

FREE EDUCATION VS. REFORM

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1. I write to congratulate you on the splendid editorial under the above-mentioned caption in your issue Vol. 5 No. 3 which I have just received. Reading further on the same subject in Notes and Comments it is surprising to note that the reforms at the centre of the controversy are not clear to the general public, including even those who oppose them so passionately! Could there be any clearer demonstration of the disastrous effects that a ruined education system have had on all concerned? I understand that my old school, Royal College, now has an enrolment of 7,800 students, with each grade divided from "A" to "Q" and even so is burdened with enormous class sizes thus reducing the entire establishment to a shambles. What the education arrangements are in the remoter urban areas and, ultimately, in the villages does not bear thinking about.

2. The object of this letter is **not** to wallow in this quagmire of ruin but to look forward to even a distant glimmer of salvation. It will undoubtedly involve an exertion far more onerous than a climb to the summit of Mt. Everest but even such a superhuman effort must commence somewhere. The first, and overriding, necessity is **MONEY**.

3. Modern education is an extremely expensive thing. It is far more expensive than a modern medical system or a modern transport system both of which deal with relatively small numbers of the population (the sick in the former and the employed in the latter) whereas the school-going population comprises **all** in the age group 5 to 15. Modern schools need a carefully calibrated physical infrastructure and highly-trained, dedicated, well-remunerated and enthusiastic staff. They need a constant awareness of, and rigorous adherence to, world standards in every discipline. The **MONEY** required for such a system is to be quantified in **TRILLIONS** of rupees, not **BILLIONS**. In addition the **MONEY** requirement grows with every passing year and does not remain constant which

is why a serious engagement with the problem has to be commenced now, however daunting the prospect may seem.

4. Ruin is not static - it grows at exponential rates in a context of collapse. Though we rightly bemoan the disaster now evident, in 10 years time we may have to look back to today as golden age of advancement and enlightenment compared to what then exists. To hope for peace on the island, an even barely civilized environment and a modicum of prosperity for all the people is an idle and dangerous fantasy if the students now in the schools do not receive a modern education.

5. The only way in which even a beginning can be made in finding some of the **TRILLIONS** needed to save our children and ourselves is by ending the war and in diverting most of the money saved thereby to the education system. Undoubtedly this will provide only a few **BILLIONS** but there is no other means by which the barest of beginnings can be made. **Peace is an absolute necessity for the Sinhala people. The single all-island state is NOT an absolute necessity for the Sinhala people.** For the last 14 years the Sinhala people have lived on a divided island and have suffered no ill effect from that; it is the effort to restore the single all-island state which has cost them so dear in precious lives and the little treasure which they possess without any success of which permanence can be regarded as an attribute.

6. As is now so well known all over the world wherever nationalist guerilla wars of national secession are fought they are unwinnable in the conventional sense. They have been ended only by the emergence of a new state embodying the aspirations of the nation which has fought to rule itself in its own sovereign state. In Sri Lanka too that is the only way in which a permanent peace can be secured. It is the inescapable and only means by which the **MONEY** can be found for just beginning the long and arduous climb up the educational Everest that faces the Sinhala nation. ■

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