

Ailing schools

The striking thing about the UNICEF sponsored study into the state of the primary education is that it does not reveal anything which was not apprehended before. It was generally guessed that the primary school enrolment rate was low and there was a high dropout among the students at this stage. The study has to be applauded on other counts. It has quantified first the number of children who are deprived of primary education every year and second, the rate of dropout. We now have a reasonably dependable basis on which to plan our future programmes in the primary education sector.

The serious quarter of the study consists of revelations about the lack of educational aids in the primary schools, particularly those in the rural areas. About 77 per cent of the rural primary schools do not possess text books for teachers' use. Again in most of these schools there is only one blackboard available for the use of more than 180 students. That in such impoverished conditions, the quality of education would be poor is hardly a matter of debate. But it is yet to be ascertained whether the poor standards are in way responsible for the dizzying dropout rates at the middle stage of the primary education. It has been stated in the report that the dropout rate of students from Class Two was 56 per cent in 1974. Roughly this would mean that out of ten children who enroll themselves in the primary schools, six do not stay to complete their studies. The drifters add to the 41 per cent of the total number of children of primary age group who receive no education.

One of the principal constraints in developing primary schools is financial. True, we have been able to save a sizable chunk of the budget allocations for other developmental sectors by not being too liberal in spending for primary education. If we are to produce quality manpower, educated and motivated to fulfil conscientiously the responsibilities of building up the nation, we will have to wake up to the fact that we must have a strong educational base. It is often pointless to spend more money for expansion of facilities for advanced studies keeping the base impoverished. For with a poor quality input from the primary schools the output at the advanced levels would not be any better. Perhaps it is now the question of choosing between the options of increased spending for a strong educational base and a weaker primary education with improved facilities for advanced studies. What our choice should be at the present stage of national development is obvious.