

An affront to incumbents' pledge to ensure primary education for all

THERE is, indeed, no room for glossing over the allegations that most of the government primary schools, even in the capital Dhaka, have recently been charging admission fees violating rules concerned. As New Age reported on Saturday quoting a number of guardians seeking to have their children admitted to government primary schools in Dhaka, while authorities of some of these schools have realised a certain amount of admission fees from students this year, some have imposed charges even for admission forms. On the other hand, in line with the Primary Education (Compulsory) Act 1990, which took full effect in 1993, primary education is compulsory and free. Moreover, according to the Education Policy 2010, the government is supposed to ensure free and compulsory primary education for all children. Overall, at least the institutions, meant for primary education, enjoying government benefits — fully or partly, are supposed not to impose any sort of fee on their students.

Despite the constitution mandating the state to ensure universal and uniform education for all citizens up to a certain level determined by the law, mainly because of rampant commercialisation in the sector, pursued by successive governments, access to even primary education has been a distant dream for millions of children, particularly those belonging to low-income groups, for long. However, with the law on compulsory and free primary education taking effect, guardians tied to low-income groups in general have increasingly been having their children admitted to government primary schools for a few decades. None can deny the fact that all this has made huge contributions to the recent radical change in the enrolment scenario in primary education — a success that the incumbents have hardly missed any opportunity to brag about.

It is, indeed, quite regrettable that as the headteacher of a government primary school in the capital pointed out in the report, they receive only Tk 8,400 every year from the government in contingency fee although they have to spend a lot on the supporting staff, obviously, crucial for a smooth functioning of the institutions during the period. However, such a problem in no way enables those school authorities to flout relevant rules, not to mention hamper poor students pursuing their education.

Encouragingly, as the director general of the Directorate of Primary Education told New Age, the government has already decided to recruit supporting staff for all the 37,672 government primary schools. It is expected that while the government will complete the process without any delay, it will also streamline the management of all errant government and non-government primary schools soon.