

Covid disrupts edn of over 70pc youths: ILO

Bss, Dhaka

The coronavirus pandemic is having a devastating effect on the education and training of young people as it disrupts education of over 70 percent of the youths, according to an analysis by the International Labour Organization.

Since the outset of the pandemic, over 70 percent of youths who study or combine study with work have been adversely affected by the closing of schools, universities and training centres, the analysis said.

The report titled “Youth and Covid-19: impacts on jobs, education, rights and mental well-being” said about 65 percent of young people reported having learned less since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic because of the transition from classroom to online and distance learning during lockdown.

Despite their efforts to continue studying and training, half of them believed their studies would be delayed and nine percent thought that they might fail, said an ILO media release.

The situation has been even worse for youths living in lower-income countries, who have less access to internet, lack of equipment and sometimes lack of space at home.

This highlights large “digital divides” between regions: while 65 percent of youths in the high-income countries were taught classes via video-lecture, only 18 percent in low-income countries could keep studying online.

“The pandemic is inflicting multiple shocks on young people. It is not only destroying their jobs and employment prospects, but also disrupting their education and training and having serious impacts on their mental well-being. We cannot let this happen,” said ILO Director-General Guy Ryder.

CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR FUTURE

According to the report, 38 percent of young people are uncertain of their future career prospects, with the crisis expected to create more obstacles in the labour market and to lengthen the transition from school to work.

Some have already felt a direct impact, with one in six youths having to stop work since the onset of the

pandemic. Many younger workers are more likely to be employed in highly affected occupations, such as support, services and sales-related work, making them more vulnerable to the economic consequences of the pandemic. Forty-two percent of those who have continued to work have seen their incomes reduced.

This has had an impact on their mental well-being. The survey found that 50 percent of young people are possibly subject to anxiety or depression, while a further 17 percent are probably affected by it.

YOUNG VOICES SHOULD BE HEARD

Despite the extreme circumstances, young people are using their energy to mobilise and speak-out in the fight against the crisis. According to the survey, one in four did some volunteer work during the pandemic.

Ensuring that youth voices are heard is critical to delivering a more inclusive response to the Covid-19 crisis. Giving young people a say in decision-making to articulate their needs and ideas improves the effectiveness of policies and programmes and gives youth the chance to participate in their delivery, says the report.

“The findings of this timely study clearly show how young women and young workers are being hardest hit by the ongoing crisis,” said Tuomo Poutiainen, country director of ILO Bangladesh.

“And Bangladesh is no exception,” Tuomo said, adding, “Millions of youths are bearing the brunt of the ever-widening ‘digital divide’ with poor access to online and distance learning, a lack of IT equipment and a lack of study space at home. This lack of education and skills training will further undermine their future career prospects.”

He said unless urgent action is taken, the nation's youths will suffer severe and long-lasting impacts from this pandemic and its socio-economic fallout -- both mentally and physically. “We must safeguard their education, training and rights to access decent work.”

Hazardous cargo lying at Ctg port

FROM PAGE 1

It is to be noted that a fire broke out at shed No 3 of the port on the afternoon of July 15 during which there was a small explosion, sources said.

Port users have urged safe management of such dangerous cargo to avert a potential devastating accident like the recent explosion at Beirut port.

The P-shed lacks modern management for storing hazardous goods for a long time, said Khairul Alam Sujan, director of Bangladesh Shipping Agents' Association (BSAA), adding that the port should not be a warehouse and the system of direct delivery from the port needs to be changed.

Importers need to get delivery of their imported goods within 30 days after the consignments are unloaded from ships at the port jetty. If they fail to get delivery within the 30-day period, the port authorities send the import documents of those consignments to the customs authorities which give notice to the importer.

And if the importer does not get delivery of the goods within 15 days of issuing of the notice, the customs authorities can auction those off.

However, this process is under several limitations both at the port end and at customs, said Customs Commissioner

Fakhrul Alam. These include delays in holding auctions due to a shortage of manpower and failure to provide the correct documents and even when auctions are held, sometimes the value of the goods are not raised from bidders and so, cannot be sold legally, he added.

COMMITTEE FORMED

The committee -- which comprises two directors of CPA, two officials from Chattogram Customs House, and a representative from the Department of Environment, Chattogram -- has been asked to submit its report by seven working days.

It has also been asked to make a list of chemical and hazardous goods stored at the P-shed, determine the period of storage, and make a list of goods to be auctioned off or destroyed.

CPA Secretary Md Omar Faruk said the committee would also see whether there are proper safety and security arrangements to store dangerous goods at the P-shed and has been asked to recommend necessary measures.

It would also see whether existing law and regulations of different authorities including customs, port, explosive department, environment and other related offices regarding handling, storing and delivery of hazardous goods are adequate.

ACC quizzes former DG

FROM PAGE 1

One letter, signed by ACC Director Zainul, reads that there are allegations against Azad of misappropriating a huge amount of money through the procurement of substandard masks, personal protective equipment, and other necessary equipment for the doctors involved in Covid-19 treatment.

Another letter, signed by its director Sheikh Md Fanafillah, reads that Regent Hospital chairman Md Shahed has amassed illegal wealth by issuing fake Covid-19 certificates. “For the sake of proper investigation, it is necessary to record your [Azad's] statement,” it added.

Amid severe criticism and scams related to Covid-19 testing, Prof Azad stepped down as the DGHS director general on July 21.

In his resignation letter, he cited health grounds as he has been suffering from chronic kidney disease for long.

Prof Azad had been the DGHS chief since September 2016.

70pc returnees

FROM PAGE 1

access to income-generating activities, social services, healthcare systems, and social support networks in foreign countries.

Sixty-four percent returnees said following the Covid-19 outbreak, they struggled to access information and health services in those countries, the report mentioned.

Twenty-nine percent of the respondents said they had returned home because they were asked to leave the country they were in, and 23 percent mentioned they were worried about Covid-19 and wished to return.

Moreover, 26 percent of the respondents said they had returned because their families had asked them

to, and nine percent returned because they were worried about being stranded there.

The study found 55 percent returnees had unpaid debt.

It said about 75 percent respondents wanted to re-migrate and 97 percent of them wished to go back to the country they were in before the pandemic.

Migrant workers are some of the most vulnerable groups affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, said Giorgi Gigauni, IOM chief of mission in Bangladesh.

“Bangladeshi migrant workers and their remittance-dependent communities are adversely impacted by the unprecedented global restrictions on mobility and the Covid-19-induced recession,” he said.



Nearly 50 such houses have been washed away by the Dhaleshwari in recent weeks in Nologoria area of Savar due to the strong current in the swollen river. The photo was taken on Wednesday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Bills cleared but no trace of work

FROM PAGE 1

The TIB in their research tilted “Governance Challenges in the Implementation of the Infrastructure Development Project under Constituency-Based Block Allocation”, analysed 628 schemes worth Tk 298 crore.

Of the projects, 464 were under IRIDP-1 and the rest under IRIDP-2.

The Important Rural Infrastructure Development Project 1 (IRIDP-1) covers projects from March 2010 to December 2014, when each of the 300 constituencies got block allocation of Tk 3 crore per year for five years.

The IRIDP-2 covers projects from July 2015 to June 2019 when 284 constituencies (excluding 16 seats in city corporation areas) got Tk 5 crore each year for four years.

The study randomly selected a total of 50 out of 300 parliamentary constituencies. One upazila of each constituency was selected through random sampling.

The research data was collected from May to December 2019 and the data analysis was done until March 2020.

The study interviewed 341 key persons, including MPs, government officials concerned, local representatives, contractors and media personnel. It also held 180 group discussions with the beneficiaries and others.

“[There were] Complaints of extorting commissions from the contractor at a fixed rate [1-2 percent] in 86 percent of the selected constituencies -- either directly in party fund [one-time] or by the MP through personal assistants,” alleged the research.

The “commission money” amounted to between Tk 15 lakh and 40 lakh in each constituency, said the report.

Although e-tendering has been introduced to curb corruption, systemic irregularities exist where oversight bodies, contractors, MPs, local public representatives and influential syndicates are involved, TIB said.

The study said of the total schemes in the IRIDP-1, construction of roads accounted for 59.5 percent, roads and culverts/drains 28.9 percent, bridges and culverts 10.3 percent and growth centres 1.3 percent.

In the completed IRIDP-2, road construction covered 62.2 percent, road culverts/drains 36 percent, and bridges and culverts 1.8 percent.

“People taking on schemes prefer making roads and constructing bridges and culverts as it gives them more scope for corruption. They also want to show off the direct impact of the scheme they have undertaken, which is why they prefer making roads and bridges,” researcher Juliet Rossette told The Daily Star.

She said lawmakers may think that if they build roads and bridges, it will

help the pace of development.

Sixty-eight percent of the schemes was implemented within the stipulated time mentioned in the tender, while 32 percent needed extra time. Seventy-four percent of the schemes were done fully and 21.5 percent partially, the report said.

The research said work quality of 33 percent schemes was “not good”, 30 percent “not good, not bad” and 37 percent was good.

Only 14.5 percent of all schemes was repaired. And among the unrepaired, 42 percent were not in good condition.

No complaints were lodged against 77.6 percent of the schemes, said the report, reasoning that complaints are not made due to threats and harassment.

And if the contractor is a relative/acquaintance/party worker of the MP concerned, people are less interested in lodging any complaint because of fear, the report said.

Although the Planning Commission has a uniform policy for all development projects, there is no specific policy or guideline for the planning and implementation of the bulk allocation for the constituency, the report added.

“[There was a] Lack of complete evaluation of this development project by IMED [Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division] of the planning commission as it was a politically motivated one,” the report said.

It was in 2005 that the then finance minister approved the allocation of Tk 2 crore for each parliamentary constituency following a proposal of block allocation by the treasury and opposition MPs.

A project was later approved at the Ecneec meeting and the allocation per constituency gradually increased. However, the 50 women members of reserved seats in parliament are not covered under this scheme.

Addressing the virtual press conference, TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said their survey found that people's involvement in the government development schemes was limited.

People’s “participation” had entirely been restricted within the party and in the grasp of local leaders and activists, he said.

As local public representatives were at the helm of such development schemes, it was expected people's participation would be greater in those than in other projects, he added.

Also, there was no preventive measure against corruption in the government schemes. The study found no measure for ensuring accountability even after allegations of corruption were raised, he added.

Iftekharuzzaman said ideally, the lawmakers should keep themselves away from the government's development activities.

However, as lawmakers' involvement in such activities has become a culture in the country, what should be done is to neutrally and professionally evaluate their deficiencies and shortcomings in such development activities of the past 15 years, he said.

Based on the evaluation, together with international experiences, strong legal, institutional, and policy frameworks should be formulated before taking the next steps, he added.

He said the primary role of lawmakers is to hold the government accountable.

Their role is to formulate law and take part in parliamentary debates and discussions representing people of their constituencies, he said.

When they get involved in events like the government's development activities, purchase or distribution, a “conflict of interest” is created and in such situations, it might not be possible for them to play their primary role of making the government accountable, said the TIB executive director.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report also made nine recommendations, including making an impartial and comprehensive evaluation of the projects under block allocation, formulation of specific legal frameworks or policies, detailing instructions for the scheme selection process, formulation of schemes based on geographical location and appropriateness, representation of local people in relevant coordination committees to ensure people's participation and a reduction of political influence in the decision-making process.

“Information boards should be set up in areas where schemes are implemented. On the information board, details of the scheme, budget, deadline, names and contact numbers of the engineer and contractor, etc. must be disclosed,” the report also said in its recommendations, adding all types of information about this project must be published on a website and regularly updated.

“Initiatives should be taken to plan and implement schemes directly consistent with the objective of increasing marketing facilities and accelerating rural employment, including providing assistance to increase production of agricultural and non-agricultural products,” the report recommended.

“In order to establish good governance, effective accountability system [Code of Conduct for MPs, disclosure of financial accounts including their activities, area-based public hearings for development projects implemented in their involvement] should be introduced to reduce the tendency and opportunities for corruption,” it added.

Decision on trial

FROM PAGE 1

to conduct the vaccine trial on 4,200 healthcare workers in seven hospitals.

But the trial became uncertain after the health minister and the health service division secretary last month said it would take time for the government to make a decision on the trial.

Speaking to journalists during a briefing after yesterday's cabinet purchase committee meeting, the finance minister said, “Let the meeting be held... It is not possible for me to say anything final right now.”

“I have told the health minister that getting the vaccine [soon] would be tough if [we] depend on a single source. I have already noticed that many countries have signed contracts with some others who will produce vaccines; they have also made advance payments. I told the health minister that we should go for such an arrangement,” Kamal said.

Talking about a Russian vaccine, the finance minister said, “We have to contact their sources too. We have to contact all sources whoever will produce vaccines.”

The minister said there is an allocation in the national budget to buy Covid-19 vaccines.

On Monday, Health Service Division Secretary Abdul Mannan also told this newspaper that the decision on the phase-III trial of the Chinese vaccine would be made next week.

During yesterday's discussion between the two ministers, the health minister also mentioned that the World Health Organization may supply 20 percent of the vaccine demand by March 2021.

The Bangladesh government, however, is trying to get the vaccine earlier from any probable source, the health minister added.

42 MORE DIED

Meanwhile, 42 more people died of Covid-19 and 2,995 tested positive for the virus in 24 hours till 8:30am yesterday, according to a press release of the health directorate.

The Directorate General of Health Services sent the release to the media around 3:30pm instead of disclosing the information through a regular online bulletin.

On Tuesday, DGHS Additional Director General Prof Nasima Sultana said they would not hold the online bulletin until further notice.

According to the press release, a total of 14,751 samples were tested in labs across the country during the 24-hour period. Of them, 20.3 percent tested positive.

As many as 1,117 Covid-19 patients recovered during the same period.

So far, 153,089 novel coronavirus patients out of 266,498 confirmed cases have recovered. The recovery rate is 57.44 percent.

On March 8, the authorities reported the first three Covid-19 cases in the country. The first death from the virus was recorded on March 18.

With the latest deaths, the death toll from the virus rose to 3,513 -- around 1.32 percent of all confirmed cases.

Meanwhile, Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday requested the health ministry to hold its regular online briefing on Covid-19 at least twice a week.

Quader, also the minister for road transport and bridges, made the call during a virtual views exchange meeting with the officers of the BRTA and BRTC. The minister joined the meeting from his residence in the capital.

“I draw the attention of the health ministry to telecast the bulletin at least twice a week,” he said.

He expressed fear that there would be rumours and people would show indifference to fighting Covid-19 if the virtual bulletin did not continue.

SP of Rajshahi

FROM PAGE 1

The duo realised that Belayet had taken the money through fraudulence.”

Golam then asked his bank not to pay the mount.

On August 8, some 15-16 unidentified persons, along with Belayet, entered the complainant's house in the capital's Dhanmondi claiming to be DB men and demanded Tk 25 lakh or else they would frame Mostofa in an arms case, the complaint read.

In the complaint, Mostofa alleged that the unnamed people led by Belayet beat him up and forcibly took him to the capital's DB office. He said he was blindfolded in the office.

Mostofa alleged that Belayet told him that if he did not get the money, he would “put Mostofa in a crossfire or a drug case.”

Mostofa's father paid Belayet Tk 3.5 lakh that day.

On August 10, another Tk 50,000 was paid to Belayet. The accused asked for Tk 6 lakh within 7 days, otherwise he would frame Mostofa in various cases, the case documents added.

After a hearing, the magistrate took the case into cognisance, recorded the statement of the complainant and instructed the Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) to investigate the matter and submit a report by November 1.

The Daily Star failed to reach the SP for comments. He did not pick up his phone or respond to texts.

However, SP Belayet told a paper, “I lent Tk 5 lakh to the man [Mostofa]. He paid one lakh in two installments. The rest Tk 4 lakh is to be paid on Thursday. I also have documents. Since he is not paying the money, the man filed an extortion case against me.”

Asked whether he was a relative of the man, the SP said, “We are not relatives, but acquaintances.”