

Widespread corruption in building rural schools

By Toufique Imrose Khalidi

The education department, officially the biggest spender of tax payers' money, is not using the resources carefully and judiciously if a recent inquiry report is any indication.

The inquiry has raised questions about quality of civil works, expenditure of money and supervision by engineers.

Much of the money allocated

for the supposedly most-prioritised sector is spent on teachers' pay (poor though) and on physical infrastructure (poorer). But negligence and corruption have turned things worse than anybody would perhaps imagine when it comes to raising structures to house rural schools and colleges.

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Rural school bldgs

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The officials involved failed to ensure quality and paid bills for non-existent works, the inquiry found.

The inquiry, conducted by three faculty members of BUET and engineering colleges, covered 100 schools, colleges and madrasahs in 15 districts, which were already built or being built by the Facilities Department of the Ministry of Education.

The inquiry said its findings only corroborated complaints made earlier by many senior project officials.

In most cases, the inquiry found, there were a lack of wisdom and judiciousness in the selection of sites for physical structures. "Structures were built on lands below the level of roads, or having slopes or ponds adjacent to them."

"Same type of foundation has also been used for all structures without taking into account the difference of soil quality in different places. In many cases, the foundation did not reach three feet below the ground and cement plasters were not done six inches deep down the ground level. In some sites, the measurement and depth of RCC casting fell short of the schedule."

In many cases, the inquiry said, it was found that the verandah and floors had developed cracks and caved-in. "It happens when sand is used instead of earth for foundation or when the earth is not properly compacted."

"In some floors, the casting of patentstone was less than 25 mm and of low quality. Cement casting was found to be less than 75 mm in thickness in some cases and of poor quality. In most floors, polythene layer or brick flat soling was not used."

"Some ceilings were found damp, indicating water stagnation on the roof."

"Walls were found to have cracked along the roof. This happens if the walls slide down."

"The quality of cement plaster on walls, beams, columns and ceiling were found to be of poor quality and contained more sand than the standard limit."

The investigators also complained about furniture and electrical fittings which were found to be of poor quality and did not adhere to the standards set in the tender schedule.

They found that it was not possible to know how much money was paid to the contractors since the accounts were not properly maintained. There were differences in the expenditure on works, based on the same design, specification and material.

"For many schools, contractors received payments for flat brick soling which they had not done. There were also inconsistencies between the measurement books and the works done."

"It was learnt that many school buildings under different projects were completed in a hurry. It is not proper to carry out works without adequate manpower that may have resulted in the defects observed in the buildings inspected."

Concerned officials and employees themselves said that due to insufficient manpower and rush to complete the works, it was not possible for them to supervise the construction works regularly and properly. Almost all the executive engineers in charge of the sites inspected had their families living in Dhaka that made it difficult for them to perform his duties."