

Primary education issues

The Ministry of Education has recently taken over fourteen private primary schools spread over as many as twelve districts. Obviously, if the schools had run well there would not have been any need for this step. In fact, this particular measure has included the abolition of the existing management committees that did not understandably give a good account of themselves.

Instances of mismanagement in privately-run schools can be multiplied. There are good reasons to believe that once under government control these do not only find themselves upgraded but they also fall into a system to be able to function better. But again there is nothing to be euphoric about the take overs. For, even the education directorate-operated primary schools in the outlying areas have often made sordid news for the way these underperformed. The point we seek to make is, merely taking on the management responsibility will not suffice by itself, there needs to be a world of change in educational administration at the local levels.

If the state of affairs at the primary schools in townships are in such jeopardy, it is only imaginable what it would be like at the remote mufassil schools. The latter category of schools have occasionally highlighted the abysmal neglect these have fallen prey to. The Education Policy envisages there must be at least 40 students to a teacher, but most of the rural schools would fall far short of that standard requirement. Resultantly poorly qualified teachers with push and pull in local influence coteries sometimes come along to fill in the gap and some of them are habitual absentees showing up at an appropriate time and place to pick up their monthly salaries though. One trekking to a remote village will invariably have one's ears full with a refrain of localised public complaints about irregularities in teacher attendance. In some instances, teachers may not have got regularly paid for months. Apart from this shortcoming, some management committees, tend to be chronically conflict-ridden and corruption-prone. These flaws coupled with a lack of the usual teaching tools in many of the rural schools seriously impede their working for any truly useful purpose.

Whatever factors stand in the way of imparting appropriate primary education must be faced and done away with. The government is keen on a dispersal of facilities away from its present-day urban confinement into the countryside. We cannot afford to take any chances with education at this bottom tier which provides basic foundations to our children for higher education, or for gainful activities since school leavers in our context have been huge in number. So, the numbers we reach with the facilities to serve assume critical importance for the future of the nation.

The streamlining of educational administration specially as regards the rural schools brooks no delay if we are to bridge their performance gaps with the city schools. While new audio-visual equipment are around the corner for the sake of city children must their rural counterparts languish in the back waters? They must be helped to do the catching up, and fast.

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