

Govt must resolve problems in boy's education

BOYS of high school-going age needing to work to supplement their family earning takes, worryingly, a heavy toll on their education, more in backward districts, holding back the progress in national education. Parents or guardians prefer, as New Age reported on Tuesday, to send their boys to work so that they could help the family. The situation has been so bad that only 46 per cent of 10.3 million high school students are boys and the percentage is lower in districts such as Sylhet, Sunamganj, Moulvibazar, Rangpur, Thakurgaon and Habiganj, where the figure stands, as the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics says, at 43. In Sylhet, Sunamganj and Moulvibazar, the percentage stands at 42 and in Panchagarh, Rangpur, Thakurgaon and Habiganj, it is 43. What is worrying is that in 2017, as BANBEIS data show, boys accounted for 44 of high school students in Chapainawabganj, Pabna, Rajshahi, Sirajganj, Dinajpur, Gaibandha, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat and Nilphamari, with a decline of a sort lurking. The Child Labour Survey 2013, released in January 2016, shows that a half of the 3.4 million 'economically active children' were child labourers, who include 0.95 million boys.

One reason, as education officials and teachers come up with, for such a situation is the stipend that the government provides — 30 per cent of the girl students getting the benefits as opposed to 10 per cent of the boys, at least until 2017. Poor students in rural areas with 75 per cent class attendance passing annual examinations from Class VI to IX get from Tk 100 to Tk 150 in monthly stipend if they do not get married till their SSC examinations. All education officials that New Age spoke to put the poor percentage of boys in high school education down to the ratio of stipends tilted against the boys. The other reason that is said to have contributed to this situation is the absence of social awareness campaign to educate boys. Social awareness campaigns have encouraged parents and guardians to send their girls to schools which has not been the case with boys. It has, thus, become evident that the government should offer stipend for more boys and carry out social awareness campaigns. The secondary school stipend project director is reported to have said that a decision has now been made to increase the stipend for boys from 10 per cent to 20 per cent in high schools.

The government, under the circumstances, must look deep into the issue and increase the stipend for boys while it must run social awareness campaign in favour of boy's education too. The government must also conduct a thorough research to find if there are any other reasons for the poor state of boy's high school education and then act, accordingly, on the results. It must consider implementing mid-day meal in schools, a plan which has yet to take off on wide scale, which might help children of school-going age to go to, and their parents or guardians to send them to, schools.