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Education budget curves down, standard nosedives

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Education budget has been on a decreasing curve since independence of Bangladesh.

The allocation for education slid to 16 per cent in the current fiscal 2002-03, down from 21.14 per cent in 1972-73.

Education accounted for Tk 6,871 crore out of Tk 44,854 crore in the current fiscal. But the allocation was reduced substantially in the revised annual development

programme, sources said.

However, the allocation for the fiscal 2002-03 was a little higher than 15.71 per cent in 2001-02.

In the fiscal 1972-73, the allocation for education was Tk 45.06 crore (21.14 per cent) out of Tk 213.11 crore.

Teachers' salaries and infrastructure gobble up a big chunk of educational spending and the expenditure is not enough to raise the standard of education, say experts.

The sector had the lowest alloca-

tion of 11.13 per cent or Tk 1,494.28 crore out of Tk 13,431.24 crore in the fiscal 1990-91 during the rule of HM Ershad.

The budget for education was 12.76 per cent or Tk 98.21 crore out of Tk 769.31 crore in the fiscal 1976-77 during the rule of late president Ziaur Rahman.

Although the government claims to 'allocate the highest budget to education', the part of the amount is spent on religious affairs - infrastructure for mosques and mosque

Many are a huge amount of

Moreover, a huge amount of funds is channelled to defence education, depriving the mainstream education, said Professor Anu Muhammad of the economics department, Jahangirnagar University.

The allocation did not increase in comparison with the number of students and institutions, says another expert. Although the sector

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was given the highest allocation, only a trickle goes to developing learning aids and textbooks -- key to raising the standard of education.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), a think tank, proposed to the government to increase the budget allocation for education gradually by 5 per cent of GNP (Gross National Product). Current allocation for education is around 2 per cent of GNP.

In its Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), the government committed to lifting the allocation to 2.62 per cent, 2.81 per cent and 2.93 per cent of GNP in the budgets for 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06. Anu Muhammad said the enhancement ratio is eyewash.

Educationist Serajul Islam Chowdhury said the decline in allocation is a reflection of the declining interest of the government in education.

The experts fear the lowering of public sector budget allocation will lead students to enrol in private educational institutions. They also called for more budget allocation to enhance the standard of education.