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For depoliticising education

The Government has announced plans to set up 20,000 primary schools across the country to boost the campaign for literacy and fulfil the target of universal primary education. The authorities are also expected to make investments on technical education establishing yet another university of engineering and technology in the relatively backward region of the country. These projects which are expected to be completed by the turn of the century indicate the priority attached to the education sector since the advent of the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in June last.

The education sector spends a great deal of both the revenue and development budgets every year. But the bitter experience of the past is that the funds had been used to serve narrow political ends instead of genuinely helping the spread of primary education and wipe out illiteracy. Fictitious educational institutions were given grants in parliamentary constituencies by the parties which were in power only to gain political support or maintain party supremacy. Government grants were not based on need and merit but on political expediency. During the erstwhile Government this kind of misuse of educational funds had reached an unprecedented level. National interests were made subservient to political targets of the party in power.

Hopefully the new Government has promised to clear up the mess of the past and replace the myopic vision of the former government with a broad outlook encompassing the development and upgradation of educational facilities across the country. State Minister for Planning Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir on Thursday told a group of researchers of a private think tank that the country had paid a heavy price for the politicising of the education sector by the erstwhile administration. He said the misuse of grants had a heavy toll on primary school enrolment and the general standard of education which had continually dipped in the last two decades.

The process to depoliticise the education sector should start with cancelling all politically motivated appointments and suspending flow of Government funds to schools and colleges which have dubious track records. Obviously educational institutions which have standards below the national requirements should be asked to improve or close down. Bad education is no substitute for no education. In the improved curriculum that the Planning Minister had hinted efficiency in languages including writing and reading skills in both Bengali and English should get the utmost attention.

The standards in our schools, barring a few exceptions, had fallen mainly because of the less importance that had been given to achieving proficiency in languages. The target for the future should be not only quantitative spread of education but also its qualitative enhancement.