

## Improving Education To Suit Our Needs

Unplanned and for too rapid urban growth, reflected in the inability of the education system to keep pace with demand, created a scope for the private sector to step in. This act was to transform education from a service-oriented industry into a consumer product. This, in itself, brought into focus yet another aspect of education long forgotten—the need to provide education that is market-led or, in other words, in tune with the needs of the nation.

The question now arises as to whether or not the new private kindergartens and tutorials, as well as the private regular schools and colleges and state-run institutions are providing market-led education or mere academic instruction?

If we look to the past and rediscover the system inherited from the British, we can see that the education system had been established for the purpose of providing the right kind of people to help run the state machinery. This system continued down the years even in the absence of any demand for such people which, of course, sent it “off the rails” with the result we have a surplus of “liberalists” and a shortage of technically capable persons. Considering this factor, we must examine the situation prevailing in the private sector to determine the extent of their ability to fill this short-fall. If not, we must reconsider the wisdom of allowing them to function unbridled. But—if they are in fact, filling this gap, we must consider evaluating this system with a view to emulating it in state-run and private government-supported schools and other institutions.

In the past, the provision of education was not much of a problem as only a relative few sought it. Today the situation is different, particularly in urban areas for children now represent half of the population at a time when education is being viewed as beneficial to the nation. However, the focus must be narrowed and seen for what it really is—a tool for survival. This means it must cater to the demand of the market while keeping in mind the needs of the future for, at present, children in Bangladesh are, within the present system, unable to fulfil, their potential. In other words, their chance for survival is limited by the system itself. If this is indeed the case, an overhaul from top to bottom is called for.

But any system in vogue, in a country as poor as ours where unemployment is endemic, has to be incorporated with a scheme for job creation, particularly in rural areas. At present, rural-urban migration has aggravated the situation in the cities without mitigating the problem of absorption of an educated workforce in rural areas.

Both the system and the people seem to shy away from taking practical steps to restore the balance. This is compounded by the inability of the general masses to comprehend future social, economic and political situations in the light of education. This means that, if the people fail to see the benefit of education for their children, the desire for learning may never be kindled. The fact of the matter is, there is a need to strike a balance between education as provided by the private sector and that provided by the state, so as to establish a well-defined system that covers the whole spectrum of education in relation to the needs and aspirations both of the state and the individual. In other words—flexibility is the key.