

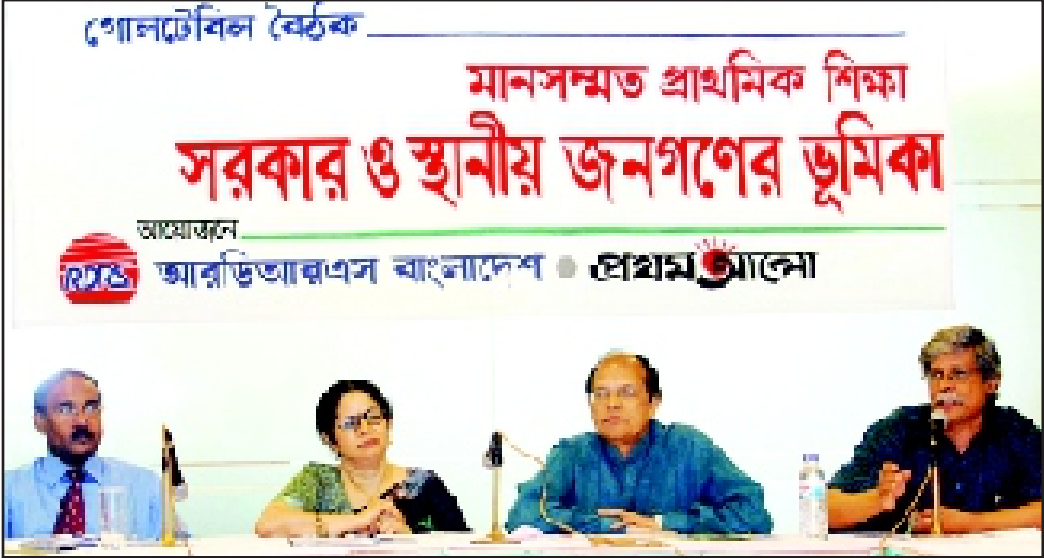


PHOTO: STAR
Prof Muhammad Zafar Iqbal speaks at a roundtable titled 'Quality primary education: The role of the government and the local people' in the city yesterday. On his right are Dr Atiur Rahman, Rasheda K Chowdhury and Khandaker M Asaduzzaman.

Ensure quality primary education for all

Educationists urge govt at roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Expressing concern over disparities in the standards of education between the urban and rural areas and the rich and the poor, renowned educationists yesterday called on the government to give topmost priority to quality primary education for all.

Active participation of the community members and more incentives and training for the teachers can play the crucial role in enhancing the quality of education, they said at a roundtable.

Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Services (RDRS), Bangladesh and the daily Prothom Alo jointly organised the roundtable titled 'Quality primary education: The role of the government and the local people' at the newspaper's office in the capital.

"It is the teachers who can bring about a real change in the primary education. The two principal qualities required to become teachers are love for the students and the ability to inspire them," said renowned economist Prof Muzaffer Ahmad.

Education has now become more mechanical; there is little participation of students, thus making the classrooms boring, he said, adding that schools should have open spaces and gardens so that students can acquire knowledge from nature.

Teachers cannot be creative without innovative education system in primary schools, Prof Muzaffer said, calling for more budgetary allocation for primary education.

Science fiction writer Prof Muhammad Zafar Iqbal observed that education has now become more urban-centric and is meant for

the rich. This situation can be changed only by improving the standards of education in rural areas, he said.

A little improvement in the primary education can bring about a major change at the national level, he said, adding that the problems in madrasa education are much serious, which require urgent attention of the authorities concerned.

He also called for active community participation, increased salaries for teachers and involvement of more women in the school managing committees.

Terming the primary education the foundation of all kinds of development, economist Dr Atiur Rahman said, "Other problems cannot be solved unless the standards of education are improved. Teachers' commitment and patriotism are a must to achieve this goal."

Although the primary education is a public interest issue, the budgetary allocation for it has not increased, he said, adding that various systems of education and the gap between the urban and rural education are creating division among the people in the country.

"Weak students should be given special attention, while monthly meetings of the guardians, teachers and students and educational seminar at upazila and Union Parishad levels are very important issues to be taken care of," he said.

Dr Atiur Rahman also suggested activating the Union Parishad level education committees and inclusion of more women in the school managing committees.

In his presentation, Imrul Qayes of RDRS said the community

involvement has brought about significant changes in the standards of education in the primary schools in three northern districts.

Such involvement develops the capacity of teachers and guardians and helps ensure discipline and accountability of teachers, he said referring to a project being implemented in Nilphamari, Kurigram and Panchagarh.

Campaign for Popular Education (Campe) Director Rasheda K Chowdhury suggested involving more teachers and guardians in formulating the curriculum of primary schools.

Khandaker M Asaduzzaman, director general of Directorate of Primary Education, said the government is going to form School Improvement Committees with school teachers, members of school committees and local people to identify problems.

Initially, the government will form such committees at 13 primary schools, he added.

He also said there was lack of good governance and shortage of good teachers in the past, but now the teachers' recruitment process is very transparent. "The standards of the primary education will be improved within a few years," he added.

Former chairman of National Curriculum and Textbook Board Gazi M Ahsanul Kabir, Prof Khandaker Mokaddem Hossain, Monira Hasan of Unicef, Nasreen Nayeem of Viqarunnisa Noon School, Primary Teachers' Association President Siddiqueur Rahman and Headmistress of a school Rasheda Begum also spoke at the roundtable.