

FLOOD IN NORTHERN, CENTRAL REGIONS

Over a thousand schools affected

STAR REPORT

Educational activities of lakhs of students in the northern and central regions of the country are in a shambles as over a thousand schools remain submerged or were washed away by flood waters in the past few weeks.

Aside from being inundated or damaged by the flood, many schools in 18 districts of these two regions had to be shut down due to dwindling attendance of students who along with their family members had to take refuge in flood shelters away from the schools, report our correspondents.

Moreover, in many cases, books and other stationary belonging to a large number of these students had been lost or damaged.

The government will provide new books to the students whose books had been lost or damaged due to the flood, assured education officers of the affected districts, one of them being Mohammad Hossain, primary educa-

tion officer of Bogra.

When asked how teachers in these schools would compensate for the lost hours in lesson time, Hossain said makeup classes will be arranged in schools in the affected areas.

The makeup classes will start if the flood waters recede in the next two to three days and if necessary, the classes will continue during the weekly or public holidays, he added.

The worst affected district is Kurigram where around 43,000 students of 248 primary schools have been badly affected as their dwellings and schools have been inundated by the flood waters, according to district primary education office (DPEO) sources.

The schools have been closed for around two weeks, said Dabir Uddin, DPEO of Kurigram. However, he said the water has been subsiding day by day.

Our district administration sources in Bogra said in Sariakandi upazila

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Schoolgirls wade through knee-deep floodwater on the premises of Hoshne Ara Hasan Girls High School in Tangail Sadar upazila to attend class. Over 420 educational institutions in eight upazilas of the district have been affected by the ongoing flood, hampering education of hundreds of students. The photo was taken three days ago.

PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL

SC orders Brac to pay Tk 404cr in income taxes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday upheld the government orders asking Brac to pay Tk 404.20 crore income tax for 11 years between 1993 and 2012.

A five-member bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha delivered the verdict after hearing on 11 government appeals challenging a High Court order that had gone in favour of the non-government organisation.

The HC in December 2014 exempted Brac from paying tax, considering it a charitable organisation.

It delivered the verdict after Brac had submitted 11 income tax reference applications challenging as many number of notices issued by the deputy commissioner of taxes in Dhaka, which claimed Tk 404.20 crore in total as income tax for 1993-94 to 2011-12 tax years.

Following the SC verdict, Brac has to pay the amount to the tax department, said Deputy Attorney General (DAG) Sardar Md Rashed Jahangir.

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Time to evaluate role of private universities

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undergraduate education, and have thus saved millions of dollars in foreign currencies.

Private universities account for teaching 65 percent of the campus-based students and are no longer the destination of the children of the rich only. A growing number of middle and lower-middle income groups are sending their children to private universities.

This is in stark contrast to a belief in some quarters that private universities are elitist, their education and curricula as something not reflecting local culture and heritage. Some allege that they are money-making machines

people run some educational institutions. But as the number of students is growing, it is not possible only by the government, he added.

"Besides public universities, private universities are a reality. We have to admit it. This has come here to stay. This will keep on expanding with the growing number of people going for the higher education," he said.

He said there were a good number of private universities that were doing well although the history of private university is not very old. But unfortunately, private universities are in the news for wrong reasons.

Talking about the involvement of some university students in militancy,

He said students would not get involved in militancy if they were involved in study, recreation, constructive activities and knew Bangladesh's culture and history more than they do now.

He said the militancy issue was a problem for both private and public universities. "It's not right to think that militants are growing only at private universities, and public universities are free from this problem."

The former central bank governor ruled out the common assumption that only children of the well-off families study at private universities, saying 35 percent students of East West University come from villages whose

vital role in providing highly trained human resources for the future growth of the country.

He said the universities must invest in research.

Prof Saad also talked about the supply chain management.

"We get the students after 12 years of their education in primary and higher [secondary] education. By then, a significant level of mental and ethical development has already taken place. In the four years they are at private universities, how much change can we bring about? If we expect them to develop significantly during their university life and work for the national interest, the entire supply chain has to be coordinated.

"You just can't come and demand at the higher education level to do this," he said, adding that it must start from primary level and that it had to be in the broader planning framework.

Carmen Z Lamagna, VC of American International University Bangladesh, said her university had formulated local case studies for the students, which was not the case earlier.

She put forward a proposal for VCs to utilise each other's resources to give the best education to students. She also said all universities should work together to sort out the problems they faced.

Prof M Rezwan Khan, VC of United International University, said there were problems in private university sector but if the criticism was done indiscriminately, it would affect the whole sector.

He said private universities were considered as nonprofit entity but they had to pay 15 percent tax.

"Everybody knows it, but no one talks about it," he said.

He said after the recent incidents of terrorism, one was trying to point finger at the other.

"But did we ever think why this is happening? When students read newspapers, watch televisions and come out on the streets they see contradictions and lies everywhere.

"If we do not address these contradictions, our younger people will be misguided. A nation cannot go on like that," he said.

He also added that one must have the courage to face these fundamental contradictions between "what we say and do".

Prof Imran Rahman, VC of University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, said in terms of the successes, private universities in this short period of 24 years have done an excellent job of creating a research culture.

Besides, he said, one of the main things of private universities is that teachers are much more student-centric.

"I have to listen to the students and their guardians as they hold us more accountable as they pay full fees here in private universities. The level of accountability is very high in private universities," he added.

Prof Md Golam Samdani Fakir, VC of Green University, said one of the most fundamental issues many of the private universities facing was getting quality teachers.

"Majority of the teachers has the mindset of the 19th and 20th centuries in terms of teaching methods. How a mind of 20th century could prepare the students of 21st century?"

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said that the achievements of private universities had not been highlighted sufficiently.

"They are actually producing high quality professionals and producing the future human resource that this country desperately needs to reach the goal of being a middle income country," he added.

Tajdin Hassan, head of marketing of The Daily Star, gave a PowerPoint presentation on private and public universities.

Militants use 20 online apps for communication

Some of them private messaging apps, say investigators

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Investigators have identified over 20 online apps frequently used by militants for connecting and chatting among themselves privately, an official of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit of police said yesterday.

"But the challenge is there are hundreds of messaging apps (applications) that allow private communication. And militants keep moving from one to another," said the official wishing anonymity.

The apps developed by different

corporations are often available for free download, he said, adding that the apps protect users' data most of the time.

He added that a couple of years ago an app titled Torchat became very popular among militants as it automatically deleted messages about five minutes after they were read and always hid the location of its users.

The investigators, however, were yet to find out which apps were used by militants at Holey Artisan Sholakia and Kolyanpur, he said.

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Service providers link up

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These are some of the decisions made at a coordination meeting at the Nagar Bhaban yesterday with DSCC Mayor Sayeed Khokon in the chair.

It was the first such meeting between the DSCC mayor and representatives of 26 utility service providers after the government empowered the two Dhaka city mayors to impose decisions on utility service providers.

On June 27, the government issued a circular asking the chiefs of all utility service providers in the city to attend general meetings of the two city corporations and implement decisions to improve civic amenities.

Yesterday's meeting discussed a total of 13 issues, including waterlogging, traffic congestion, freeing the city canals from grabbers, preparedness for earthquake, clean-up drives and demolition of risky buildings in the city.

To ensure better coordination of work among all utility service providers, Khokon asked them to submit a six-month work plan to the DSCC soon.

He also told them to carry out road digging and construction work in the dry season and at a particular time to reduce sufferings of the city dwellers.

At the meeting, it was also decided that illegal bus and truck stands would be removed from the road under the Mayor Hanif Flyover at Jatrabari within 15 days to reduce traffic congestion in the area.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) would set up an action committee to conduct the eviction drive.

Jatrabari is one of the main entrances to the city and it should remain clear, said Khokon, asking the DMP representatives to make sure that the place is not reoccupied after eviction.

DMP Additional Police Commissioner Sheikh Mohammad Maruf Hasan said coordination is very important to reduce traffic congestion in the city.

He said two committees formed by the DMP identified 10 places in the DSCC where vehicles can be parked beside roads in a systematic way.

Kazi Golam Nasir, chief architect of the Department of Architecture, suggested that the government should build 10-storey towers in the city for using them as car parks.

Each tower on a plot of three-katha land would accommodate up to 100 vehicles, he added.

To tackle the waterlogging prob-

lem, the mayor asked the Deputy Commissioner's Office to remove illegal structures on the city canals within 15 days, and asked it to submit a report to the DSCC in a month.

Noting that most of the city canals are being encroached upon or filled up, he asked the Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) to identify such spots and report to the DC office to take necessary action.

The mayor decided to form a three-member committee that would decide on demolition of box culverts, which are partly blamed for waterlogging in the city.

The committee would take the

- A three-member committee will be formed to decide on demolition of box culverts in the capital
- Rajuk will decide on demolition of 109 risky buildings in the city after holding a meeting with the organisations concerned today
- DSCC will set up an emergency control room where utility service providers will keep a wireless set and involve a liaison officer to take complaints

next course of action after holding a meeting with the principal secretary to the prime minister, he said.

Khokon also asked the railway authorities to remove all unauthorised structures in and around the drainage channel near the Wasa pump house at Kamalapur to ease waterlogging in Shantinagar area.

He said they are thinking of setting up common utility ducts and asked the utility service providers to think about it.

"If we can do this, the frequency of road digging would come down and people's sufferings would be reduced greatly," said Khokon.

The meeting was attended by, among others, heads or representatives of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha, Wasa, Dhaka Power Distribution Company Ltd, Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Ltd, the Department of Environment and Fire Service and Civil Defence.



Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury, vice-chancellor of University of Asia Pacific, speaks at a roundtable on "Successes of and Challenges before Private Universities" at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

whose main focus is making profit.

This negative image worsened further after some of their present and former students have been found involved in recent militant attacks.

But a number of vice-chancellors said the truth was far from what was popularly believed. They were, however, candid about the problems and challenges facing private universities.

Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury, vice-chancellor of the University of Asia Pacific, said the quality of education at undergraduate level at some private universities was comparable to those in renowned universities in other countries.

However, he said the quality of students of private universities was lower compared to the students in public universities as the best students prefer the well-established public universities.

"Still we are trying to add value. And if you look at the end product, the value addition is much more than in the public universities as we do not get the best students but the end product is among the best," he told the discussion organised by The Daily Star.

Jamilur Reza said students going abroad for undergraduate education had almost come to a halt as private universities flourished in the country in the last two decades.

"This we can treat as a success. Their quality varies - some of them have gone for higher studies in the best universities in the world and got master's and PhD degrees."

Prof Abdul Mannan, chairman of the University Grants Commission, said: "I don't want to distinguish between private and public universities. A university is a university."

Universities and colleges in Bangladesh are usually run by the government and in some cases effluent

guardians are mostly farmers.

Prof Atiqul Islam, VC of North South University, whose university came under focus after several of its present and former students have been found to be linked with militancy, said the militancy issue had to be tackled at three levels: policing, surveillance of technology that spreads it and by universities, parents and the broader society.

"About success of the private sector, just imagine if we did not have these institutions where would the students go? And what would it cost the Bangladesh government in terms of foreign currency?" he asked.

These private universities can produce students capable of competing on the global stage and this is a big thing for a nation, he said, adding that since its inception, the NSU had produced 15,000 graduates and none of them was unemployed.

Prof Syed Saad Andaleeb, VC of Brac University, said private universities had not only created education opportunities for Bangladeshi students but also generated jobs for others.

Private universities have also created opportunities for students to study on scholarships, he said.

A lot of things are happening in Bangladesh, and in May next year, Brac University would launch a Nano satellite, he said, adding that universities should be seen as part of the global community.

He said the economy was growing and the growing service sector, which accounts for more than 50 percent of gross domestic product, also needed qualified people.

He said that about \$5 billion went out of the country for hiring people with higher managerial capacity. This is where private universities are playing a

- Private universities 94
- Functional 84, some of the rest 10 may go into operation from this semester
- Total students 4, 63,767, out of which 40% are women
- Total number of teachers are 14, 000, of them, 6,400 are full time
- Public universities 37
- Total students - more than 2.38 lakh
- Students under National University and Open University are 21 lakh

SOURCE: UGC

Mannan said no parents sent their children to university to be turned into militants.

Prof M Omar Rahman, VC of Independent University, Bangladesh, said the private university was not a marginal sector, as 65 percent of students in campus-based universities were studying in private ones.

He said the vast majority of students in higher education go to private universities. "I think what happens in private universities matter to the whole country."

There are 84 private universities operational in Bangladesh today compared to 37 public universities.

Prof Omar said private universities offered better environment, better infrastructure and highly qualified faculty, with their curricula more globally benchmarked.

Mohammed Farashudin, chairperson of the board of trustee of East West University, called upon private universities to go for soul-searching while resolving the militancy issue.