Specialist teachers, computer access, for students a must

IT IS unacceptable that although the education ministry has made information and communication technology compulsory as a subject at the junior secondary, secondary and higher secondary levels almost half of such schools do not have specialist teachers on the subject. As New Age reported on Sunday quoting Directorate of Secondary Education and Higher Education officials, there is no specialist teacher for teaching the subject in 322 government schools and over 300 government colleges. The subject ICT gives the students primary ideas about computer and its related devices, such as, internet, mobile and their usages, which builds the foundation for further ICT studies. Needless to say, computer literacy is the need of the day to stay competitive in this era of great interconnectivity. Today's students who are looked upon as the future leaders of the country certainly deserve to be provided with the opportunity to attain computer literacy to keep themselves abreast of the new developments in different fields of knowledge. However, Bangladesh is at the wrong end of the global digital divide.

There is also a digital divide within the country between urban and rural areas. According to a survey by LIRNEasia, a Sri Lanka-based Asia-Pacific information and communication technology policy and regulation capacity- building organisation, on an average there is no computer in every 100 'bottom of the pyramid' households in Bangladesh. Economists also say that if the per capita income ratio is considered, the cost of computers is still high for the poor Bangladeshis. Under such circumstances, the introduction of a mandatory ICT course for the students has proved to be an additional headache not for the students only but also for the schools and colleges particularly in the rural areas. Now that the government has introduced a compulsory ICT course for the students, it needs to ensure that all students have access to computers under the guidance of specialist teachers. Admittedly, the students and schools in urban areas are better placed than their rural counterparts to have specialist teachers and access to computers. This being the case, the challenge for the government now is to ensure that rural students have specialist teachers and reasonable access to computers.

While the government is not expected to provide all students with computers for individual use, it should help the schools and colleges in rural areas in setting up their own computer labs with financial and technical assistance and arrange to appoint specialist teachers in all institutes. Or else, the introduction of computer course will prove to be an exercise in futility.