

LACK OF RESOURCES

Printing textbooks outside Dhaka may hit snag

ERSHAD KAMOL

The government initiative to print textbooks for primary and equivalent students outside Dhaka might hit a snag due to lack of printing resources.

As a result, students might not receive the books of the next academic year in time, publishers said, but the government believes that the entire nation will benefit from this initiative.

Unlike previous years, the government has decided to publish textbooks for primary school and Ibtedia in six divisional headquarters -- Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal and Sylhet -- this year. Earlier, these books were published in Dhaka by Bangla Bazar-based publishers.

"This initiative will help eliminate the syndicate of Bangla Bazar-based unscrupulous publishers, which will ultimately help the entire nation," Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid told The Daily Star.

Around eight crore textbooks will be printed at an

estimated cost of Tk 150 crore, majority of which will be published from outside Dhaka, sources said. Publishers will be invited to print and bind the books through tender.

And the books will be distributed for free at schools and Madrasahs through the District Primary Education Office.

But some publishers expressed scepticism about the success of the government move.

"Publishing textbooks is a highly technical issue. Since only a few publishing houses outside Dhaka are equipped with adequate printing resources, the government decision might hit a snag," said Abu Taher, chairman of Bangladesh Pustak Prakashana O Bikreta Samity.

"Moreover, power crisis and shortage of binders at the divisional towns are major obstacles to making the plan a success," he added.

"We have already informed the ministry of its disadvantages several times," he continues. "If the publishers outside Dhaka fail to deliver,

there won't be enough time to print the books in Dhaka, since the publishers in Dhaka by that time will remain busy publishing textbooks for the secondary level and its equivalent students. As a result, primary students might not receive books in time."

The government should have taken such a decision after creating enough facilities for the job, he added.

According to sources, around 1200 printing presses, across the country are capable of printing textbooks. Of them, 1000 presses are located in Dhaka.

However, National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) Chairman Prof Md Mostafa Kamaluddin is hopeful of making the plan a success.

He said the District Primary Education Officers, District Education Officers, Thana Nirbahi Officers and Deputy Commissioners will work together with the NCTB officials to implement the project.

"In the event of failure, we will get two more months to resolve any problems," he

said. "Our plan is to complete everything by October. If the plan fails, we will be able to complete the job in November and December."

Besides, the textbooks would also be available on website, he said, adding that anybody can download them via Internet.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid, however, accused the publishers of making confusing comments on the government move.

"A vested group of publishers are against the decision of publishing textbooks outside Dhaka. But someone has to take such an initiative to break the monopoly of a group of Dhaka-based publishers. They are also against the government decision of giving textbooks for free," he said.

Instead of criticising the ministry, the publishers should come forward to make the plans a success for the interest of the entire nation, the minister said.

He also said the government would provide all support to make the project a success.



PHOTO: STAR

With the risk of floods increasing, carpenters remain busy making boats to make a quick buck, as boat becomes the only mode of transport during floods. The photo was taken in Savar yesterday.

POOR PERFORMANCE OF NATIONAL AIDS/STD PROGRAMME

Service to 1.69 lakh high-risk people uncertain

MAHBUBA ZANNAT

Service to some 1.69 lakh high-risk people for HIV/AIDS becomes uncertain as the World Bank (WB) warned the government of discontinuing the HIV/AIDS Targeted Interventions (HATI) project due to poor performance of National AIDS and STD Programme (NASP).

NASP failed to complete bidding procedure for six targeted interventions even after seven months, which was supposed to start from January 2009. So, the WB on June 16 warned the government of discontinuing the project if the process cannot be completed by June 30.

"We don't want service disruption as it will lead a huge number of high-risk group to a vulnerable condition and also would tend to increase the prevalence of AIDS/STD in the country," said Dinesh Nayar, team leader of HNPS (Health Nutrition and Population Sector Programme).

Under the HATI project, the injecting drug users (IDUs), brothel, street, hotel and residence-based sex workers and their clients and MSMs (males having sex with males) were provided services to control HIV/AIDS by around 200 NGOs. The time frame of service providing was fixed initially for 18 months from January 2009-June 2010 after completion of the 2nd phase of the project in December 2008.

But the dilly-dallying of the NASP to select NGOs to provide service to those high-risk groups lead 120,000 population to be deprived of getting services from April 2009 under three packages, including intervention for street-based sex workers, hotel and residence-based sex workers and internal migrant/client of sex workers as the activities are closed since April 2009.

The reason is that the NGOs that could not win the bidding process stopped working while the new NGOs,

which won the bidding, are yet to go through final agreement and cannot start their activities yet.

But the rest three packages, which include interventions of brothel-based sex workers, IDUs and MSMs that continued their activities till June, might be stopped now, raising the toll of vulnerable people to 1.69,000 as fresh bidding is yet to be completed.

Without showing any apportion reason, NASP re-tendered for these three packages cancelling prior proposal from interested NGOs and bidders again submitted the proposal to NASP.

But if the government fails to choose the NGOs properly within a very short time and if the WB does not continue the project, the future of approximately 169,000 target population will be uncertain, said the activists working with the vulnerable groups, adding that many of the Drop in Centres (DICs) have been closed by this time from where the high-risk groups used to receive services.

Talking to The Daily Star, Programme Manager of NASP Abdur Rahman, however, said WB would not create any problem as in a meeting on June 25, the government and the WB reached an under-

standing that the bidding would be completed within a very short time soon after revising the operational plan.

He further said that service is not interrupted anywhere.

But the fact is that Care Bangladesh has already stopped its activities under the HATI project.

"The 32 DICs which were run by the Care directly to provide services to the IDUs have been closed from June 30," said Selina Ferdous, team leader of Care Bangladesh, adding that they sent a letter to the government regarding this in 1st week of June and as the government neither responded to the letter nor signed any agreement with them, they stopped providing services.

"HIV prevalence would increase if the beneficiaries are deprived of getting services," said Prof Nazrul Islam of Virology department at BSMU, adding that very few people were brought under the coverage and if they are dejected in this way, it will be harmful for society.

The achievements of last five years would be wiped out if the programme is halted even for few days, according to experts.

The NGOs continuing their activities under HATI project

also apprehended that taking the chance of weaknesses of HATI, Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) is capturing the targeted interventions. For this reason, those who would win the bidding process won't have any place to work for.

However, Save the Children USA, which is managing the fund and technical side of GFATM fund, said it has been working with 45 NGOs and as per the government decision, it is working with a small group of IDUs at a specific point at old Dhaka in the city where the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is highest among the IDUs.

"We are working here just for an interim period," said Deputy Director in Programme Implementation and Management Amjad Ali.

Considering AIDS a national priority issue, the government established NASP as a separate wing under the health and family welfare ministry. But negligence of the high officials of NASP tends to turn the programme a vulnerable one.

In the last six months, two programme managers and two line directors were changed in the NASP leading to stop the programme.

Sustainable planning a must to ensure safe drinking water

Experts tell workshop

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sustainable planning ensuring community participation is needed to face the challenges of safe drinking water during any disaster in the city, said the experts at a workshop yesterday.

They said water crisis in the city might worsen and immediate attention is a must for adopting necessary policies and strategies.

The national workshop titled 'Strengthening of safe drinking water management for disaster risk reduction in Dhaka city: Challenges and the way forward' was organised by Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Centre (BDPC) and the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD) at the National Press Club in the city.

Dr Shoichi Ando, coordinator of UNCRD Hyogo Office in Japan, said during any disaster the local people is the first to reach the site and start relief and rescue work.

So a mutual cooperation between the people and the government and an early preparedness can achieve a lot in this regard, he added.

"Natural disaster has become a part of our existence and people have a culture of working together during disasters," said Farhad Uddin, director general of Disaster Management Bureau.

This collaboration has to be increased with constructive training, he added.

Farhad said during every natural disaster crisis of safe drinking water further aggravates.

He urged all to protect the safe water sources and save



PHOTO: STAR

Dr Shoichi Ando speaks at a workshop at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. On his left are Farhad Uddin, Mohammad Saidur Rahman and Shahjahan Ali Mollah.

the rivers of Dhaka.

Shahjahan Ali Mollah, managing director of Dhaka Wasa, said the underground water level in the city continues to fall creating an alarming situation.

With the increase of population, demand for safe water is rising every year leading to further exploitation of underground water, he added.

"Water table is going down at least two metres every year. Because of too much construction the aquifer doesn't recharge naturally. At the same time surface water sources, mostly the rivers around the city are too polluted and other water bodies have already been filled up

with earth for more construction," said Shahjahan.

The situation cannot be improved unless community people take the lead, he said urging all to play their part to prevent wastage of water and stop illegal connection.

Shahjahan blamed illegal water supply lines for contaminating water.

"Most of these connections are made in the dark at night leaving leak in the lines. These illegal connections often get mixed up with sewer line. So the man-made leaks are the main sources of polluted waters," he said.

However, in the old part of Dhaka the water pipes are eroding as these were installed

during the British period and need replacement, he added.

The community leaders attending the workshop said safe drinking water sources in Dhaka goes under water following a little rain.

The situation gets worse during flood while stinky polluted water is part of the daily life increasing the risk of waterborne diseases, they added.

Participated by DCC ward commissioners and community stakeholders, the workshop was also addressed by Mohammad Saidur Rahman, director of BDPC, and Edward Yutaka Sumoto, assistant researcher of UNCRD Hyogo Office.

'Each varsity to get net connectivity'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman Prof Nazrul Islam on Tuesday said all the universities of the country would be brought under internet connectivity and libraries be digitised under 'Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (HEQEP)'.

Inaugurating a two-day workshop on 'Academic innovation fund' at the commission's office in the city, the UGC chairman said, "Such project to enhance the quality of higher education has been undertaken for the first time in the country."

Fund starting from Tk 21 lakh to Tk seven crore would be granted for research and train-

ing projects which would be selected through competition, he said.

Gradually, the private universities would also be included in the project, he added.

Earlier on May 14, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid inaugurated the 'Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (HEQEP)' funded by the World Bank.

The workshop was also addressed by UGC member Prof Md Tajul Islam and HEQEP Project Director Ruknuddin Ahmed.

Around 84 representatives, including registrars, deans and directors (planning and development) of the 28 public universities, were present.



PHOTO: PID

Speaker Advocate Abdul Hamid hands over a flag with the monogram of the Jatiya Sangsad to the chairman of a parliamentary standing committee at a ceremony on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises yesterday. (Story on page 2)

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