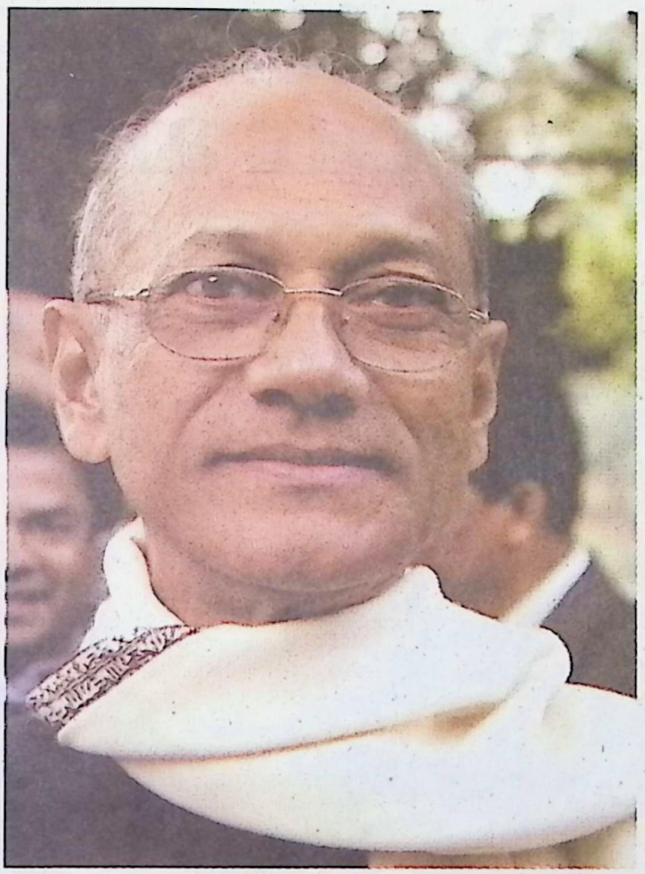


Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid.

based education at the secondary level and improvement of the standard of the teachers. We will not do anything haphazardly. After sufficient preparation these changes will be implemented. Already a few training programmes are running to improve the quality of the schoolteachers. We will also initiate more elaborate programmes for teachers training."

The ministry is considering hiking up the salary of the teachers at all levels of the public institutions including schools, colleges and universities. Nurul Islam Nahid says, "We believe quality teachers can provide quality education. For that we have plans to increase the benefits of the teachers to attract the talented students in this profession. But we expect dedication from the teacher, since many teachers these days are interested in private coaching, teaching at private institutes and consultancy rather than concentrating on their classroom. This unethical tendency by the teachers is one of the major causes of decreeing the education standard."

Nurul Islam Nahid is also concerned about the standard of higher education in Bangladesh. According to the minister the higher education system at the public university is decreasing. On the other hand, most of the 54 existing private universities do not provide quality education, but are highly expensive.

"We are planning to increase the standard of both of public and private universities. University Grants Commission (UGC) is working on it. Within a few days discussing with the private university authorities, UGC will provide a new private university act to ensure quality education at these institutions," says the minister.

To control the 'dropout' rate, which is 42 percent at present, of the students at primary and secondary level the ministry has already taken some measures. The ministry has already announced that it will provide all the textbooks free up to the secondary level. "I've seen many students leave the schools since their parents cannot buy them books. Which is why under my initiative, we have already allotted 300 crore takas for books in the next academic year that will start in January. We are now facing problems created by the vested interested groups, who create artificial crisis of textbooks. But we are determined to overcome it."

"We will take initiatives to provide tiffin to the poor students to encourage them to come to school. We will also encourage public-private partnership to establish schools in the poverty drawn areas and in the remote areas."

The government also plans to regulate the madrassas and English medium schools operating in the country. It has already held discussions with the representatives of the Quami madrassas for registration and has briefed them the government's intention.

"Madrassa education-- both Aliya and Quami-- needs to be improved a lot so that those who study at these institutions can contribute for the development of the country. Quami Madrassas must go through registration and their syllabus must incorporate the subjects of mainstream curriculum. At the same time we will take immediate measures to improve the quality of the vocational education system."

The minister adds that there are plans to also focus on the English medium schools. At present, these schools are following a foreign syllabus. These schools are often expensive, but most of them do not provide quality education he says. "We are thinking of formulating an act focusing on the syllabus, management and others of these schools," says the minister.

Financial constraints will pose a great challenge in terms of making sure that such plans are implemented. The education sector allocation is currently about 2.3 percent of GDP and 14 percent of total government expenditure. But the amount of money is very little for a highly populated country like Bangladesh. In fact, the education sector is financially challenged and deprived.

It's true that the current government has already increased the budget allocation in this sector to give textbooks free up to secondary level and is also planning to give free tiffin to poor students. But to improve the overall quality of education according to the demand of the time requires more funds, sincerity, commitment, capacity and coordination.