

Primary education upgrade

Finally, sector getting merited attention

THE Primary and Mass Education Ministry's proposal to create a separate BCS cadre service for primary education is a long overdue one, and we are gratified to see that the government is taking this up for consideration. As long ago as 1992, a government taskforce recommended this measure, and the government of the day pledged to adopt it by 2005, so it is to the credit of the current government that a step is being taken for the betterment of the sector.

Given the fact that there are some 1.7 lakh primary school teachers working in over 38,000 government primary schools around the country, and that the current situation makes it difficult to hire good candidates, this is an initiative that makes a lot of sense.

Indeed, more important than the mere creation of a new cadre service is a recognition of how crucial the primary education sector is and how crucial it is to have a true and renewed commitment to its all round development.

Bangladesh now has universal free primary education, and for many of the children this will be the only education they will receive, so let us trust that the creation of a separate cadre service will be the first step in comprehensive reform of the sector aimed at dramatically improving primary education and making it more effective and useful.

We all know the problems: the fact that government after government has used the primary education sector to dispense political patronage so that the sons, daughters, nephews, and nieces of petty officials and politicians can find a sinecure here when there is nowhere else for them to go. Add to this the malcontent of the school management committees and you have the abysmal state of affairs in the primary schools.

All this needs to change. We need to ensure that good, qualified, and conscientious people enter the ranks of teaching profession at the government primary school level. We need also to look at other measures that would help improve education, such as updating the curriculum and textbooks. We need to consider what more could be done to keep the children in school, perhaps the provision of one meal a day.

There is much work to be done to bring our primary education system up to decent standards. The decision to give the sector its separate BCS cadre service is a good first step towards giving primary education the importance it deserves. Let us hope it is not the last.