

## Salaries-only Varsities

Soon after the national budget was out, with its 40 billion-plus allocation to education, we had lamented in this column that 80 per cent of this huge sum would go to salaries and some more to constructions and maintenance, leaving almost nothing to education and student support. Now we are not alone in our misgivings. From inside the education sector has come a report on the affairs of our universities which says salaries eat up 70 per cent of their budgets leaving very little for educational and research activities. We are happy that the observation comes from no less a body than the University Grants Commission — who hold the purse-string of the universities and yet maintain that universities have been spending their kitties on irregular payments on unacceptable post creations and promotions.

Why should we bemoan salaries to teachers? No, it's not quite that. Paying them is paying for what they give to the students, namely, education. Salaries shouldn't have been the pain that it is now precisely because nobody is convinced that the students get their money's value. Can education be meaningfully imparted without proper laboratories and equipment and sufficiently stocked libraries?

Mass literacy and primary education are, by their sheer number, unwieldy things. Even the wisest of policies takes time to show result here, such result as no one can predict for sure. National excellence in intellectual pursuit and in coming to grips with the universe and the more complicated man's world — depends very much on the universities. A nation's capacity is built there out of the capability born of its geography and history, culture and physical anthropology. Why shouldn't the universities, lending so eminently to good leadership because of the smallness of the constituency, be a study in excellence themselves? What's holding?

There should, of course, be more money to higher education. More than the present one per cent of GDP. But there must be universities in Bangladesh competing for students and for excellence — and many of today's problems will not be there.