

Education in the Metropolis-I

No schools for 100,000 children

By Mostafa Kamal

About one lakh primary school-age children out of more than three lakh in Dacca city have no formal schooling at all.

The rate of drop-out of primary school students in the city is also quite high. About 60,000 of children, who enter into primary schools fail to make their ways to high schools.

A fortnight-long random survey of primary schools in the city conducted by the times shows that lack of a proper strategy to meet the education need of an ever increasing population has led to disparate developments in the growth of schools in the capital. As such no uniformity can be found among the primary schools of the city as far as physical and other academic facilities are concerned.

Even conservative estimates (based on the 1974 census) suggest that the population of Dacca city is over 20 lakh now including over three lakh primary school-age (5 to 9 years) children.

At present there are only 317 Government primary schools in the city which accommodate slightly more than 1.20 lakh children. About 80 thousand others are admitted to the privately-managed primary schools or attached primary sections of high schools. Most of these schools are overcrowded with more than 400 children in each school.

FEW SCHOOLS ARE WELL-EQUIPPED

Well-equipped primary schools are few. Only about

125 Government primary schools have buildings spacious enough to take all classes in a single shift. Again most of the schools do not have enough teachers to introduce double shifts.

There has been almost no initiative to set up fully equipped Government primary schools in the city for years and this has led to mushroom growth of commercially-oriented schools in the city. At present five categories of primary schools are found in the capital, namely, kindergartens (about 40) privately-managed primary schools charging high fees and tolerable fees (55), attached primary sections of high schools (about 70) and the Government primary schools.

Historically all of the Government primary schools were first initiated by inhabitants of respective areas. They donated land and built houses for such schools which were later nationalised by the Government. With the sudden rise in price of land in the city such initiatives have practically stopped by now.

Under the existing arrangement, Government does not buy land to set up schools and as

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such establishment of new Government schools in the city have come to a halt, a Dacca District Education Office source told the Times.

The Thana Education Officer of Lalbagh said that in the absence of central planning in setting up of Government schools in the city proper geographical distribution of primary schools were not ensured. He said that at present as many as four Government primary schools could be found within a radius of a half mile in some places while no such schools could be found even within the radius of a mile in some other places.

BETTER FACILITIES

Almost all of the kindergartens and privately managed primary schools on the other hand are housed in rented buildings. These institutions charge tuition fees ranging from Tk 25 to Tk 100 per month from each student to meet all expenses including salaries of teachers. These schools admit limited number of students and offer better facilities to students compared to the Government primary schools. Performance of students of the privately managed primary schools are also better compared to those controlled by the Government which trail behind with limited facilities. Only people of higher income bracket can afford to send their children to kindergartens and privately managed high schools. Thus disparate development of schools in the city is contributing to widening of difference between people of upper and lower classes the District Education Officer of Dacca said.

With a view to arresting this trend the Education Authorities had instructed the managements of all privately managed schools to get their institutions registered. The measure was supposed to weed out the commercially-based schools which did not fulfil the required pre-conditions. It is, however, gathered that most of such schools had escaped compliance to the directive by stating that their

institutions were not full-fledged schools but tutorial classes.

Meanwhile, the drop-out rate in the city's Government primary schools is high. Most of the schools have twice as much students in class I compared to those in class V. For example, the Ideal Primary School has a roll strength of 100 students in class I and only 50 in class V. Paltan Nidhi Smriti Primary School has 58 students in class I and only 27 students in class V while Motijheel Government Primary School had 200 and 100 students in classes I and V respectively.