory condition and textbook content in the field of science education in Bangladesh. The slide has become noticeable in recent years when the number of students coming to study pure science subjects began to dwindle significantly and quality of teaching and curricula went from bad to worse. Statistics presented by the scholars show that while 1.26 lakh students appeared in HSC examination from science group in 2001, the number stood at 82,199 in 2006. The situation in the case of B.Sc examination is more disconcerting as far as number is concerned.

The present science curriculum is not need-based and there is no coordination between SSC and HSC science curricula. Furthermore, we are quite surprised to learn that higher courses on mathematics are not compulsory for science students and that calculus is not included in HSC first year mathematics course, although it is an integral part of physics courses. The most significant aspect is allocation of meagre funds in the national budget for education. While UNESCO recommends a minimum allocation of 5 percent of the GDP to education sector, the actual allocation amounts to only 2.3 percent. It can be easily deduced how much of that amount ultimately trickles down to supporting science education.

The message that came out clear from the roundtable is that the government will have to formulate a pragmatic science policy and revive the Education Equipment Bureau that used to supply modern science equipment to educational institutes. Furthermore, it will have to take immediate measures to provide training to science teachers, furnish schools and colleges with laboratory equipment, offer better salary packages to science teachers and offer scholarships to meritorious students and organise programmes like science fair, science week, Math Olympiad etc. It needs no emphasising that to find our place among the developed nations of the world, we have to put science education at the top of the education policy.