

## CRISIS IN EDUCATION

A new government has come to power and the expectations of the people from the democratically-elected government is understandably high. It is widely expected that the present government would take careful stock of the most pressing problems facing the country and take actions quickly, efficiently and imaginatively in order to solve the same.

Education, specially higher education is considered a serious problem area that the country faces at the moment. Neglect of the education sector is not affordable in a relative sense because we are all aware of how all developmental aspirations of the country are in one way or the other linked to education, its availability and its quality. Education in Bangladesh is suffering on both counts and there is an urgency indeed to address the issue of the education sector. Although for some years a great deal of publicity officially is being given to greater allocations for education, how far in reality the higher allocations are translating into education at base level or how far the same are creating higher education opportunities, call for close examinations.

It seems that in spite of increasing allocations substantially for primary education, its quality aspects have hardly improved. Besides, the drop-out rates in primary education are also not coming down as fast as were contemplated. Much greater worry is gripping the sphere of higher education. It is an irony that at a time when more resources are being made available for the overall education sector, the numbers, of publicly run institutions of higher learning remain nearly unchanged. There are 11 publicly run universities in the country including the specialized universities such as for agriculture and technology. The number of publicly operated polytechnic institutes or similar bodies have also not increased during the last decade. But these bodies are supposed to produce

the technically oriented or able manpower in increasing number required to feed the country's various developmental needs. No doubt some private universities have been added to the scene during the last five years. But these can be attended by only the sons and the daughters of the rich.

The egalitarian system of education, notably higher education opportunities for all sections of the people, which existed so far in the form of publicly run institutions, are considered hardly sufficient to cope with demand. Surely we need to set up many more universities and specialized bodies to impart skill or technology education and training under the government's sponsorship. Such steps are much needed to increase the right type of education opportunities as a whole for all classes of people in the country so that the objectives of balanced development in the education sphere in the higher national interest can be achieved.

No less important, but perhaps greater as a priority, appears the issue of establishing peace in the campuses on a lasting basis. We are pained to see that at present most of the seats of higher learning in the country are suffering due to politically engineered violence. Most of the medical colleges remain closed as a result. The same applies to the engineering universities. Some of the general universities, such as the Dhaka University, are operating in name only because most of the time the students of these remain in a state of apprehension about the breaking out of violence. The academic environment in the educational bodies must be restored if we are to ever realise our goals of spreading education or getting fully the dividends of it. The ruling party needs to take the initiative to open broad-based dialogue to permanently free education from student politics so that only the cause of education and nothing else is served in the educational institutions.