

## The Conference On Governance In Education

While speaking at the inauguration of a three-day conference on "Governance in Education: Accountability and Effectiveness" the Chief Adviser, Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed said, "Something most of us know to be true that the urban-rural divide in primary and secondary education is responsible for creating divisions in society. That this phenomenon is a serious problem" is also known but any efforts made to bring the three tiers of education at par have always met with failure. But the divisions in our society over the past several decades have now intensified to reach boiling point. Therefore, as Dr Fakhruddin said, the problem of "a widening divergence in the quality of education in urban and rural schools" should be resolved "as soon as possible."

This is not the first time this issue has been raised by eminent personalities, nor is it the first time the issue has been raised in our columns, but in the face of the rural-urban divide plus the rich-poor divide, resolving the issue will not be easy. Needless to say, education is a principal condition for the development of our vast human resource. But the existing education delivery system, from kindergarten to university has become a commercial enterprise and thus a city-centered operation.

It is also no surprise to learn that the overall quality of education is much higher in the urban areas than the rural. Therefore it goes without saying that urbanites have far more avenues for human resource development than their rural counterpart. Clearly such an arrangement gives urbanites an undue advantage over rural people. By being denied access to quality education, rural-based citizens also find employment opportunities restricted. This translates out as the domination of urban-based people in the decision-making process of the country which, in turn, results in the perpetual control of government policies.

The reason the state provides education is to have a productive workforce at its disposal, but while disparities exist, this is impossible. Yet we know that educating the young is important because it is not only a major economic development issue but a social justice issue. It is also an important long-term issue for the health of the nation. But what of all we need to close the socio-economic gaps in educational attainment because educational stratification and income stratification has reached a frightening level.

If the idea of education is measured in terms of whether it is emerging from the system can be counted on to provide the manpower the nation requires in an increasingly complex and integrated world, there is also an urgent need to force parity between rural and urban based children. Developing skills and potential for our own benefit is an economic necessity. This is why education to a certain level is compulsory.

When we consider the poverty rate for families headed by dropouts is more than double that of families headed by school graduates this in itself is too frightening to ignore. Children from these families are likely to remain unemployed. In other words, a lack of education that prevents people from realising their potential both as individuals and productive members of society. The continued presence of divisions within society undermines the sustainability of educational institutions. Such divisions perpetuate social unrest. Unless educational institutions are reformed, improving human resources can never be achieved. As educationists say the present system can only produce square pegs in round holes. Unless the anomalies are addressed we cannot ensure that students get value for the time spent in schools. The solution lies in making a paradigmatic shift in our overall development outlook. We therefore need to come up with a development model whereby the interests and aspirations of the rural people are accommodated. But in order for children to receive the kind of education they deserve, quality assurance for all schools is needed. And because education is needed to bring discipline to our society, how we deal with this problem is a national