

59

50

The Bangladesh Times

PRIMARY EDUCATION

Often likened to the backbone of a country, education has been considered vital for individual as well as national uplift. In a least developed country like ours the crucial importance of primary education cannot be overemphasised. Education at this level enables a student to acquire the essential minimum of knowledge about the world around so that he or she can be a better informed and more conscious person. Here comes the question as to why should not all be given the opportunity to get instruction. Such an argument is morally tenable but impossible to implement in our situation. Hence, though the goal has been to impart primary education to all the people, it continues to be an unfulfilled dream.

That the state of this sector has been far from satisfactory is evident from a recent news item. According to the report 2.5 lakh children are deprived of primary education in Chandpur. 939 government and non-government primary schools in seven upazilas of the zila have been facing manifold problems for a long time. There are six lakh children of school-going age there and of them 3,50,000 are able to attend classes while the rest 2,50,000 are deprived of education. Shortage of teachers has been ascribed to this sorry state: there are 3950 sanctioned posts of teachers of which 200 are lying vacant. As the school buildings constructed during the pre-liberation period and some even during the British rule obviously they bear the marks of time. These are now in a dilapidated state and some are really on the verge of collapse. Some schools have no doors and windows. Of course there are some new school buildings but these are far too few. If we take the Chandpur report for a random sample then the overall situation of this sector would not seem bright.

Not to speak of advanced nations of the world, even the newly industrialising countries of Asia laid emphasis on educating the masses which policy has stood them in good stead—Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong have taken off economically. Besides, the problem of overpopulation also stands tackled in these countries. Identified as the number one national problem, population explosion is the single biggest threat to our well-being. The high rate of demographic growth most unfavourably influences the socio-economic development of the country. It is common knowledge that primary education can produce better conscious mothers who can help limit family size.

It is heartening that preparation for setting up a separate ministry for primary education is afoot and Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia herself will be in charge of it. This would indeed be a welcome step in this country where literacy rate is only 25 per cent. Illiteracy is a bar to national progress and only a literacy drive through primary education could rid the nation of this scourge. Now that a separate ministry for this purpose is going to be set up one may expect more attention to this sector.

Observers feel that the establishment of the proposed ministry alone will not be enough to remove the snags and lapses the sector is beset with. Attention to the lack of physical facilities should also be given in right earnest for reaching the goal.