

Recruitment of teachers deserves highest priority

THE fact that 21,000 out of 63,607 government primary schools are imparting education to children without headteachers brings to the fore the government's apathy to the education sector. The irony is that despite that the nation celebrated International Literacy Day as usual. The glaring neglect of primary schools, as New Age reported on Thursday, shows why the nation's rate of illiteracy still remains as high as 27.7 per cent. The unpalatable fact is that the positions of headteachers and 32,000 assistant headteachers remaining vacant in government primary schools undermines the education of about 1.37 crore students. Absence of a headteacher is felt acutely in schools as they play a pivotal role in various activities, including staff management, academic calendar implementation, and school discipline oversight, co-curricular activities and the daily schedule. Moreover, acting headteachers cannot take many important decisions and eventually fail to deliver the leadership headteachers are supposed to provide. Needless to say, the shortage of teachers is a major reason for the government primary schools trailing behind non-government or private schools in public examinations.

As we have written in these columns on several occasions before, teachers lay the foundation of formal education, at the primary, secondary and the higher secondary levels. Qualified and competent teachers underpin that foundation in a solid manner so that students can pursue higher education without facing any obstacles, whatsoever. With adequate number of qualified teachers being put in place, classroom teaching improves, which in turn leaves students not to depend on memorising and not to resort to private tuition and the guide books. But here things are different. Many students who score the highest grade point average 5 in their previous public school and college examinations fail to qualify for admission to universities when they take admission tests. This reinforces the idea that their foundation in education still remains irresolute because of the foot-dragging by the government in implementing some of its important responsibilities; in this case, because of its delay in recruitment of teachers, for which the teaching positions in many schools have remained vacant for years. Since its assumption of office, the Awami League-led government has repeatedly professed its commitment to improving the quality of education at every level. The facts mentioned above, however, tend to suggest that the incumbents may not have lived up to their words, especially when it comes to education. Such indifference is unfortunate, to say the least. After all, proper education for all citizens is essential for a nation striving for prosperity.

The government, at the moment, is well advised to take expeditious steps to appoint qualified and competent headteachers and assistant headteachers to teach the students of primary level students at all government schools. But it needs to do it, ensuring transparency in the recruitment process at any cost.