

036 Primary education

A decision taken by the National Economic Council to provide 40 thanas in the country with an average of 100 new primary schools within the Second Five-Year Plan period indicates the government's earnestness about achieving the goal of universal primary education. However, answers to two crucial problems will have to be found simultaneously if the physical expansion programme in this field is to produce matching results in terms of actually imparting education. One is to get dedicated teachers and the other is to attract and retain more students.

Parents now often complain — mainly in the villages — that teachers do not pay enough attention to teaching and thus drive pupils to unmindfulness or callousness regarding their studies. Teachers on the other hand say with pain that they are frequently maltreated by so-called village leaders and their immediate superiors in the education department which makes them lose heart about their profession. Then, on many occasions, with would-be teachers compelled to take recourse to unfair means for securing the job—resulting often in sincere ones elbowed out by the useless—good education gets a jolt at the start. The vicious circle of disrespect that is thus created can turn even a good teacher, who is on the job, into a neglectful one. A determined bid has therefore to be made for recruiting honest and diligent teachers and thereafter to retain them and their good qualities by defending their honour. Teachers themselves will have a lot to contribute in this endeavour.

A high drop out rate remains a constant feature of primary education. Poor parents appear unenthusiastic about schooling of children. Noticeably, the largest number of youngsters not taking any education belongs to families with little or no educational background. Perhaps such families find it more worthwhile to engage their children in income-giving activities rather than wait for them to finish school. This problem would have lent to easier resolution had the parents themselves found ways to earn more. But in the meantime an element of attraction to elementary education can perhaps be introduced by following a curriculum that is related to job opportunities likely to open up locally. Good school environment, with provisions for school lunch, could also induce more parents to send and keep their children in these institutions as these would then serve the purpose of creches with education thrown in. The search for ways to attract more and more students to primary schools must continue.