

EDUCATING THE YOUNG

The rush of admission seekers in the city schools is increasing, from year to year. The schools with comparatively better results find the situation particularly difficult. There are around 650 schools in the city—roughly half of them primary and the rest secondary. However, most of the secondary schools have primary section. Even after the capacity of these schools are fully stretched some two hundred thousand children of school-going age remain unregistered. This obviously gives occasion for undesirable practices. It is a common knowledge that admissions are sometimes bought by donations of large sums to the school funds or exerting influences otherwise.

If concessions are made for the usual urban-rural disparity, the picture beyond the metropolis would not appear much different. But the problem is not confined to physical facilities alone, it extends to curricula, teaching staff, motivation and a number of other socio-economic factors. These problems obviously came to the fore at a recent-Bangladesh Literacy Society organised seminar on Education for All by the Year 2000.

There is a growing concern, both national and international, for spread of primary education. Indeed a programme for universalisation of primary education has been under implementation in the country since 1981. The current Fourth Five Year Plan also embodies a Taka 1100 crore project to this end. Besides legislations have also been adopted making primary education compulsory. It must, however, be appreciated that this would mean an increase of some 40 lakh to the existing one crore and 14 lakhs on the rolls of the country's primary schools. To accommodate the additional number there has to be some 5000 new schools. It was envisaged that the funds for housing schools to that extent of about half the number would be arranged locally under the Compulsory Primary Education (CPE) programme while the World Bank and other multilateral agencies would finance construction of the rest.

The problem of accommodation is being addressed by introducing second shift in the government schools. Already 22 schools—10 in Dhaka city and 12 in former district towns—are running double shifts. The number would rise to 62 from this session with the introduction of second shifts in 8 schools in the metropolis and 32 in former district towns. The programme would certainly benefit the more densely populated urban centres but the provision for teachers has to be made without delay. It was earlier stipulated that the teachers of the existing schools would be paid honorarium for teaching in the additional shifts.

The government has decided to remunerate four eligible teachers of all registered non-government primary schools at the rate of Taka 500 each per month from the beginning of this year. A system for close monitoring of the attendance of the teachers and performance of the schools should also be introduced for ensuring better academic achievement.

The curricula too need to be updated. The National Curriculum Committee headed by Prof. Zillur Rahman Siddiqui reportedly recommended a package of measures for the overall development of education in the country. The green signal for implementation of the same may come from the next elected government. Meanwhile Prof. Rahman who is now holding charge of Education as Presidential Adviser proposed at a seminar compilation of up-to-date text books for students right from the lower to the higher levels and taking initiative of proper training for the teachers of science and technology.

The constraints for universal primary education are many—resource, manpower, and above all motivation. But it would be worthwhile to make concerted efforts to realise the objectives in view of the crucial impact it may have in all the other development spheres.

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