

Rural Base Of Education

National reconstruction must remain a chimera until you got your priorities right and carry them through with no let-up according to plan. For a country like Bangladesh the priorities are three: Education, health and food. Education tops the list, for when anything goes wrong with education nothing practically goes right. And at the moment there is a rash of complaints that have to do with the massive illiteracy (about 80%) and the kind and quality of education received even by the 20% of the population. We have returned to these platitudes on receiving reports about the way primary and secondary schools are run particularly in the mofussil. We have also seen colleges coming up in most of rural Bangladesh, either new ones, or those resulting from upgraded secondary schools. Such an academic proliferation (i.e. by our standards) occurs from the sheer quantitative need created by a growing population and the increasing number of those leaving school and going in for college education.

In this editorial we will restrict our comments, as we have said, to how these educational institutions are managed. The first general allegation is about the primary schools. Complaining parents and sensitive local people point to 1) the method of appointment of teachers, 2) their performance, and accountability, 3) their attendance and the time and attention given to their pupils, 4) their alleged immunity from control exercised by administrative authority. Parental grouse also includes the query that primary school teachers are now much better paid and enjoy a greater security of service under government, and that despite or because of it—things have more declined than improved. And the decline according to these local critics is in exact proportion to the improvement in the lot of a teachers.

They also allege various kinds of irregularities of which the authorities seem not fully aware. In the matter of appointing teachers. Efficiency or character are said to be less valued than other considerations. It is also pointed out that although the posts are transferable few are seen being moved from their original places. And in most cases the original place is the locality of the teacher, due for a transfer. It is said he can 'manage' to stay on. A transfer could mean for him losing a number of advantages from attending to his domestic or agricultural duties and taking his own time in matters of attending to his duties at school.

Among other leading causes of deterioration and of popular complaint is the lack of rigour of inspection of schools by the inspectorate. This means a conspicuous absence of accountability of teachers or schools to the relevant higher authority. This hierarchy of authority is the linchpin that holds a given system together. Any link going loose, the whole structure must come tumbling down. And education as a whole seems to be, let alone rural education cosily staying far from the direct control of central authorities.

Quality of books apart, one specific complaint relates to the beginning of the teaching of English from class III rather than from class I. This is a sensible demand, in that, as in urban kindergarten schools, children in rural schools could begin their formal education with the elements of English.

What emerges from a critical consideration of the existing rural base of education from school to college is that both academic and administrative obligations have to be more peremptorily carried out. The question is: even the little that we are giving to the community in the name of education ought to be, and could be, much better than work done in a slapdash manner.