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## Computer Literacy

Nobody can contest that computer literacy in today's world should be compulsory rather than optional for all school students. Yet the Prime Minister's recent declaration that all primary and secondary schools in the country would be equipped with computers needs to be taken with some reservation, for it would be foolish to presume that the availability of equipment alone can deliver the miracle.

The attitude and the competence of the people, who would be called upon to instruct the children, in other words, the teachers, have first to be brought up to date with the skills. Without this important step, the purchase of the required CPUs, monitors and other hardware and software can only profit the suppliers and do little for the students themselves.

A case in point here is a similar move to 'computerise' the government offices some years ago, whereby hundreds of thousands of Taka were spent to glorify senior bureaucrats' offices whose skills in it till date would make even a computer literate child blush.

This is not to say we are against modernising offices and schools with 21st century information technology. It is in fact an imperative to have a computer literate nation, if we are to keep pace with the world around us and reap economic benefits via the information superhighway.

There is no denying that computers are changing the lives not only of urban working class people but also ordinary rural folk, as various pilot projects in neighbouring India as well as our own country have shown. People from all walks of life can reap benefits from being computer literate.

But let us be rational in our approach so that the maximum dividends can be realised at the minimum cost. This means effective computer education for the target groups who can actually use their skills to improve their lives rather than end up more computer-confused than literate. This calls for well-thought-out basic programmes that are affordable and accessible to all, with dedicated instructors delivering and monitoring progress.