

No more apathy to govt primary schools in capital

THAT only the guardians who are unable to bear educational expenses at private and non-government schools and who fail to enrol their children in such schools send their children, as New Age reported on Saturday, to government primary schools in the capital Dhaka yet again highlights the government's apathy to public education, in general, and to primary education, in particular. It is all the more so because, although teachers of government primary schools in the city sought to blame the situation mainly on the guardians' indifference to such schools, parents who are well off rarely send their children there as these schools lack adequate infrastructure and quality teachers, in particular. The responsibility to address these factors lies solely with the government. Many of these schools are housed in run-down buildings while most of them lack adequate classrooms, playgrounds, toilets, etc. Not only that, at least 54 of them have been under illegal occupation, fully or partially, of various institutions, public and private, and influential individuals for years or even decades. Even water pumps, kitchen markets, shops, garages, mosques and eidgahs have been set up on the premises of some of them. But successive governments have just overlooked the issue despite repeated media reports highlighting the problems.

One can in this connection refer to the 64-year-old government primary school on Banagram Road in Dhaka, as mentioned in another New Age report the same day, which remains closed during downpour when it rains through the roof. Moreover, classes are held only in four rooms on the first floor of the three-storey building that is less than three kilometre from the secretariat and has yet not been repaired for years. As a result, filled with 1,000 students two decades ago, the school now has only 51 students. It is, meanwhile, important to note that like their rural counterparts, the poor in the city are also largely more willing to engage their children in earning rather than sending them for schooling. Against the backdrop, teachers in many government primary schools in the city reportedly go to school at their whim. Besides, they, as parents have alleged, pass their time in schools largely gossiping, which indicates a waste of public money spent on their salaries and benefits.

It is, indeed, an irony that all this prevails when the government has already started to nationalise thousands of primary schools across the country apparently to comply with its election pledge to ensure at least primary education for all within a short period. The government immediately needs to improve the condition of the government primary schools in the city also in compliance with the existing compulsory primary education act that made it mandatory for all parents, rich and poor, to send their children for primary schooling. It is all the more important because the poor state of the primary schools will only allow private schools that are inclined more towards commercialisation of education than to ensure the right for all to dominate the sector.