

# 'Holding exams, bringing education back to former state not the same'

In conversation with BracU Professor Emeritus Manzoor Ahmed on declining school attendance

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

After a year and a half, the country's schools finally reopened, and all students were welcomed back to classrooms on September 12. But according to Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, absenteeism has been growing in secondary schools for the last two weeks.

Against this backdrop, The Daily Star sat with Brac University (BracU) Professor Emeritus Manzoor Ahmed, also founding director of the university's Institute of Educational Development, to shed light on the matter.

**The Daily Star (DS):** Attendance rate was 67 percent at secondary schools on September 12 but dropped to 56 percent 15 days later. What may be the reasons?

**Manzoor Ahmed:** We all welcomed the decision to reopen schools, maintaining health guidelines.

Two-thirds of the students went to school (on September 12), which was not satisfactory, and even that number is dropping. This declining attendance rate is a matter of great concern.

Students want to join classes, but their families are concerned about different issues. Many studies and surveys show that students and their guardians are facing a financial crisis, so many children are joining work to support their family, which is child labour. On top of that, child marriage is on the rise.

Many of the students may even drop out of schools.

**DS:** There is a concern that many of the absent students will not return to schools, what do you think?

**Manzoor:** This is a big problem. We talked about dropouts and other issues when schools were closed, but government officials said students are doing assignments and attending online classes.

They further said officials are in touch with students, and there is no real problem. But now, we can see impacts of the closure.

**DS:** What steps can the government take to bring students back?

**Manzoor:** Only directions from high-officials will not work; we need to engage in conversations. There should be local committees comprising guardians, local representatives and school management committees to communicate about how to bring back students not attending classes.

**DS:** Did you come across any prior government plan to avoid possible absenteeism following reopening?

**Manzoor:** Education officials always tried to propagate the idea that

everything is fine, and there will not be much of a problem.

There were some guidelines and directions, but those alone will not work. A guideline was prepared to reopen schools, but there was no recovery plan, which is essential, as students lost almost two academic years.

It seems that the government is taking steps to hold public and other exams, as if that is their main job. Holding exams and bringing education back to its former state are two different matters.

Ten educationists in a joint statement recently emphasised bringing students back to classes, saying that utmost importance should be given on ensuring students' safety and mental wellbeing.

There should not be any pressure of exams immediately after reopening, as during the last one and a half years, students had to face different kinds of adversity.



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They also proposed prolonging the current academic year and rapidly assessing how prepared students are academically, among other necessary steps.

We hope the government will pay heed to these utmost important matters. The situation is unprecedented, and traditional approaches to deal with this issue will not be enough.



Parents have an innate need to safeguard their children's future, and in our age, the future is determined by education. Even though she might not be that educated herself, this mother is trying to pass all of it to her child, transcending the adversities of their life on the street, with hopes of a better future. This photo was taken yesterday near the capital's Sonargaon Hotel.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## MURDER OF ROHINGYA LEADER UN, envoys, rights orgs demand justice

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The UN, foreign diplomats and rights bodies have offered deep condolences over the murder of Rohingya leader Mohibullah and demanded immediate investigation to bring the killers to book.

Meanwhile, the UN Refugee Agency has enhanced its staff presence in Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar to ensure that Rohingyas have direct access to support services and can report their concerns.

Unknown assailants on Wednesday evening shot dead Mohibullah, chairperson of Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights in Kutupalong camp.

In a statement yesterday, UNHCR Bangladesh said, "We urge the Bangladesh authorities to undertake an immediate investigation, and hold those responsible to account."

UN Resident Coordinator Mia Seppo said the killing is a painful reminder of increasing risks of violence faced by activists promoting peaceful solutions to violent conflicts.

US Ambassador to Bangladesh, Earl R Miller, said he is saddened and disturbed by the murder of Mohibullah, a courageous champion of human rights of the Rohingya community.

UK High Commissioner Robert C Dickson said Mohibullah's death is a tragic loss to his family, friends and the Rohingya community.

The European Union in Bangladesh said it extends condolences to his family. "We hope that the authorities succeed in

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## RABINDRA UNIVERSITY

# Teacher Farhana cut students' hair herself

## CCTV footage reveals; HC wants to know about actions taken into the incident

STAR REPORT

The committee formed to investigate the forced haircutting of 14 students of Rabindra University has found allegations against teacher Farhana Yeasmin Baten to be true, reports our Pabna correspondent.

Laila Fardous Himel, chairperson of Rabindra Studies Department and head of the five-member probe committee, told The Daily Star yesterday that a CCTV footage confirmed that Farhana cut the students' hair.

Other teachers and staffers were present during the incident too, she said. "Now we are taking witnesses' statements."

"We may submit the probe report next week," said Laila Fardous.

Meanwhile, agitated students continued their hunger strike on the university's campus in Sirajganj for the second consecutive day, demanding Farhana's termination.

Students' representative Rukhsana Rapa said, "We will continue the hunger strike until our demands are met."

Three students have fallen sick observing the strike, she said, adding that two of them were hospitalised.

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## Increase food storage capacity, sourcing from farmers

Speakers advise govt on controlling food market

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a webinar yesterday called upon the government to increase the capacity of its food storages to ensure fair prices to farmers and reduce dependency on imports.

They made this recommendation at a webinar titled "Situation of Food Production, Import and Market: In the Context of Rights to Food", organised by Right to Food Bangladesh.

Dr Md Shahjahan Kabir, director general, Bangladesh Rice Research Institute, said, "The government collects less than five percent of the total paddy production directly from farmers. This is so low that the government cannot influence the market with it."

"The government should collect at least 15 to 20 percent of the total production to effectively control the market. At the same time, the government should increase storage facilities to store the collected crop," he said.

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