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Abed suggests tasking NGOs with pre-primary education

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Brac has 22,618 primary schools where 670,815 students study



Fazle Hasan Abed, founder and chairperson of Brac, has suggested that the government should leave pre-primary education affairs to NGOs.

He made the proposition in light of the report styled "State of Pre-primary Education in Bangladesh" which said pre-primary section in the government primary schools lack facilities and a good number of students are still out of pre-primary education. The report was yesterday unveiled by Campaign for Popular Education which releases reports every year under the title "Education Watch Report".

Speaking at the unveiling ceremony, Abed said the government can leave pre-primary education to NGO-operated schools and "those who are ready to work" as a considerable number of children are still being deprived of pre-primary education.

Funding education for these children is a big issue for the government, he said.

Describing government schools, Abed said some 60 to 70 students attend classes in a single classroom in those institutions which contradicts the philosophy of pre-primary education. He said pre-primary learners require support and should be taught with fun.

Abed said pre-primary education is important for early development and it helps reduce drop-out rates in the primary education sector.

The report said nearly 15% and 41.3% of the government and non-government primary schools (with MPO status) respectively had no separate classroom for pre-primary students. These schools offered pre-primary education along with grade I students in the same classroom and often at the same time.

This was not the case in kindergartens, NGO-operated as well as mosque-based schools, the report said, adding that 1.5 million students aged five are still out of school.

The report described kindergartens as the top pre-primary education providers with a 27.9 % enrolment rate.

According to the report, in 10.8% of the cases, pre-primary classes are held in school verandas, head teachers' offices, roofs of school buildings or open spaces.

Nearly three-quarters of the classrooms in the government schools are not tidy, the report said.

Speaking at the programme, Kazi Rafiqul Alam, president of Dhaka Ahsania Mission, supported Abed's proposition, saying the government should take initiatives so that NGOs, under the leadership of the government, can work in pre-primary section.

In 2008 when the army-backed caretaker government was in power, a government move to give Brac the task to supervise and improve quality of education in all primary schools in 20 upazilas was halted in the wake of a nationwide protest staged by primary teachers. Campaign for Popular Education Executive Director Rasheda K Choudhury was an adviser to the then government.

Commenting on Abed's suggestion, Primary and Mass Education Minister Mostafizur Rahman said: "The ministry will have a discussion on the idea".

The government will take ideas from everyone but it will take the ultimate decision on its own and the ministry will move forward with the plan, he added.

Brac is a major stakeholder in the primary and pre-primary education in Bangladesh. It has 22,618 primary schools where 670,815 students study and the number of teachers is 22,699.

The organisation also has 15,164 pre-primary schools with 433,658 students and 15,164 teachers.