

Time for govt to bolster science education

THE future of a nation lies in knowledge as the ability of a nation at the generation of new knowledge and its innovative use depends on having a scientifically literate people. This is particularly where Bangladesh runs the risk of a failure as the number of students taking up science courses, as New Age reported on Saturday, has declined over the past decade. The number of science students at the secondary level has declined from 34 per cent of the total students at the level in 2004 to 28 per cent in 2015; the figure at the higher secondary level has declined from 25 per cent in 2014 to 17 per cent in 2015. The decline in the number of students taking up science courses in schools and colleges, while being worrisome as it hampers the creation of enough scientific intellect and harms the process of creation of scientific knowledge-based society, speaks of rather a failure of the national education. This trend, if allowed to continue, is highly likely to result in a lower number of scientific professionals such as engineers, physicians and researchers than what the country needs.

Teachers, educationalists and education officials all blamed such a decline on the absence of science laboratories and shortage of qualified teachers, in particular, and parental attitude and expenses of science education, in general. According to the data available with the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics, about 7,880 out of about 19,700 schools, government or non-government, which accounts for 40 per cent, have no laboratory facilities; about 1,080 out of about 4,000 colleges, accounting for 27 per cent, also have no laboratories. This means that students taking up science courses in institutions having no laboratories will certainly fare badly than others, having the facilities. The shortage of qualified teachers for science subjects also, thus, affects the education of science students. Parental attitude that has been blamed for the decline also points to a failure of the government. Students and their guardians are not fully aware of the number of doors the students close when they do not take up science courses. Science education is not only meant for making scientists; even subjects such as linguistics and culinary art these days require students to have science-related subjects in schools and colleges. The government has, thus, a lot to campaign for to let students and their guardians know of the benefits of science education. Educational expenses are another reason for students, especially with those coming from poor families and in rural areas, not taking up science courses. The remedy for the government, in this case, is to spend more on science education, with increased and proper budgetary allocation.

In view of all this, the government is well advised to manage the national education, especially science education, well, and quickly, by shelving out more money, setting up laboratories, creating good science teachers and letting students, and their guardians, know of what science education entails for them.