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## The Bangladesh Times

### OUR PRIMARY EDUCATION

It is reported that a Task-force has been organised for looking into the present situation of primary education in all its details and for suggesting the solution of the problems therein. It seems that this is a highly desirable step taken by the govt. Though primary education has since been made compulsory it still remains a neglected sector of our national life. If the primary schools of our villages were operating properly, there would have been no problem about the educational progress of our rural areas. Although we would still say that the government has to do more than it is doing for promoting primary education, its efforts are by no means negligible. The shocking thing is that the rural primary schools are suffering from inadequate functioning. Most of the question of the functioning of our primary education system concerns teachers. If they become more active and hardworking, their students can learn much better and the nation can overcome many problems which are hindering socio-economic progress. Agriculture, health, family planning and most other sectors of national development can be promoted much more effectively with the universalization of primary education. In contrast with almost a 100 per cent adult literacy in developed countries, we have only about 25 per cent.

If we consider the enrolment of the children of the primary school going age, we notice that we have no more than 70 per cent, in contrast with a cent per cent enrolment in developed countries. Even some underdeveloped countries have made a remarkable progress in this matter. India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, China and Egypt are among them. All these countries achieved most of their progress in primary education during the last 30 years. During this period, our socio-economic progress has been very slow, while the rest of the world progressed very fast.

The condition of our primary education remains deplorable in spite of the spending of public funds for them having increased several times during the last 30 years. If we consider the situation obtaining in our country half-a-century ago, we cannot fail to recognise that the government's spending of funds and all other efforts for promoting primary education have been substantially increased since that time. It all started with the provision of free primary education under the initiative of the late A.K.Fazlul Haq when he was the Chief Minister of Bengal which was a province of British India.

Indeed a silent revolution took place in this part of the sub-continent with the introduction of free primary education and the introduction of the Debt Settlement Boards by the government under the leadership of that great personality. While the Debt Settlement Boards freed the poor cultivators of our country from the heavy burden of their indebtedness, the system of free primary education made the access of the children of these poor people to education possible. A veritable silent revolution was thus initiated in this part of the subcontinent. This fact was made clear when the election of 1946 took place and the people voted for what they wanted, namely independence in a homeland.

After 45 years since the end of British rule, we are still lagging behind most other nations of Asia in the matter of education. Our literacy level remains low and the enrolment of our school-age population remains rather low too. It is high time to wake up and look around. It is inevitable that we shall be dominated by others if we fail to ensure development for ourselves. Educational progress—particularly at the primary level—does not require a lot of funds to be spent or a lot of foreign exchanges. Let us, therefore, ensure that the facilities for primary education are utilised by the people, particularly the poor among them. The impact of what is known as VOC (Value of Children, which means the idea that children are considered to be an economic asset by parents who are poor and illiterate or near-illiterate) should be overcome and the necessary publicity for the purpose has to be ensured. Possibly an adequate school lunch programme would be helpful too.

An adequate supervision of primary schools by committees and officials would possibly ensure better instruction in these schools. In the cities, education has already become something of a commercial matter. The KG schools are run by private parties trying to make money out of them. It seems that the government has to take some responsibility about them. There should be some rules about the rates of fees charged from students and the remuneration allowed to the teachers there. We understand that teachers in many of these private educational institutions are not well-paid, although the fees extracted from students there are quite high. Let us see our government be active in this matter for ensuring justice to the teachers there. The reading materials used there need close supervision too. While the government-run primary schools use the publications of the Textbook Board, the many private institutions do not. We would expect our government look into what they use, and ensure that proper materials for the education of children are used in the private schools.