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**NEWAGE**

## Madrassah candidates up, school ones drop

Staff Correspondent | Updated at 12:57am on November 15, 2019



State minister for primary and mass education Zakir Hossain addresses a press conference at his office in Dhaka on Thursday, November 14, 2019. — Shahin Akhter

The number of candidates from the madrassahs has increased while that from the general schools decreased in the primary education completion examination scheduled to begin on Sunday.

State minister for primary and mass education Md Zakir Hossain at a press briefing at the ministry on Thursday said that 3,50,371 students from ibtedayee madrassahs would seat for the examination.

The number of madrassah candidates this year is 30,983 more than that in the last year.

On the other hand, 25,53,267 candidates from different types of schools would sit for the examination.

They are 2,23,615 less in number than the previous year, the minister informed.

The minister disclosed that the government was working to upgrade the status of the government primary school teachers.

Meanwhile, data of the Directorate of Primary Education, which conducts the PEC examination, shows a gradual rise in the number of madrasah examinees against a continuous fall in the number from the general-education schools.

In the 2018 PEC examination, there were 3,19,388 madrasah candidates, 25,007 more than registered for the 2017 examination.

But the number of general candidates registered for the 2018 PEC examination was 27,76,882, which was 29,214 less than the 2017 general candidates.

Zakir claimed that the number of general-school candidates declined for the fall of the country's population growth rate.

According to DPE director general AFM Manzur Quadir at the briefing, those who are sending their children to madrasahs are mostly from rural areas where the population growth rate is higher compared to the urban areas where people mostly prefer general schools.

According to the Population Census Monitoring Cell of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the population growth rate in the country was 1.33 per cent in 2018.

But, the state minister, the director general or the primary education ministry secretary, Akram-Al-Hossain, could not say why people were preferring madrasahs while the government primary schools provided various incentives.

The government schools provide free education, free textbooks and free uniforms, a Tk-100 stipend to each student, and midday meals in selected schools.

The state minister, however, claimed that the total number of female candidates in the 2019 PEC examinations was 1,66,874 more than the male students of schools and madrasahs in total.

The number of disabled children from the schools to appear at this year's examination is 3,347 while that from the madrasahs 236, he disclosed.

The total number of examination centres for this year's PEC examination, he said, is 7,470 – 7,458 inside the country and 12 in eight foreign countries which are Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Greece, Libya and Qatar.

He further said that all the question papers had been printed and distributed to the authorities concerned.

Vigilance teams comprising officials of the ministry and the DPE directorate have been formed to monitor examination centres, he went on.

Besides, the deputy commissioners, superintendents of police, upazila nirbahi officers and district primary education officers have been requested for taking special measures to ensure a normal law and order situation during the examination, Zakir said.

The government introduced the primary education completion examination in 2010 following advocacy by some NGOs.

But, over the years the examination has earned criticisms from educationists and the civil society on the plea that the pressure of this public examination hampers normal growth and other aspects of the children.