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The Bangladesh Observer

তারিখ ... 12 JAN 1991 ...
 পৃষ্ঠা ... ৮ ... কলাম ... ৭ ...

Promoting Primary Education

Although in most of the middle income countries there was a sufficient number of primary schools by 1985 to accommodate almost all the children of the primary education age group in low income countries this was not so, and school capacity fell far short of the goal. In Bangladesh the number of primary school buildings numbering about 44,000 fall extremely short of requirement if targets for 90% enrolment by the year 2000 are to be met and estimates agree another 100,000 school class rooms need to be provided. Over a period of five years this means, somehow, 20,000 class rooms per year will have to be built.

Most of the schools are public schools built, financed and staffed by the government, but so far the small amount of money earmarked for education leaves very little for any capital expenditure such as new school construction. The percentage of the expenditure on education put aside for construction and repair of schools is probably not more than 12% of the budget. In order to make the government's programme for compulsory primary education a success the participation of local communities in the school building activity (by that we mean the actual physical construction process of building brick by brick the structure which will house our children) will be essential.

Those who can participate either by providing cash or by providing materials, or through proffering their own particular skill, perhaps as a mason or carpenter, should be persuaded by local leaders to build their own schools. There are many ways in which people can participate. Women can help by volunteering their services as teachers. A book drive can be held among the wealthier section of society are often wont to throw away at the end of the school year. Perhaps the scout movement could undertake this part of the drive. People in the villages with large enough trees could perhaps be persuaded to donate one old tree for the timber needed to make into furniture which would save on costs. If we want schooling for our children it will be up to us to support the efforts of the government in practical ways and not simply sit back and wait for it all to happen.