



A Case For Non-Government Primary Schools

Hundreds of non-government primary school teachers made their case amply known by staging a sit-in on the Kazi Nazrul Islam Road near the Sonargaon Hotel. The massive demonstration accompanied with hunger strike on the road led to a grid-lock of traffic all around the place, causing suffering to thousands under the scorching sun. It has become customary to draw attention to a cause by going all the way to force a large number of people who might have no connection with the issue, suffer for hours end. On that count, the non-government primary teachers have certainly not gone extra yards to demonstrate their strength and the legitimacy of their demands. The question is if the teachers had no other alternative to this strike programme. We do not know. But we feel that an academic issue such as this could be addressed academically by the authority concerned. The strike has been withdrawn after the Prime Minister's assurance to gradually fulfil their demands.

Why sit on issues for months and years and allow them to be dragged on to the Prime Minister's office. If the Prime Minister has to personally intervene in all matters, the basic principle of parliamentary system gets dented. The teachers demand that the registered primary schools be nationalised and the salary structure for teachers of those schools adjusted to the payroll of the government schools. No doubt, the demand merits consideration in light of the universal primary education goal the country has set for itself to achieve. But then one must be sure about the quality of education these registered primary schools are imparting. Registered schools are those which local people start and manage on their own and the government recognises the effort after fulfilment of certain conditions. In return for their service the teachers get a token amount from the government. One strong argument in their favour is that the schools have already qualified for government patronage, albeit in a limited way. To stimulate local initiative for expansion of primary education through setting up such schools may be good but this cannot be at the cost of quality.

Currently, even the government primary schools are not doing justice to their names,—let alone the schools set up with local initiative. Teachers of the registered schools are not trained, whereas the trained teachers of the government schools are increasingly proving unequal to the emerging challenges of the time. So, not many options are open to the policy-makers of education. We ask the authority concerned to analyse the issue in light of the new proposed education policy. Where do the registered primary schools exactly fit in? Admittedly, we need to reform our primary education system if we really want to have meaningful education for our young generation. The return on the investment in government primary schools is far from satisfactory. Any reform must try to ensure the best of return.

The teachers of registered primary schools have taken the advantage of a government move and they are not to blame for going the whole hog with their demands. It is not even a question of how much the government is ready to pay. The question might concern a policy that was wrong in the first place. Now the government either has to nationalise the schools under certain conditions or cancel their registration. The latter move will be politically injurious. No government will dare do this. In this situation reforming the primary education will become even more difficult. No piecemeal solution will take the national education programme to its desired destination. Yet the least the government can do is to salvage whatever little possible out of this chaotic situation. It would be wise to strictly set the rules for qualifying for the nationalised status and other comparable benefits. Even if any teacher fails to pass the test of a set standard, he must be made to go, no matter if he were one of the organisers of the institution. Such an undertaking must be there from the demonstrating teachers in return for possible fulfilment of their demands.