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Primary Education: The Primary Need For Socio-economic Development

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PRIMARY education, in Bangladesh, has its legacy with 'Wood's Despatch' in the British period in 1854. But, as the imperialist British governments were obsessed with selfish gains and attitude of exploitation, the education system could not grow in the pattern capable of deriving benefit of the people. The very attitude of the then education system was to create an elitist cum sycophant class giving priority to establish more colleges and universities rather than primary school. Government's resource constraints were shown as the cardinal deterrence on way of establishing primary schools. But this constraints could surely be overcome had there be no constraints of attitude. Non acceptance of the proposal of compulsory primary education raised by the politicians of the British India in the Imperial Legislative Council in 1912 is a brilliant example of the attitudinal crisis in then government. The proposal was discarded in 38-13 votes. But the sustained efforts of the politicians ultimately could result in passing the Bengal Primary Education Act 1919 and the Bengal (rural) Primary Education Act 1930. In these two bills to the government did not shoulder the responsibility rather the responsibility was thrown on Union Board and District School Board, much inadequate to fulfil the objective of universal primary education.

Independence of Bangladesh ushered in a new horizon in the expansion and promotion of primary education. Free and compulsory education has been guaranteed in the article 17 of the constitution. Article 17 reads, "The State shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of - (a) establishing a uniform, mass oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law" and the (c) reads, "removing

illiteracy within such a time as may be determined by law." In 1974 under the provision of Acquisition of Primary School Act, 36,105 existing managed, aided and non-aided primary schools had been taken by the government giving a retrospective effect from July 1973. During the First-Year Plan (EFYP), 1974-1978, more 500 primary schools were taken by the government under the same provision. One thousand more primary schools had been added during the Third Five Year Plan (TFYP), 1985-1990. Besides, this a few other primary schools were nationalised under revenue sector.

Recent creation of Primary Education Division under the direct control of the Prime Minister of the Republic reflects the firm political resolution of the present democratic government towards the programme. Primary Education Directorate, Compulsory Primary Education Project, Evaluation Cell, National Syllabus and Text Book Board, 53 Primary Teachers' Training Institutes and involvement of 78,448 primary schools in imparting primary education to the children of the country will go a long way to remove illiteracy. The statistics shows that there is a primary school or kindergarten school or iftedaii madrasa for every 2 square kilometre of area and otherwise for every 1500 people.

Of course, the number of primary school (78,448) includes, government primary schools (37,733) registered private primary schools (8,830), waiting for registration private primary schools (4,688), primary schools in secondary schools (2,583), kindergarten (2,500), iftedaii in higher madrashahs (6,086) and independent iftedaii (16,028). Recently published Statistical Year book of Bangladesh 92 recorded the number of government primary school to be 48,148 as on 1991 which

means the total number of primary educational institution has gone up to 88,855 at the latest.

According to the information of Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics eligible for primary school, 6-10 years age group children counts at one crore 52 lakh 85 thousand presently. By 2000 A.D. it is expected to rise to one crore 69 lakh 12 thousand. If all children are brought under the compulsory primary education, present per school average student will be 200 and 2000 A.D. the average will stand at 220.

Teacher and pupil ratio is another key indicator to be taken into consideration. As per World Bank statistics the teacher-student ratio in Bangladesh was 1:45 in 1965 and in 1987 it became 1:48. Recent statistics of the Education Ministry shows that in 1990 teacher-student ratio stands at 1:63. If we compare this figure with some of the countries of ESCAP region our position will be clear. Taking 1987 as base year teacher student ratio in Australia it is 17, Republic of Korea 37, Malaysia 22, Vietnam 34, Afghanistan 34.5, Iran 39, Nepal 35, Pakistan 41, Sri Lanka 32 and Myanmar 15.

Drop-out before reaching the fifth year in primary education tier is a serious deterrence to the progress and success of the programmes. As per the recent study of the 1990 the percentage of dropouts in class-I is 19.3, Class-II- 12.0, Class-III- 15.6, Class-IV- 15.8 and Class-V- 11.0, against 13.50, 9.20, 13.50, 12.70 and 14.25 respectively in 1989.

With whatever existing facilities we have, both infrastructural, logistics and personnel, in the primary level, according to World Bank statistics (1987) educational participation level in Bangladesh was at 59 compared to 49 in 1965. That is in the last 28 years we made a progress of only 10 per cent. Taking 1987 as base

year Primary level educational participation in Australia 99 per cent, Japan 100, New Zealand 106, Hong Kong 103, Republic of Korea 101, Singapore 105, China 132, India 98, Indonesia 118, Malaysia 102, Philippines 106, Thailand 95, Vietnam 102, Bhutan 24, Iran 114, Nepal 82, Pakistan 52, Sri Lanka 104 and Papua New Guinea 70, per cent. Among all the countries our position is above Pakistan and Bhutan only. So we have a lot to do to bring the entire age group into the stream of universal primary education. Again as per the TFYP document in percentage of the age cohort went upto 78.2 in primary education in 1990.

Accordingly, the government has decided to implement compulsory primary education in phases starting from January 1991. First, all children belonging to age cohort who are eligible for enrolment in class-I in 1991 will be brought under the programme. Then the whole programme will be phased in class II, III, IV and V in 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1995 respectively. In this gradual and phased manner the country will be covered by Universal Primary Education (UPE) by the year 2000. The immediate objective is 10 per cent coverage in each year and 50 per cent in 1995.

To fulfil this objectives basic strategies are optimum utilization of existing facilities including starting double shifts rather than establishing new class rooms in existing schools, and consequent on the growth of population in most of the facilities will enable an average enrolment close to 50 per class or 250 for a fullfledged primary school to be maintained or the new schools to be set up during TFYP period. Satellite schools for pupils of class I and II, affiliates to nearby primary schools will be established.

(To be continued)