

No more apathy to flood-hit schools

THAT at least 820 primary schools and 310 secondary schools remained closed in six northern and two north-eastern districts till Tuesday because of flooding, disrupting studies of thousands of students, is, indeed, a matter of concern. Moreover, according to a New Age report on Wednesday quoting the education officers concerned, attendance fell sharply in many schools and colleges in some other areas as they went under water forcing the authorities to hold classes elsewhere. The possibility of water-borne diseases breaking out also poses a challenge for students seeking to attend classes in the areas. Not only that, as the district education officers concerned have feared, there are many educational institutions requiring heavy repairs where restarting academic activities will be further delayed even once flood water recedes. What is, meanwhile, more unfortunate is that neither officials in the education directorate in the capital Dhaka nor those in divisional offices are aware of what exactly is going on in the areas. All this takes place at a time when the Primary Education Completion Examinations and the Junior School Certificate Examinations are less than two months away. There are reasons to believe that particularly those who will take the two examinations are among the worst victims of the situation as they are likely to lag behind their peers not affected by flooding, let alone in urban areas, in terms of performance in the examinations.

It is important to note that almost all the flood-affected schools are located in remote areas mostly with poor communications systems. Besides, while families living there predominantly belong to poor and marginalised sections, students pursuing education in educational institutions of the areas, which invariably lack adequate infrastructure and qualified teachers, have so far generally underperformed in different public examinations. It does not take to be an expert to understand that it is the general apathy of successive governments towards rural people, in particular, something mentioned in these columns on several occasions earlier, which led to the regrettable situation in the first place. Hence, it is hardly surprising that, as mentioned earlier, education department high-ups did not feel the necessity to know at least how many schools were inundated by the recent flooding.

Be that as it may, we want to believe that district education officials are serious about translating into reality their words mentioned in the report that they are making efforts to keep the schools open. In fact, the government needs to come forward in this regard. It needs to realise that further indifference on its part to the flood-affected students may cause them to fall further behind their urban counterparts, in particular, in the competition of attaining decent jobs in future. Above all, it is there not to violate the constitutional provision that the state should ensure education for all citizens regardless of, among others, the areas they belong to.