THE BANGLADESH OBSERVER

Scientific And Technical Education

It is easy to see that 'purposeful' is the key word in what Prof. Abdus Salam, the Nobel Laureate, has said in Dacca on Saturday last on promotion of scientific and technological education in developing countries. Education of this kind can be meaningful in two ways in a country like Bangladesh; this should be directly related to the developmental needs of the country in the fields of both agriculture and industry; and this should aim at identifying appropriate technology for the country and at developing such technology in the country itself by making use of indigenous resources. Planning education of all kinds demands vision, and the demand is all the more exacting in the case of scientific and technological education in order to guard against the danger of developing a particular kind of technical manpower in excess of the capacity needed and against that of developing the wrong or the inappropriate kind. It is a good idea to decentralise technical and scientific education and to make facilities of such education available in varying degrees in as many areas as possible, but it must also be ensured that such facilities do not lie idle and are made fully use of. That would of course depend on the employment opportunities for the students of these institutes within the country and outside.

Prof. Salam has uttered a word of caution against the kind of lip service that is at times paid to the need and importance of scientific and technical education without making available to it the kind of support, attention and encouragement that it deserves. This certainly is not the case with Bangladesh, as would be evident from a close look at the provisions made in five year plans and the interim two-year plan of the country. Scientific and technical education has been given undisputed priority in all these, but in spite of such priority many a problem remains, the most crucial among these being a lack of adequate number of teachers in the technical institutes, especially the engineering colleges, and the absence of a firmly established mechanism to relate such education to the current industrial needs of the country. But their commitment is important, and this commitment must be full and total. This alone can find an answer to the problems that would arise from time to time.

This is a commitment basically on the part of the government. But it is not for the government alone to shoulder the entire responsibility. As Prof. Salam has rightly pointed out, both collective and individual efforts are needed. He has spoken of collaboration between the guardians, the students, the industrialists, the public benefactors and the government. The list may be further enlarged, but that is not necessary. The point is that the private and the public sectors must play a mutually supportive role if scientific and technical education and research are to make a significant progress and if the benefits of scientific and technological advancement are to be made available to the people in their war against poverty, illiteracy and human affliction of all other kinds. The call that Prof. Salam has made to the scientists of this country to make experiments on the unification theory of forces in nature is really a call to join the ranks of scientists all over the world in making persistent experiments in all fields of science, and our scientists must, in spite of all limitations, respond to the call.