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The State Of Primary Education In Bangladesh

It is several months since the government formally launched the programme of universal primary education, which in addition to being universal was also to be compulsory. In effect, it meant rounding up all small children who might be found roaming about or helping their parents in work.

The programme was ambitious. There was much to be said for it as an ideal.

But many felt when the programme's commencement was announced with much fanfare that it might prove extremely difficult to implement. Some of the critics warned against the cynicism that might set in when it would be found inevitably that the goal of universal education had not been attained by the set date, the year 2000.

The difficulties in the way of the goal's realisation are twofold. First, there is an acute dearth of teachers and teaching materials, no money for school buildings and equipment and text-books. Secondly, many poor parents are reluctant to spare their children for education when they can help them in agricultural work or tending cattle.

The enthusiastic planners do not appear to have taken these factors carefully into account in insisting that the goal of universal literacy has to be attained in just about eight years!

The reports which have begun to come in during the last few months reveal that progress has been slow. There are hundreds of schools without teachers or with an utterly inadequate number of teachers; and there are many others without a home, benches or chairs, blackboards and such other tools as even the barest programme of primary education calls for.

We do not think these problems and deficiencies daily brought to light in the press are receiving the care and attention they deserve. On the contrary, instead of concentrating our limited resources on primary education at the moment, we are also trying, undoubtedly with the best of motives, to expand facilities for higher education, financing more colleges. It needs to be realised that it is the quality of primary education which in the long run determines the quality of higher education. This fact is not always appreciated by the planners, with results which may prove disastrous.