

Govt plans escalator at public schools

Academics term it wasteful, bizarre and unrealistic

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GOVERNMENT is planning to set up escalators at 163 public secondary schools, mostly in district and upazila towns, at the cost of over Tk 1,100 crore.

Academics and economists are taken aback by the government plan and have termed it as 'waste of public money, unrealistic and bizarre.' They have also smelt a rat in the move.

As most of the secondary schools in the country lack

sufficient teachers, classrooms, laboratories, libraries, playgrounds and other educational infrastructures, the government plan is nothing but 'overambitious,' they said.

The government plan is like putting the cart before the horse as most of the school do not have proper academic facilities and infrastructures, they added.

'It is a complete wasteful plan,' Dhaka University professor emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury said, adding

that the plan was a bizarre.

'Government should not take such a plan rather they should take steps to meet the urgent need in education sector to ensure proper academic atmosphere,' he said.

The government should concentrate more to provide cultural and sports facilities for the students, he added.

Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education director general SM Wahiduzzaman said that the plan to set up escalators was a desire

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of prime minister Sheikh Hasina to minimise the sufferings of students to use stairways.

'It is a part of modernisation of the schools, not overambitious,' he added.

The executive committee of the National Economic Council in March approved a project to develop 323 government secondary schools with an estimated cost of Tk 4,640 crore.

Directorate sources said that at the meeting Sheikh Hasina directed the authorities concerned to set up escalators instead of elevators in all government secondary schools in the country to ease the sufferings of students.

According to the direction, the directorate submitted a revised project proposal that included setting up escalators at 163 government schools with the estimated cost of Tk 1,116 crore, planning commission sources said.

A project evaluation committee of the planning

commission on November 6 asked the directorate to resubmit the proposal of setting up escalators reconsidering the technical risks and the negative side of the escalators and its maintenance.

The evaluations committee meeting also said that generally public schools were four to six storied buildings where it was easy to use the stairs without elevators and escalators. The meeting also resolved that they did not know whether the schools in neighbouring countries had high-rises with escalators or elevators.

The meeting also observed that escalators or elevators would need uninterrupted electricity supply, professional skilled manpower and fund for its maintenance and using stairs were effective for physical growth of students.

Economist Hossain Zilur Rahman, also former interim government advisor for education, said that

there was scope for government for reconsidering the proposal. 'There are so many other priorities in education,' he added.

He said that current priorities for education should be ensuring quality education and for that the country needed qualified teachers and their training, sufficient laboratories and laboratories and other educational facilities at classrooms.

'Whenever a question of good governance arises we at first observe whether the proper project has been taken or not. In that question this project goes beyond discussion,' he said.

Former Dhaka University Institute of Education and Research professor Siddikur Rahman said that there was every scope of corruption in the project.

'Many of the projects taken by the government are prescribed by the donors,' said Siddikur Rahman, who was also National Curriculum and Textbook Board chief consultant to head the

team which developed the existing curriculum for secondary education.

'We would need escalators at schools at least after 30 years. Now schools lack proper classrooms and qualified trained teachers,' he said.

Dhaka University history professor Syed Anwar Husain said that the proposal was 'unrealistic' and not in line with the target of improving the quality of education.

Wahiduzzaman said that all these 163 schools were in district and upazila towns and had power connections. 'We cannot lag behind other countries ... When a student visits a foreign school where s/he finds escalators, s/he thinks why such facilities are not at his or her schools in Bangladesh,' he added.

'It is [setting up escalator] a part of other developments, we would build new high rise buildings.'

'Government is working on improving education quality' he said.