

Going Through School of Affliction

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MUZAFFARGARH, April 4: A child has lost his life while two others have been paralysed owing to accidents which have been attributed to improper location of two schools on the busy Jhang Road.

The Government Primary School for Boys, Pirwala, and the Government Primary School for Girls, Lotewala, are located along Jhang Road and both the schools have no proper building and not even boundary walls.

A couple of months ago, Yousaf, a class-III student, was crushed under the wheels of a truck when he was playing along the road during the school recess time. A few weeks later, class-II student Mehwish was knocked down by a rashly-driven bus. Critically injured, she was admitted to the District Headquarters Hospital where doctors diagnosed that she had become mentally retarded because of brain injuries.

In yet another incident, class-II student Fatima lost one of her legs in a road accident. She was crossing the road during school hours.

Many months have passed but the administrations of both the schools have failed to introduce facilities and get erected boundary walls. All the government's department concerned has done so far is declaring the schools' buildings dangerous.

The teachers and the taught have to sit in the open even during the extreme weather conditions. While the children often get sick due to exposure to tough conditions, two lady teachers at the girls' school have time and again complained to the authorities concerned that they can't concentrate on their jobs amid the constant threat of eve-teasing.

As if these hazards are not threatening enough, a brick kiln near the two institutions emits smoke the whole day through and has become a constant headache for the students who inhale chemicals.

"The brick kiln is always crowded and the labourers cast an evil eye on us. We feel ourselves insecure and are unable to perform our duties," complained Rubina, one of the teachers at the girls' school.

She said the school had no furniture and it had borrowed two chairs from the boys' school where the students sit on the ground. She said her institute also had no facility for potable water and the only tap it had had been out of order for the last two years. Last year they had installed a tap on their own, but that was stolen as the school had no boundary wall.

The teachers at the boys' school were cooperating with them by supplying water to their institution, she said.

Since both the schools had no other staff, the teacher said she and her colleagues had to clean the ground before taking classes.

Ghulam Mustafa, the headmaster of the boys' school, said Yousaf's death created panic in the area and many people started thinking about discontinuing studies of their children.

He said on the day of the incident he was alone in the school and his colleague was on leave. "Since the children sit in the open, it is difficult for one teacher to keep eye on almost 200 of them.

"The school building has already been declared dangerous as it can collapse any time. During summer, the children sit under a tree," he said.

District Monitoring Officer Syed Naveed Alam said he had compiled data about missing facilities in all schools in the district and sent it to the department concerned. He said DCO Tariq Najmi had directed the education department officials at a meeting that school management committees should be formed to oversee financial affairs and ensure maintenance of schools.

He said no teacher would be allowed to leave the school for official purposes as their official matters would be done by the AEOs. The construction of school buildings would be carried out in phases and the NLC had already been assigned the job, he responded to a question.

The DCO had also ordered checking of the enrolment of all students and taken strict notice of reports that in many schools free books were not being distributed, the official said.