

Yet more pointer to ruling elite's apathy to public education

STATE-run educational institutions in general and those providing primary education in particular have been subjected to increasing indifference on the part of the government over the past decades. As such, primary schools in the public sector have generally lagged behind their private-sector counterparts, especially, in terms of providing quality education. Not only the affluent sections of society, even middle-income families increasingly prefer private schools for their children's education. It may thus be inferred that government primary schools currently cater largely to the education needs of poor and low-income families. However, successive governments, including the incumbent Awami League-led administration, have displayed sustained apathy to the interest of the poor and low-income people, which, suffice it to say, has also manifested in the gradual decline in the quality of education in public schools. Such indifference-induced negligence has also taken tolls on these schools' physical infrastructure even. While they lack adequate teachers and classrooms and other logistic support, allegations have it that teachers available there more often than not become truant in the absence of monitoring on the part of the relevant government agencies. That apart, land of different government primary schools located in different parts of the capital Dhaka has fallen victim to pervasive encroachment over the years leaving the students with little or no space for classroom learning and morning assemblies.

According to a New Age report on Sunday, land of these schools is now 'in possession of slums, the Water Supply and Sewerage Authority, social welfare organisations, mosques, non-government high schools, private law colleges, clubs, community centres, land donors, and local thugs'. And all this occurred under the nose of the government agencies concerned, including the primary education directorate, tasked with the duty to look after these institutions. Intriguingly still, the directorate reportedly does not have any data on this issue. Of course, the Dhaka district primary education office provided New Age on January 23 with information of encroachment on 29 schools' land although it has a total of 295 primary government schools under its jurisdiction.

The government needs to realise that its failure to address the situation at hand not only undermines the constitution that ordains it to establish 'a universal, mass-oriented and uniform system of education' in the country but also defies its election pledge to rid the country of the curse of illiteracy by 2017.