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Primary education scene

Educational planning is considered to be a strategic policy issue in the development planning of many a developing country like Bangladesh. The development of enrolment in the educational system for achieving total participation of school-age population in education, therefore, is very much interrelated with socio-economic progress. Availability of upto-date statistics and continual review of the state of affairs in the domain of education, especially primary education, are thus matters of top priority.

The Ministry of Finance in its latest issue of Bangladesh Economic Survey has come up with some vitally important statistics pertaining to the educational scenario. The number of students in all categories of educational institutions rose during the year 1983-84. The number of educational institutions, too, increased in most cases, except for primary education where the number of schools declined by 557 in a matter of one year. The survey further brings to light the fact that the student-teacher ratio for primary schools in the country now stood at 52:1.

The only improvement appears to be that the enrolment in primary schools of the country last year rose by one lakh 74 thousand. But this is negligible compared to the size of the primary school-age population (5 to 9 years) in the country, which, according to a survey made in 1978, was of the order of one crore 50 lakh.

According to another study on the state of primary education in Bangladesh, made by now-defunct National Foundation for Research on Human Resource Development (NFRHRD), back in 1980, there was just 0.74 primary school per square mile in Bangladesh. The same study showed that there were 2.73 schools per 1000 school-age population in rural areas, 1.03 in Dhaka city and 2.60 in other urban areas of the country.

The findings of the NFRHRD study further showed that about 80 per cent of the primary school students dropped out before reaching the final year (class V); nearly 50 per cent students did the same before reaching class II. The net output of total enrolments in rural schools turned out to be just about six per cent.

The statistics undoubtedly indicate that primary education should unquestionably receive the priority treatment it deserved, if universal literacy is to be achieved in the country soon enough. This, however, is not the sole responsibility of the government. Popular participation holds an important answer to the problem of increasing enrolment, ensuring better attendance in schools and reducing the number of dropouts, improving the standard of teaching, as well as, achieving better management of schools. What the government can do is to engage experts for finding out ways and means for achieving the desired level of popular participation for improving the state of primary education.