



## Nutritional Snacks In Schools

Twenty-six million people in Bangladesh eat less than 70 per cent of the recommended 2,100 calories daily but the fact that the chronic state of malnutrition adversely affects every stage of national life is not always clearly understood. It needs no telling that economic development without education is hardly possible. Examples of economic success in some Asian countries clearly demonstrate that "only skilled, trained and educated people can break the circle of poverty," as the head of the World Food Programme in Bangladesh points out. We could not agree with him more. The World Food Programme has therefore launched a new undertaking—a school feeding programme aimed at providing 925,000 children with nutritional snacks in schools.

First launched last year as a pilot project in the south-western part of the country, the programme is one of the largest of its kind. About 400,000 children now covered under the programme get a 75-gram daily packet of high-energy biscuits containing 300 calories and 80 per cent of their daily vitamin and mineral needs. The World Food Programme stressed the effectiveness of the snacks not only in combating hunger but also in getting children in school and keeping them there.

There is in marked contrast to the Food-For-Education (FFE) Programme which was introduced in 1993 by the then BNP government on a pilot basis. Although at the start, the FFE Programme expanded rapidly, and linked food transfers to poor households through primary school enrollment of their children, the expectation that it would achieve the four objectives of increased school enrollment; better school attendance; lower dropout rates; and higher quality education, soon dissipated. It was recently replaced with a new programme that gave a primary student Tk 100 per month and a boy student and a girl student coming from the same family Tk 120 between them.

A report by the Asian Development Bank said that, though the introduction of FFE had led to a rapid increase in school enrollment; and an increase in school attendance and decrease in the dropout rate, it quickly declined during the following years as the practice of distributing FFE wheat through dealers was marked by widespread corruption and leakage. What was worse the quality of schooling in FFE schools deteriorated.

Whether or not the new World Food Programme will face the same fate is debatable but with regard to the Cash-For-Education Programme we feel handing out money will not fare any better than the Food-For-Education Programme as it will create even greater scope for corruption.