

Closure to cause significant school dropout, child marriage: study

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amid closure of educational institutions due to the coronavirus pandemic, dropout rates will increase significantly at schools which will subsequently cause a rise in child marriage, early pregnancy and child labour, according to a study.

Education rights activists attending a webinar organised by Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) yesterday demanded increased allocation for education sector in the upcoming budget as part of two/three-year-long Covid-19 response and recovery plan for the sector.

CAMPE shared a rapid survey with journalists from the webinar on impact of Covid-19 on education sector.

In the questionnaire survey -- 115 representatives from 115 NGOs working in the education sector and 11 representatives from 11 teachers' associations gave their feedback.

Of the respondents, 84 percent said dropouts will increase at schools, while 80 percent warned of increased absenteeism and irregular attendance in school.

Seventy-two percent said malnutrition will impact on learning ability, 71 percent

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NOT BY CHOICE ... Young men and women cram inside a 7am human hauler on the Dhaka-Aricha Highway on their way to work, while those not 'fortunate' enough to find a spot inside cling to the body of the vehicle, *inset*. The masks on their faces testify to their effort in complying with health guidelines, but social distancing is something neither they nor transport operators can afford.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

'Let's turn challenges into opportunities'

The Daily Star's diplomatic correspondent Porimol Palma recently caught up with Hasin Jahan, country director of WaterAid, to talk about the Covid-19 crisis from the perspective of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).



TDS: What are your thoughts on the Covid-19 crisis and the serious toll it is taking on our lives?

Hasin Jahan: Covid-19 is an unprecedented crisis that is testing our resilience. While medical treatment is absolutely important, we are observing a treatment-centric response without adequate attention to preventive measures.

The government has formed a technical advisory committee of 17 members, most of whom are doctors of various specialisations, but there is no public health or WASH expert. As such, the preventive measures remain overlooked.

We should keep in mind Covid-19 is a highly contagious disease. To effectively counter further spread, we should drastically scale up preventive measures. The institutional response appears ad-hoc -- everyone is on a "firefighter mode". However, a holistic planning including preventive measures is not there.

TDS: Can Covid-19 pandemic be turned into an opportunity from WASH perspective?

Hasin Jahan: Water, sanitation, as well as hygiene are all linked with Covid-19 prevention. We are constantly emphasising the importance of handwashing with water and soap as a simple but highly effective preventive measure. Addressing WASH aspects may be challenging, but we can also turn this into an opportunity by instilling sustained hygiene

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COVID-19 CRISIS

New school curriculum delayed by a year

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The introduction of the new curriculum by National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has been delayed by a year. Originally expected to launch in January 2021, the curriculum has been postponed to the beginning of the year next.

Due to the Covid-19 crisis, the distribution of free textbooks among over four crore students studying in primary, secondary and equivalent levels would also become a major challenge.

NCTB officials fear that printing and distributing new textbooks will be difficult for them if the coronavirus situation does not improve soon.

"We are yet to complete the tender process for textbook printing although that usually ends by April," they added.

Hence the decision to delay the introduction of new curriculum by a year, NCTB chairperson Prof Narayan Chandra Saha told The Daily Star on Tuesday evening.

Experts cannot work on the curriculum,

hold piloting and train teachers due to the Covid-19 crisis, he said.

The decision was taken at a meeting on new curriculum held at International Mother Language Institute on the day.

Education minister Dipu Moni, deputy education minister Mohibul Hassan Chowdhury, primary and mass education state minister Zakir Hossen, top officials of secondary and higher education division, technical and madrasa division, primary and mass education ministry and NCTB attended the meeting.

Before the coronavirus outbreak in the country, NCTB was working in full swing. Reviewing of existing curriculum would be completed by 2020 and the new textbooks following would be launched in three phases from January 2021.

According to previous plan, students of class one, two, and four were scheduled to get new book as per new curriculum in January 2021.

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HC scraps bail order for Rashedul Chisty

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday scrapped a lower court order that granted bail to Rashedul Haque Chisty, son of former chairman of Farmers Bank audit committee Mahbubul Haque Chisty, in a corruption case involving Tk 9.28 crore.

The special judge court of Tangail had granted bail to Rashedul Haque Chisty in the case on May 27.

Later on, the Anti-Corruption Commission filed a petition with the High Court to cancel the Tangail court order, saying that the lower court granted bail to Rashedul without hearing arguments from the counsels of the ACC and public prosecutor.

The ACC filed the case with Tangail Model Police Station on September 16, 2018 against Rashedul and three others on charges of misappropriating and laundering Tk 9.28 crore from bank.

Yesterday, the HC bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder cancelled the bail order and asked the Tangail court to hold further hearing on the bail petition of Rashedul and to hear arguments from the both sides.

Rashedul cannot get released from jail following the HC order, ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star.

Advocate Khurshid Alam argued for the ACC and Attorney General Mahbubey Alam represented the state while Advocate AM Amin Uddin and Advocate Shaharir Kabir Biplab appeared for Rashedul during the virtual hearing over video conference.

An unfading beacon

Dr Hari Shankar provides uninterrupted service to patients amid shutdown

MD AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

For the past couple of decades, eye specialist Hari Sankar Das has been seeing patients at Mymensingh city's Charpara area. As the country's healthcare system took a major hit amid the coronavirus outbreak, access to medical facilities became more and more difficult. Despite the challenges, the 70-year old continued to serve the people of Mymensingh, not turning away anyone who might need medical help for their eyes.

In fact, he has been examining most patients completely free of cost. Akkas Ali, a 65-year-old farmer from Dewkhola village in Phulbaria Upazila of Mymensingh said he has been visiting the doctor for long. Recently, he took a hit on one eye and came to Dr Hari with an injury.

"It was a great relief for me to visit the doctor, as I was worried about accessing healthcare during such a crisis," said Akkas.

Mofiz Uddin, a daily wage-earner from Phulpur Upazila also receives free treatment from the doctor. He visited the chamber with irritation in his eyes on Sunday noon, and Dr Hari didn't let him down. Sometimes he also gets free medicine, said Mofiz.

Aysha Akter, a 35-year-old daily wage-earner from the city's Dhopakhola area said as she is poor, the doctor never charged fees from her.

Dr Hari Sankar is the director and proprietor of Paramita Eye Hospital (Pvt). There are 52 staff at the hospital, all of whom have been retained throughout this time, and they're being paid due salaries.

The hospital's deputy director Fatema Begum said, "Most of the private hospitals and clinics in the town have been closed during this time, and people who used to work there are passing difficult days. But Dr Hari has ensured that the staff of Paramita Eye Hospital do not suffer financially," said Fatema.

However, the number of patients at the hospital has decreased, also reducing the hospital's revenue. Around 20 people visit the hospital on average every day, and most receive free treatment or pay as much as they can afford to, said Mahmuna Akter Mina, a manager of the hospital who has been serving there for 24 years.

Dr Hari has also been providing his services over cellphone. Patients call him for consultation every day, and the number is available on the doctor's Facebook page. Emergency operations are also being conducted at the hospital.

Born to late Indu Bhushan Das and Renuka Prova Das at Nikla Das Bari in Bhupur of Tangail in 1950, Dr Hari Sankar



Dr Hari Sankar examines a patient's eyes at his clinic.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

did his MBBS from Mymensingh Medical College in 1974 and joined government service in 1975. He later resigned from the service in 1981 to complete his post-graduation in Austria's Vienna.

"Under the leadership of country's eminent eye specialist Dr K Zaman, we organized hundreds of eye camps in greater Mymensingh since 1977 and I was the chief surgeon of the team," said Dr Hari, speaking about his long career.

Dr Hari Sankar said he personally procured PPE for himself and his staff, and they are maintaining as much precaution as possible with patients. "None of the staff has been infected, by God's grace," he said.

"I have to pay Tk some 350,000 for staff salary every month but the monthly income from the hospital is meagre at the moment," said the doctor. He is subsidising the rest of the expenses from his own funds.

Dr Hari Sankar himself is a patient of diabetes and high blood pressure, and he appeared well aware of the risk of operating the clinic amid the pandemic. "I would be at high risk if infected. But I could not leave those who seek my service amid any crisis. Medical professionals are stepping up during this crisis and it is my professional duty," said the elderly doctor.

Dr Hossain Ahmed Golandaj Tara, secretary of Bangladesh Medical Association, Mymensingh unit said it is a rare instance in the country that the doctor did not close his chamber for even a single day even during such a crisis period.

"We are proud of Dr Hari for his devotion and commitment to the profession and his patients," said Dr Golandaj.

"Doctors, many of whom are private practitioners, should come forward for their patients in this time instead of turning them away," Dr Hari said.

Road crashes kill 6

STAR REPORT

Six people were killed in road crashes across two districts over the last two days, report our correspondents.

In Mymensingh, three people including a couple were killed in separate road accidents on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway in Bhaluka upazila yesterday.

The victims were identified as Kule Begum (45), her husband Akkas Ali (55), and Kamrul Islam (32), police said.

In Hobirbari area, one Kamrul Islam died after a truck hit his motorbike from behind, said SI Hadiul.

Police recovered the bodies from both accidents and handed them over to victims' families. Separate cases were lodged.

In Sirajganj, three of a family were killed in a road mishap on Nagarbari-Bogura highway in Shahzadpur on Tuesday.

The deceased were identified as Kanchu Sutrodhar (40), his wife Anna Rani (35) and their seven-year-old daughter Tora, said police.

Officer-in-Charge of Hatikumrul Highway Police Station Md Khairul Islam said the accident occurred around 7pm, when a speeding bus hit and killed them on the spot.

The bus driver managed to escaped the scene with his vehicle, he added.

Thousands deprived of OMS rice in Barishal

Mismanagement over list results in BCC returning tonnes of rice allocated for the poor

SUSHANTA GHOSH

The special Open Market Sale (OMS) programme to provide rice at Tk 10 per kg started in April to help those outside safety net during the Covid-19 pandemic.

As part of this programme, Barishal City Corporation (BCC) was set to be allocated the rations by the food department according to the city corporation's enlistment of people who meet the criteria.

For the first month, BCC sent a list of 8,000 people, said a Barishal Regional Food Department official, requesting anonymity. After cross-checking, the department provided 10kg rice for each name on the list.

For May, the department

allocated rice for 18,000 people under BCC. However, the city corporation provided only 12,400 names. As a result, the allocated rice for the other 5,600 will now have to be returned to the food department, although there are many people in the city who need the rations.

One such individual, Azahar Mia, a rickshaw puller from Ward 2, said he was unable to enlist his name for the special OMS rice allocation, although he's eligible for it.

In spite of this, the food department decided to allocate rice for another 30,000 people under the programme for this month. But this phase hangs in the balance too, as BCC is yet to submit a list, and failure to do so

within the next couple of weeks may lead to termination of the allocations yet again.

Faruque Hossain Sikder, regional controller (RC) of the Food Department, said BCC's failure to submit a complete list led to the squandering of 5,600 people's allocation for May. There is a fear that the same will happen for a portion of June's allocation too, he said.

Asked to explain this failure, the RC expressed frustration in this gross mishap. "When people are starving, this failure is simply a tragic case of mismanagement," he said. If the list is not compiled in time, thousands of people will be deprived of rations they are entitled to, he added.

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Man who hid Covid-19 test result dies at RMCH

Relatives reveal after death, six staffers quarantined

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A Covid-19 positive patient hid his details to get admitted into Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH) yesterday. His relatives revealed the information after he died shortly after.

The incident forced hospital authorities to put six of its staffers, including two doctors, on quarantine. They also suspended treatment at a medicine ward corner to disinfect it.

Rabiul Islam (45) of Chapainawabganj died at 11am, and hours later, his relatives revealed that he was tested Covid-19 positive in Dhaka a week ago, said Dr Saiful Ferdous Khairul Ataturk, the hospital's deputy director.

Dr Saiful, quoting relatives, said they did so because they thought Rabiul would not be treated if the information was revealed.

Rabiul went to Chapainawabganj after he tested positive, and had been in home quarantine. After his condition deteriorated yesterday, he was taken to RMCH by a rented vehicle around 10:30am.

At the hospital, he was taken to the medicine ward to treat his fever and breathing problem, but he died.

Quantum Foundation secured his body for proper burial, said Kaiser Parvez, the foundation's divisional director.

Rabiul's relatives, who took him to the hospital, managed to leave RMCH without being quarantined, hospital sources said.

Mentionable, RMCH has dedicated Covid-19 treatment facilities. A patient with a severe case of Covid-19 will be admitted to the hospital, and those with mild cases get referred to other local hospitals with help from authorities.

With Rabiul, the Covid-19 death toll in Rajshahi division reached 10. The division's total infected persons reached 1,050 until yesterday morning, stated a report of Rajshahi divisional health director's office.

Among the infected, 253 received treatment, while 280 were undergoing treatment at different hospitals. The rest were directed to be in home quarantine, added the report.



Following yesterday's rain in the capital, this small road at the capital's Moghbazar overflowed, as the drains were blocked by accumulated rubbish. This resulted in pedestrians and vehicles having to wade through the muddy water to reach their destinations.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Tk 80 LAKH GRAFT Ex-DIG prisons Partha Gopal denied bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday refused to grant bail to Partha Gopal Banik, suspended deputy inspector general of prisons, in connection with a case filed over recovery of Tk 80 lakh from his residence.

The HC bench of Justice Obaidul Hassan sent his bail petition to the regular bench for its hearing after reopening of the court following ongoing closure.

It passed the order after holding a virtual hearing on the bail petition recently filed by Partha Gopal Banik over video conference.

Anti-Corruption Commission's lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star Partha Banik cannot get released from jail as per the HC order.

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