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Government primary education management mired in failures

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FIVE thousand and thirty-six out of the total 64,122 government primary schools, which accounts for about 7.85 per cent, running with less than 100 students — and 13.44 per cent of them, or 677 schools, running with less than 50 students, as the final draft of the Bangladesh Primary Education Annual Sector Performance Report 2017 says — points to failures of the government in its primary education management. Such a sorry situation of the schools shows that they are faced with poor classroom teaching, inadequate number of teachers and lack of oversight, which together have pushed students to kindergartens. The highest number of students in a single government primary school, as the primary education performance report draft says, is 3,768 while the lowest number of three students in a single school is in Barisal. While in many of the cases, poor learning in government primary schools has pushed students to kindergartens — as the number of kindergartens increased from 10,537, with more than 1.2 million students, in 2012 to 20,601, with more than 2.23 million students, in 2017 — in many others, what may be the case is that the government has set up schools without assessing the need for the schools in many areas.

Whatever the reasons are for the plight of these schools, the situation now calls out education managers, or the government for that matter, on doing a school mapping so that some of them could be merged, if not closed, to better use the available resources for education. There are schools in some areas set up on political considerations, which is echoed in the statement of the director general of the primary education directorate who said that many of the schools have been founded by influential quarters, which makes it tough for the government to merge them. But the government needs to rise above partisan considerations in righting the wrong that has happened in the primary education sector. Against this backdrop, the government planning to set up 1,000 more primary schools, as the finance minister said in his budget speech for the 2019 financial year, would only compound the situation unless the government first does the needs assessment. The government, through the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics, should immediately launch a survey to assess the needs in view of the locations and consider the school-going age population, between six and 14 years, in areas of the locations to better plan the establishment or merger of schools.

When the government has plans to set up 1,000 more schools after it has just finished setting up

1,500 more primary schools, it has become imperative for the government to first look into the needs of the existing schools vis-à-vis locations and school-going age population of the areas. There is no denying that the nation needs more schools, but it needs them where they are needed, and in an improved environment with better facilities, so that people can send their children to government schools. The government must attend to the failures in its primary education management.



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