

Attractive schools

On the primary education front we are trying to break new grounds. What comes first for consideration in this venture is that we remove the major obstacles in the way of spreading primary education in the rural areas towards the end of making it universal. There is a characteristic lack of physical facilities for schooling in the villages. Schools mushroom and close down with regular frequency here, leaving the parents to wonder whether educating their children is not like chasing an illusion.

Most rural primary schools are usually a proposition for the buffs who run them as casually as they gossip in the local bazars. A school or a maqtab is hurriedly set up without even a minimum number of teachers, far less trained teachers, to man them. Educational equipment and aids are too much to expect there.

The fate of such a school is usually intertwined with the prospect of harvests. Bad harvests, and many drop out for having failed to bear cost of studies. As it is, there exists little motivation among the poorer families to send their children for schooling. They would rather have their children work for them in the farm which would pay in tangible terms.

Basically such a school is set up in anticipation of government assistance. An odd assortment of a school committee sees in this an opportunity to make money or earn local prestige so that even when a school has received government grant there is no guarantee it will function. The primary sections attached to the inadequate number of rural high schools are probably run a little better.

A proper school system has not really developed in the countryside. With an appraisal of this reality, the Universal Primary Education Pilot Project which was undertaken on a limited scale in Meher Panchagram, Comilla, has now been extended to cover the whole area. The concept is that there will be community participation in line with the Swadhyar principles to make a primary school viable. Teachers, specially female teachers will be recruited from the localities, and existing housing facilities like outer houses, mosques or even open-air premises will be fully utilised for the purpose. There will be free supply of books, slates, pencils and other stationery to the students, particularly whose parents cannot afford these. Even nutrition support, medical aid and recreational facilities will be provided. In other words, the schools will be so equipped and easily accessible that the idea to put children into schools will appear attractive to most parents.