



Schooling problem in Metropolitan Dhaka

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A city dweller said on Monday, he was facing nerve-wrecking anxiety in his mind as he was awaiting the results of the admission test of his daughter in a city school. Asked why, he said, "don't you understand what uncertainties will befall me if my daughter does not find a place in the school?" If the girl do not pass the examination, her father would have to look for some other school for her admission.

But the schools which are considered 'standard' and suitable for admission of children by guardians are a few in the metropolis. "Do you have a school-going child," asked one guardian to add. "You cannot understand the problem if you don't have one."

One would naturally ask, what has gone wrong with the state of the city. Has Dhaka's population grown beyond the size it can hold, shelter, educate and socialise? Perhaps nobody would deny that this is exactly the situation in

case of children who needs to be educated.

If this is the situation, the second question would be, had the planners of Dhaka city failed to foresee that a rapidly expanding city also needed to prepare itself to provide even the minimum civic rights and amenities. Education, it is said, is the birth right of a citizen.

The problem of admitting children to schools in Dhaka city is by no means a new one. It began to be felt from the early seventies when Dhaka turned into the capital of our young nation. Its size is growing at accelerated pace ever since and by now, even conservative estimates suggest, the city has a populations of four million.

Due to lack of a systematic approach to make the city keep pace of with such a rapid expansion, the problem of education, specially for children has now become so acute. The new city areas that have developed over the years do not have space to have public educational institutions.

A survey conducted earlier by the Times showed that out of about 350 government primary schools and over 150 secondary schools (both government and non-government) in the metropolis, only about 40 are considered 'standard' by guardians. These schools have adequate physical and academic facilities, and their candidates do better at the Secondary School Certificate examinations.

But these schools are located in certain pockets in the city. The preferred schools are in parts of Kotwali and Sutrapur thana areas, and pockets like Motijheel, Siddheshwari, New Market, Azimpur, Tejgaon and Muhammadpur. Children living in all other parts of the metropolis thus crowd for places in these schools centred in

a few areas. Thus two factors contribute to the problem of children's education in the metropolis. These are (a) good or "standard" schools are very few in number compared to the demand and (b) the better-known and preferred schools are unevenly distributed. The second problem again creates yet another problem for guardians who have to shuttle their wards to and from distant schools.

An educational administrator told the Times that the planners of Dhaka city appeared to have given lesser importance to make provision for schools and colleges when new residential areas were developed. The problem was more acute in areas that have grown up in an unplanned way.

Taking the advantage of this gap between the demand for education and the availability facilities hundreds of kindergartens have sprung up in Dhaka city. According to one estimate the number of such kindergartens, run on a profit basis, is over 400 now. The kindergarten differ widely in their methods as well as standards of instructions. Some even consider admission of wards to kindergartens, which change higher tuition fees status symbol. Schools, both government and private managed, also differ in standards of instruction. Thus, there exists no uniform school education in the metropolis.

For the past one decade the education authorities are bypassing their responsibilities in this regard just by fixing dates of admission test in the schools of the city at the beginning of each academic years. It appears that a full fledged survey of the schools and the growing demand for education in the metropolis needs to be undertaken on an urgent basis for finding a durable solution to the schooling problem, otherwise it would continue to worsen.