

Education: In Search of a Policy

One basic thrust of the policy is to ensure that all citizens of the country have equal opportunity of access to education, certainly to primary and secondary education but also to other levels. Primary education is proposed to be extended up to class VIII, with secondary education consisting of classes IX to XII. This system is proposed to be put in place in phases to be completed by 2010.

WHATEVER the level one is talking about — individual, national, global — the most important key to progress is human capability of development. The basic ingredients of human capability development are education, training, and health. The developed countries of the world achieved their phenomenal scientific, technological and economic successes through concerted efforts at human capability development and renewal. On the other hand, the poor countries of the world are seriously constrained by low levels of education, training, expertise, and health status.

Over half the adult (15 years+) population of Bangladesh is officially stated to be literate, which is still a low literacy status. Moreover, a significant proportion of those counted as literate can only write their names and read and write a little; but they are functionally illiterate. Functional literacy implies that a person is able to understand simple messages and documents, internalise the contents, and formulate responses accordingly; communicate with others in writing in simple language; and do simple sums. What is therefore necessary in Bangladesh as the most basic step is to accelerate educational expansion in terms of functional literacy or basic education.

At the same time, it is necessary to develop expertise of different levels and types in accordance with the requirements of various sectors of the economy and society. It is also necessary that, through the process of education, a culture of truthfulness, fellow-feeling, honesty, devotion to duty, and primacy of human values and rights is promoted among the population.

An overall educational policy setting out the overarching purposes and strategies within the framework of which educational activities would be coherently and purposefully promoted is yet to be formulated. It is possible to undertake specific

programmes and projects and let educational activities be pursued, as has been the case in the past, without adopting a national education policy. But in order that efforts can be mounted to promote education in a coherent manner, generating a momentum towards the best possible development of human capability for the best possible rate of national progress, an overall policy framework is absolutely necessary. In the absence of such a framework policy, ad-hocism and piecemeal actions are more the norm than systemic imperatives. This state of affairs ill behoves the nation if it were to prepare for a major forward thrust in the 21st century.

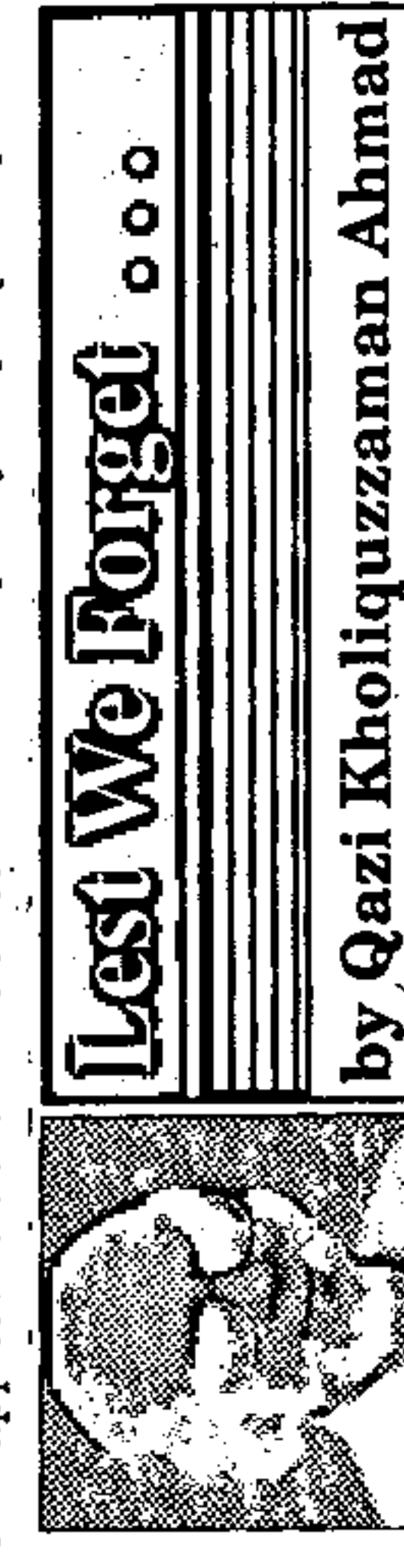
Since Liberation several commissions and committees have been appointed by the government to formulate a national educational policy. Reports have been submitted but, as noted earlier, a policy is yet to be adopted. The present government formed a National Educational Policy Formulation Committee in January 1997, which submitted its report in September of that year. In early 1998, a small committee was constituted to review that report, finalise policy proposals and suggest implementation and financing strategies. This committee, using the report of the earlier committee as the basis and after holding discussions with various stakeholders and reviewing the comments and suggestions offered by individuals and organisations generated on the basis of discussions on the report drafted contained in that report a National Education Policy covering various levels and types of education and suggesting implementation strategies along with possible ways of funding the major initiatives to be undertaken under the policy. In this piece I wish to highlight

some important aspects of this draft policy to the extent I am aware and given my understanding of the proposed steps and strategies.

As I see it, the proposed policy has been formulated with two basic goals in view, which are very appropriate in the context of Bangladesh. One is the promotion of ethical and human values, such as social justice, good behaviour, fellow-feeling, respect for others' views, devotion to duty, respect for human rights, non-communism, and patriotism. Promotion of leadership qualities is also an important aspect. The second overarching purpose is the applied side of education

subjects such as economics, commerce, science, computer, agriculture and so on. Liberal arts are not however neglected.

At the same time, for those who cannot go to school or remain in school because of poverty and other social reasons, the major emphasis has been given on non-formal education. Its purpose is to bring those left-out children within the fold of the educational process and to encourage and help them to pursue education at least to a level that enables them to participate in economic and social processes in a meaningful way. Another important aspect of the proposed educational policy is people's participation in the process of ensuring that schools and colleges are properly managed, education is properly imparted, and quality of education is adequately ensured. In this process, continuous interactions among teachers, parents, members of management committees, local leaders, and local government officials will be encouraged, promoted, and facilitated.



Lest We Forget

by Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad

and the development of expertise of various types and levels. The sciences, engineering and technical subjects and also the social sciences which are more directly concerned with economic activities are encouraged in this context.

Given that an overriding need of this country is to help the ordinary people to get out of their accommodation with poverty and backwardness, primary and secondary education, encompassing both the overriding goals stated above, have been given top priority. Keeping in sharp view that the two levels represent both terminal and continuing education, the curriculum and importance of various subjects have been proposed. Side by side with the development of human qualities, emphasis has been laid on vocational training and more directly economy-related

primary education is that on completion of primary education one acquires basic qualifications to participate purposefully in economic, social, cultural and political processes of the country.

While primary education is compulsory and universal, higher levels of education will depend on the ability of the students to pursue higher diplomas/degrees. Higher education and research in the sciences and technical subjects is duly emphasised. A major emphasis has been laid on the quality of education at all levels — primary to the highest degree. With that end in view, training of teachers of all levels has been duly emphasised. Strategies have been proposed for pursuing both these ends in an effective manner.

With a view to promoting an equitable educational system in accordance with the dictates of the Constitution of Bangladesh, all types of primary schools will be required to impart education of which the contents and quality will be the same and the medium of instruction Bengali. However, due emphasis has been given on English as a second language, which will be taught from class III as a compulsory subject. It may also be taught in classes I and II as an optional subject.

There will be three basic streams at the secondary level — general, technical and madrasa. In each stream, vocational education will form an integral part so that after completing secondary education one is able to take up a vocation if one does not pursue higher education for some reason or other. In each stream, there will also be certain common compulsory subjects. Overall, education to be provided in each stream has been so designed that, when the proposed new system of primary education up

to class VIII and secondary education consisting of classes IX to XII will be in place, students will be able to change from one stream to another, if they so desire, on completion of primary and secondary levels, as the case may be.

In so far as madrasa education is concerned, the emphasis is on in-depth and analytical imparting of religious education. At the same time, the sciences, technical subjects and the social sciences are given due emphasis in madrasa education appropriately at different levels in order to enable the madrasa educated people to have both a proper religious education and a strong background in other subjects for them to be able to participate not only in religious activities but also in economic and scientific processes in an effective manner.

As far as I know the draft policy document has been going through various stages for final formulation and, hopefully, eventual adoption. Obviously, it is important that a policy which is appropriate in the context of the needs and aspirations of the people and national and international dynamics is adopted. The draft policy provides an adequate response to this national need, as I see it. But one must also recognise that the implementation is another matter. In this country, there are good, even excellent policies in many areas of national management, but implementation is often poor and riddled with corruption and mismanagement.

The management of education at national and subordinate levels is also seriously affected by inefficiency, bureaucratic procrastination, and corruption. It is important therefore that to ensure effective progress in the field of education and training, and indeed in other sectors, the issue of corruption and mismanagement has to be addressed squarely and firmly. Otherwise, our future is unlikely to be any better than a mirror image of our past (failures and poor achievements).

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