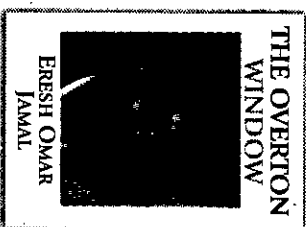


# Schools we send our children to



**No renovation or repair work had been done to the building since being constructed 20 years ago. And no alternative arrangement has been thought of since the Primary Education Office issued its warning.**

AN you imagine the horror school children of a government primary school in Sadar upazila faced when debris started to fall on them in the middle of their studies? Neither can we. The incident injured at least four young children who belonged only to the second grade. As frightening as that is, luckily, no one was killed as that could easily have been the case.

Shockingly though, the government school had already been declared unfit for use by the district Primary Education Office. Yet, not only were classes ongoing in that hazardous place, especially for young children, but the school authorities didn't even bat an eye to the warning, let alone attempt to address the issue.

No renovation or repair work had been done to the building since being constructed 20 years ago. And no alternative arrangement has been thought of since the Primary Education Office issued its warning. Worse still, the school where this recent accident occurred happens only to be one out of a whole list of hazardous schools according to the Primary Education Office. Having come to know about just this one, one can only wonder what the situation is in the rest. According to reports last year, for example, the Education Minister had said in the Parliament that "the number of educational institutions with buildings needed to be renovated is 10,960".

Meanwhile, it is true that the school authorities, having failed to heed the warning themselves were gravely irresponsible and that their negligence had criminally endangered the lives of young children. But is it fair to blame them only? Having issued the warning, what steps did the state authorities take? Is it not the responsibility of the state, especially when the school is government run, to go that extra mile to ensure a safe environment for children?

Article 17 of our Constitution says that all children in our country are supposed to receive full free education up to the secondary level. We regularly harp on the fact that many children are still being denied that right. But what I want to ask is what type of education do we plan on providing in school buildings that are unfit for use by anyone for anything, let alone for school children to study in? Because by the looks of things, clearly we have not asked ourselves that question before sending our children to the rickety schools all across the country.

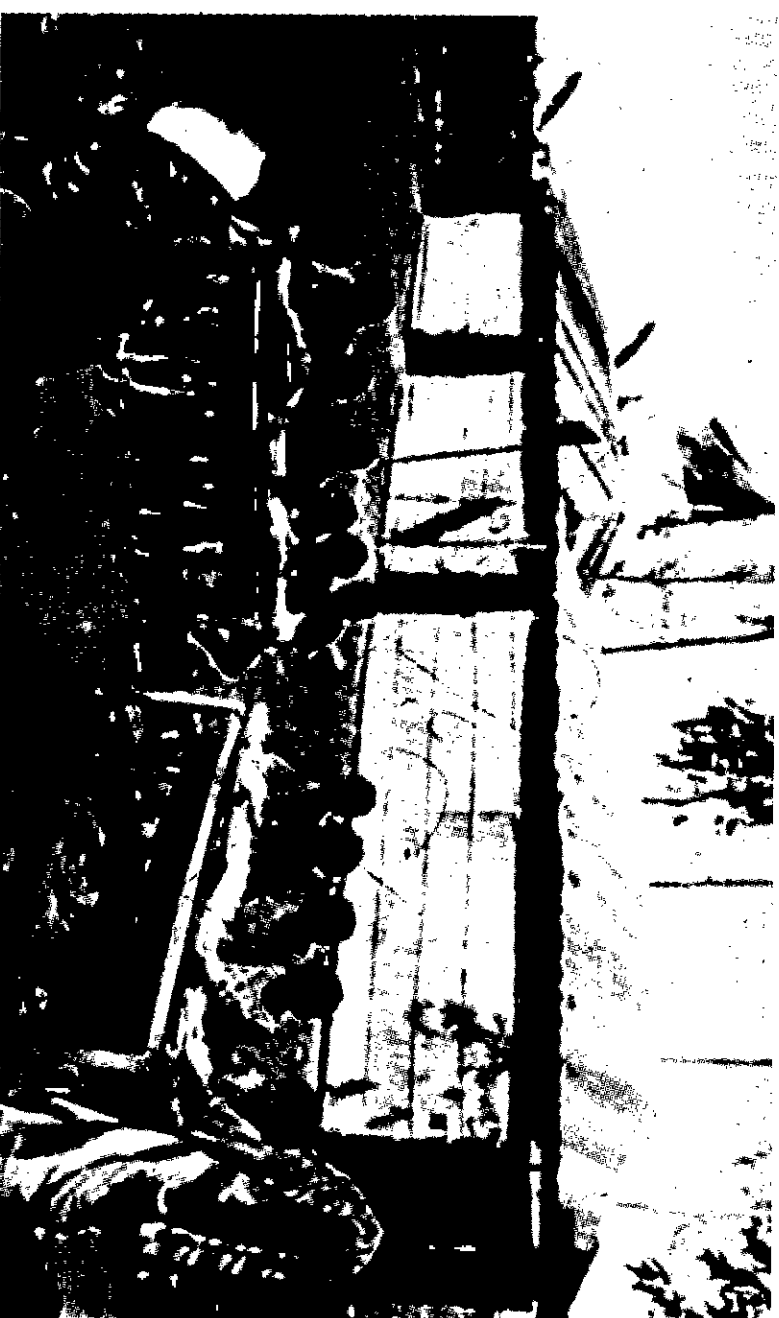
Furthermore, what are we trying to instill in young children when the roof above their heads in their classrooms fall and injure them? Is it fear? If it is that, then we are undoubtedly succeeding. Down the path we are pursuing, however, what we will fail to achieve is build schools where children can expand their horizon in a 'safe' environment. A failure particularly exemplified by the state.

And it is precisely this nonchalant attitude of the state authorities that is allowing schools across the country to function under such atrocious conditions. As *The Daily Star* had only

recently reported, 38 government primary schools in Nilphamari were found to be in such decrepit conditions, that some had even lacked the most basic necessities, including walls. And without walls to prevent nearby animals from entering

preparing students for their lives. And the biggest problem with our primary education is that it "lacks imagination and the joy of learning" (Are we running out of thought leaders?, *The Daily Star*, October 3). Well, amidst urine and excrement,

also badly need to have), we must take a long and hard look at the environment in which we are seeking to provide that education in. Because if we do, we will, at the very least, be shocked, if not horrified. And perhaps it is that jolt of shock and



**Students of Gabrol Deeparpar Dolapara Government Primary School in Jaladhaka upazila of Nilphamari attend classes under the open sky.**

classrooms as they pleased, children of very young age had to study in the midst of urine and excrement.

According to Professor Syed Manzoorul Islam of Dhaka University, "The base [primary education] is the most important in

one can only imagine why there is a lack of joy in learning. And there are plenty more examples which show that before we can even begin to discuss what type of education we are indeed providing to our children (a discussion that we

disgust which is needed for us to change our disgraceful ways and for the children to have some semblance of safety in their own schools.

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The writer is a member of the Editorial team at *The Daily Star*.