

Rural primary schools

Anybody who has trekked by a village primary school, in a remote, forlorn part of the country, may have been impressed by the litany of lessons reverberating through the tranquil rural surroundings. But all the rest of it must have saddened him—the peeling off thatched roof or the potholed tin-shed, the gaping sides and the ramshackle seating arrangement of the interior. The lone teacher in that apology of a school may not necessarily be the trained one to impart the elementary education. Moreover, with his overlapping daily chores, as a local soul tied to farming and sundry other interests, he may play truant like some of his taught coming to the school leisurely or leaving it too early for the day. He would not like to be blamed for the indiscretion. For he is routinely at pains to collect a pittance of a salary for work at that private school.

The fact that such tiny make-shift schools are there attests to the love for education in the countryside and highlights the impelling necessity to upgrade their conditions.

Against this backdrop, the government's plan to bring within its fold one thousand private primary schools in the rural areas during the current fiscal year is welcome. It has been reported that at least two primary schools in each of the 460 upazilas will be nationalised. The idea is to have a government-managed school for a population of two thousand within a radius of two square miles. Schools on 52 decimals of land and having at least 200 students will qualify for the take-over. These criteria may leave out the smaller ones which could be numerically considerable.

The government is going to take charge of such a large number of private primary schools, for the first time, since 1974. There are already as many as 37000 government primary schools. Initially the services of the teachers and staff were nationalised only, they being placed on the pay roll of the government. Subsequently, the Education Ministry undertook to raise buildings on the sites and supplied the rebuilt institutions with teaching and other aids, apart from free books—in phases. Assistance mainly from the UNICEF and the Sweden has strengthened the government's hands to refurbish the schools. This process of improving the conditions of the schools must be quickened. After all, we are taking on the additional task of equipping one thousand more schools adequately in the current fiscal year.

The 7000 primary schools that remain outside the pale of nationalisation will be receiving government grants in phases. Last year teachers of 600 non-government primary schools had a salary support from the government. Furthermore, a list of 2100 schools has been drawn up for awarding government grants and salary support. Lovers of education in the community with surplus money should come forward to patronise the cause of literacy through the rural primary schools.

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