

Schooling gets costly for the poor

Corruption is to blame

THOUGH in theory education at primary level is free, in practice it is not so, especially for children from poorer households in rural Bangladesh. And the poor parents have to pay bribe at every step of their children's schooling, from admission to getting books to being awarded stipends to collecting the stipend money. And in the process, they may end up spending up to 61 per cent of their savings just to pay bribes to a section of corrupt officials in the school administration.

Paradoxically though, the richer parents may not have to pay such bribe simply because they are less vulnerable to the bribe culture, if only due to their social clout. This picture about the state of the so-called free primary education came out from a paper based on a survey conducted among a large number of poor households in the rural areas by Brac. It has been further revealed through the paper that this corrupt practice of extorting the poorer parents of schoolchildren prevails among about half of the government primary schools in the country.

This is no doubt a stunning revelation about how corruption in the education sector is making education discriminatory and forbidding for children from poorer social backgrounds. There is no question of any government official's being surprised at this revelation, since all this could not have happened without the knowledge of the administration, especially the education ministry.

The authorities concerned must accept fact and take urgent steps to root out corruption in the primary education sector, if only to prevent children from poorer social backgrounds from being dropped out of schools.