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Brac not 'NGO-nising' any primary school

Target is to improve quality of education, says Abed

Staff Correspondent

Brac has no intention of privatising or commercialising primary schools in the country and its pilot project, funded solely by Brac, in 20 upazilas is aimed at improving the standard of education at primary schools, said Brac Chairperson Fazle Hasan Abed yesterday.

Since Brac is funding the pilot project, it will not use public funds allotted for Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP-II) of the government, the Brac chief claimed adding, "We have no plan to take any fund of the PEDP-II or any fund from foreign donor agencies."

The Brac chairperson made the comments at a press conference held at a hotel in the capital.

His remarks came at a time when primary teachers across the country are agitating against a government decision that approved Brac to supervise and improve quality of education at all primary schools in 20 upazilas.

On June 10, teachers united under four organisations -- Bangladesh Primary Teachers Association (BPTA), Bangladesh Private Primary Teachers Association (BPPTA), Bangladesh Graduate Primary Teachers Association (BGPTA) and Bangladesh Community Primary Teachers Association (BCPTA) -- wore black ribbons across the country to protest the government decision.

Today the teachers will wear black ribbons again and submit a memorandum to the chief adviser, demanding the immediate withdrawal of the government approval for the pilot project.

On May 23, the government approved the pilot project under which Brac would work to improve overall education and classroom environment in the 20 upazilas by training teachers and making school management committees (SMC) more effective.

Primary teachers say this move would not improve the standard of primary education and they see this move as a plot to gain control and thus commercialise the primary education system in the country.

Rebutting the speculations of the teachers, the Brac chief said, "We want to assure the teachers that we are not conspiring to privatise primary education."

"Brac strongly believes that it is the responsibility of the state to ensure quality primary education for all and it does not believe in privatisation or commercialisation of the primary education," added the chief of the largest NGO in the country.

The authority vested in Brac by the government does not approve Brac of interfering in administrative affairs of primary schools in the 20 upazilas under the pilot project, he said adding that Brac will train teachers on public holidays and during vacations only so that it does not affect other training programmes conducted by directorate of primary education.

"This caretaker government gave us the permission to improve quality [of education] in the 20 upazilas after we performed well in improving the quality of education in five upazilas in Sherpur district during the BNP-Jamaat alliance government," he said describing the background of the permission.

The primary schools that fall under the pilot project are in 20 upazilas in Sylhet, Habiganj, Cox's Bazar, Chittagong, Sirajganj, Patuakhali, Bagerhat, Munshiganj and Gazipur districts.

The quality of primary education has fallen drastically as "many substandard teachers were recruited during the governments of Awami League and the BNP-Jamaat alliance... Thirty percent teachers in government primary schools and 50 percent teachers in non-government schools are not trained," Abed said.

Brac at present runs 32,000 schools where 9,84,440 students receive non-formal primary education, he said pointing out that the passing rate in Brac schools is 96 percent while the rate in government primary school is 82 percent.

Brac will hold a meeting with leaders of primary school teachers sometime next week to clear the misconception and confusion over the pilot project, Abed said.

Brac deputy executive directors M Aminul Alam and Dr Ahmed Mushtaq Raza Chowdhury, Education Programme Director Dr Shafiqul Islam, Public Relations and Communications Director M Anwarul Haque and Education Research Unit Coordinator Samir Ranjan Nath were present at the conference.