

অসম ... 07 MAY 1991
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The Bangladesh Observer

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Compulsory Education And Infrastructural Support

The cost of providing the additional number of class rooms needed for any ambitious plans for imparting compulsory education to all children in the primary age group by the year 2000 is estimated to be US\$ 700 million in our currency around Taka 2,450 crore. The number of school rooms are said to be in the region of 100,000 over and above the existing 130,000. The repair and maintenance of the older class rooms requires a separate fund.

The necessity for training an adequate number of teachers to cope with the influx must not be underestimated but existing facilities for this purpose are too inadequate and, if the percentage of female teachers is to be increased, totally lacking. At present the 53 Primary School Teacher Institutes (PTIs) have a potential for training 10,300 teachers a year, hardly a sufficient number for the estimated 20 million children between the ages of 5 to 9 years. And, if sufficient teachers are not forthcoming it will be extremely difficult to raise the percentage of those children who complete the course within the prescribed period of five years which at present is said to be only 14%.

And what of the administrative infrastructure? Do we have a sufficient number of trained and experienced inspectors to make certain standards are maintained for the success of the programme will lie in the ability to maintain a continuous assessment of the standard of teaching especially important in the far flung rural areas? Do we have the capability to provide the huge quantity of text-books even without accounting for loss or destruction? So far UNICEF has provided the paper for the text-book distribution scheme but with the expressed intent to phase this out within one or two years we shall be in need for alternative support schemes. Without the proper infrastructural support in place prior to the start of the programme it may be we are biting off more than we can chew.