



THE EDUCATION WEEK

Once again we are observing the national education week, a period of evaluation and stocktaking of our constitutional commitment to mass literacy and universalisation of education. There is no alternative to it if we seriously mean to tackle our multiple problems of backwardness, over-population, poverty and the general socio-economic indices that mark our status among world nations. The present government hopefully is alive to the gravity of the situation and has been demonstrating its desire to identify problems and cure the education sector of its malaise on a priority basis.

In his inaugural address President Hussain Muhammad Ershad mentioned some specific measures that are to be taken to bring about an improvement. Among them are: enhancement of teachers' pay and allowances, reformation of the examination system, more rational and realistic curricula, upgrading the standard of education through strict rules and regulations aimed at better classroom teaching, and other positive decisions. The budget allocation has also been increased for making primary education free, universal and compulsory and ensure basic education for all by the year 2000.

Purity of intentions notwithstanding, the poor state of our literacy level and education in general would need a good deal more than the allocated funds to make it wholly beneficial for national development. We have long been perpetuating an irrational system where the tertiary and secondary levels of education take the lion's share of resources while the primary level suffers acutely even though the failure rates at the higher stages have been unacceptably high, and among those who succeed very few can boast of being really educated. Certificates alone cannot make one learned though they increase one's scope for pretensions.

Our tragedy is that we have allowed this lop-sided attitude to flourish at great costs to the nation. Spending for the huge mass at the base would have yielded more wholesome dividends. There has been some talk of establishing a pyramid-type education system where the broad base would get concentrated attention that universal primary education deserves while the top would gradually become highly selective for only the very best. Provided the quality of teachers improve together with the teaching methods, there is no reason why we cannot make higher education cost-effective and useful in nation-building.

It is in the interest of total socio-economic development that we must invest now our time, mind and money to eradicate illiteracy and provide compulsory basic education to all as well as increase the scope for applying it in enriching general life. Hopefully we can set attainable goals and reach them step by step.

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