

## Education Of Our Times

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Editorial  
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It is open to question how much and what education the different institutions provide to produce a citizen who will be useful for the Nation. Although many say the traditional, textbook-oriented, theoretical teaching has contributed to the economic growth and development of the nation in the past, most of what has been undertaken in the name of reform has been inefficient, ineffective, needlessly expensive, and irrational. We need to ask the government to define what education is about. If the idea of education is to be measured in terms of whether those 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 a need to provide students with a needs-based technical or vocational education. Despite knowing this we have persisted in maintaining three different tiers of education, primary, secondary, tertiary and higher education to cater to the needs of each. But the problem is that these three different systems produce citizens with different talents, different outlooks, and different beliefs, customs and traditions - and even in spoken language. In other words instead of education being the leveller, society is becoming increasingly fragmented and hostile. Unfortunately culturally exclusive groups with little or no interaction cause conflicts difficult to constrain and this is one of the main reasons for the social and political unrest we have been experiencing. In other words our education system has created divisive trends in society and unless the government whose job is to regulate society pays immediate attention to its education system, the trials and tribulations will reach a stage where social and its attendant political conflict will become inevitable. Nevertheless educating the young is very important and must not be neglected as it is a major economic development issue. It is also the most important long-term issue for the civic health of the nation therefore we need more children finishing high school and four-year degrees. Of even greater importance, we need to close the socio-economic gaps in educational attainment as educational stratification and income stratification has already reached a frightening level. It is important to help low-income students achieve so that they can participate in the economy and in society.

But any proposed changes in the education system should be subjected to close attention. At the same time we must be mindful that when we consider the poverty rate for families headed by dropouts is more than twice that of families headed by high school graduates, we must take measures to eradicate this gap. Children coming from this type of background invariably end up unemployed, less likely to vote, and more likely to be imprisoned than high school graduates. And we must also be alive to the fact that we live in an era when a college education is a prerequisite for maintaining a middle-class lifestyle. In other words education in an incrementally growing knowledge-based society is not something to be played with. Sudden changes in the system must be avoided as it is inordinately expensive and taken from the taxpayer's point of view, wasteful. Most people believe that money wasted is money that should never have been spent. It is also money not available for other things. Developing skills and children's potential for our own benefit and of others is an economic necessity. But the weaknesses in the system are many, chief among them is endemic corruption in the government structures that control the system. There is also a clear lack of a clear policy or direction. However mass education as prevails in the country produces mass literacy, of a sort, but it does not create a productive, pragmatic, tolerant and aware citizenry.

However there is a place for a religion-based system of education in our country but the Madrassahs do not produce people who are productive and pragmatic, and so they are disadvantaged. In other words they do not fit students for living in an increasing complex world but nevertheless they do fulfil an important function - the socialisation of the most downtrodden. Even English medium education has its place but as it is no longer the domain of the middle classes it increasingly caters to the nouveau riche who are often not tuned to the ways of western oriented education. Moreover as this type of education that takes a child from primary level to