

For More Technical Education

On more than one occasion we have been told that our phlegmatic attitude to science and technology is keeping us backward. Many believe that unless the number of technical institutions in the country can be increased, this gap can never be closed and we can never achieve our full potential. Yet despite the knowledge that technical education is an essential pre-requisite for progress, practical training and technical education has been neglected.

The Prime Minister seems to hold that view for as she said at the recent 12th National Conference of Diploma Engineers, "There is no scope to neglect technology as the twenty-first century will be a millennium of science and technology." But if we are to keep pace we must first do something about the miserable state of our technical education for during the past 25 years we have managed to increase the number of polytechnic institutes in the country by only five (from 15 to 20) and the annual enrolment of students by only 3,000 (from 10,000 to 13,000) which works out at only two per cent of all students.

Although the government does have a plan for increasing facilities for technical education and vocational training, it is far too modest for our needs. More than the additional 15 vocational training centres and 44 polytechnic institutes it envisages will be needed. However the Prime Minister's announcement that three out of sixteen of these polytechnic institutes will be for women, which will be established during the current fiscal year is encouraging for it underscores her government's commitment to developing technical education. In addition, there is a plan to impart vocational training in 500 non-government schools.

Although skill training and the transfer of technology are known to be powerful forces in the struggle for economic emancipation, even if everything goes ahead as scheduled, judging from the experience of the past, we rather suspect there will be the usual shortage of trained teachers to run the show. Courses designed to provide a complete training package for schools and polytechnics are not difficult to design for we have enough experts in the subject but where we fall short is in translating these packages into action.