

THE BANGLADESH OBSERVER

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Dacca WEDNESDAY JULY 9 1980

Technical Education

Mr. Shah Azizur Rahman, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Education, has, on Monday last, formally inaugurated in Dacca the College of Engineering. The college has started functioning from the first of this month, meeting, for the first time, a demand which the students have voiced for years. The college, affiliated to the University of Dacca, provides an opportunity for further advancement in studies to those who successfully emerge from polytechnic institutes with diploma in technical education. This opportunity was not available to them earlier and it is only fair that this has been made available now, for there is no reason why those who wish to pursue higher courses and deserve, by virtue of their merit and performance, to do so should be denied an access to continued education. The University of Engineering and Technology could not probably take upon itself the responsibility of looking after these students, for attending to such a task would have demanded fundamental and far-reaching changes in the present design of courses and the system of education there. The establishment of a separate institute has, from this point of view, been judicious, and so has been the decision not to affiliate it to the University of Engineering and Technology. The character of the University remains unaltered, and the need for expanding educational facilities in this particular direction is also met.

It would be, however, premature now to say that the task has been accomplished, for the success of the move depends not on the establishment of the college alone, but also on how well the institute is run. Students graduating from this college would have the same degree conferred on them as those coming out of the BUET, and their proficiency must also be at least of the same level as that of the others. This means that the educational standards maintained in both the institutes must be roughly the same, and this, in its turn, implies that the newly established college must have facilities similar to those available elsewhere and that it should have equally qualified teachers on its staff. The three engineering colleges of the country are known to have suffered in the past from

a crisis of teachers, and it would be wise to ensure right from the beginning that such a crisis is never permitted to have a grip over the newly born institute. If graduates adequately qualified for appointment as teachers in engineering colleges find employment elsewhere more lucrative, they should be told and made to realize that their services are more needed in the educational institutes. If they are not happy with the environment of work in these, adequate facilities should be provided in the workshops and the laboratories to create the right kind base for both training and research.

The Prime Minister has indicated that the government is at work to establish a new system of education—one that would have, in its entirety, a clear bias towards technical training. If this is an attempt, as it seems to be, to relate education to the process of development, the contents of the technical education itself and the nature of the bias towards a general kind of technical training will both have to be made clearly responsive to the demands of the developmental efforts currently being made in the country. If technicians are produced in excess of the number that the economy can profitably absorb, possibilities of their employment abroad have to be kept in view. Emphasis on acquisition of technical knowledge by all, some to a greater and others to a lesser degree, must also be balanced against the ability of the students to understand and appreciate deeper human values. A total and clear perspective is what the education process must endeavour to provide to the students.

The Prime Minister has also said that vocational training institutes would be set up in each thana of the country and that primary education too would have vocational components. The second would help universalization of primary education by reducing the opportunity cost of attending school, both by the adults and the children. The first would make a larger number of technically trained persons available to strengthen the developmental process, but then opportunities will have to be created to make the best possible use of their services and not to permit their talents to go waste by default.