

New approach, old disparity

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But they stressed the need for minimising the disparity between rural and urban students in accessing online learning facilities.

"Prolonged school closure not only causes learning loss, it will also increase dropouts, child labour and child marriage. Therefore, special measures should be taken," Brac University Prof Emeritus Manzoor Ahmed.

One of the measures, he said, could be the blended learning.

Prof Siddiqui Rahman, a former director of the Institute of Education and Research at Dhaka University, said interim arrangements can hardly bridge the gap as many students from rural and poor families are not being able to access distance learning due to lack of devices like smartphones and computers.

UNPRECEDENTED CLOSURES

With the first Covid-19 cases detected in the country on March 8, the government on March 17 closed educational institutions; the shutdown was extended in several phases till January 6 next year.

The coronavirus crisis exposed the fact that a majority of schools, colleges and universities were not equipped to take online classes -- a new reality for the country's educational system.

Private schools were quick to adopt online learning methods, offering lectures delivered via video conferencing apps like Zoom and social media platforms like Facebook.

However, a lack of infrastructure and uneven access to internet and devices such as a desktop computer, laptop, or smartphone for students in poor urban areas are vital obstacles to virtual learning.

To address the disruption, the government started broadcasting live and recorded lectures through Sangsad TV for secondary and primary students, and directed all schools, colleges and universities to hold online classes.

The shutdown led to the cancellation of major public examinations -- Higher Secondary Certificate, Primary Education Completion, Junior School Certificate and their equivalent tests. The examinees are evaluated based on their results in preceding classes.

Now, the government is planning to hold next year's Secondary School Certificate and equivalent examinations in June and the same year's HSC exams in July-August.

"We will hold the exams if the Covid-19 situation is favourable," Education Minister Dipu Moni said yesterday at a virtual press briefing.

More than one crore students of class 6 to 10 have been promoted to

the next class this year and there were no annual examinations. Instead, the school authorities are giving assignments to students, to identify their learning shortcomings.

The government moved to enrol students at schools for all classes for the next academic session on the basis of the lottery.

It had to put on hold the "Textbook Festival" on January 1 when textbooks are handed to primary and secondary students for free. This time, students of a certain class will come to school to collect books on three days, divided in three groups.

The pandemic-induced closure also brought a drastic change in the daily lives of thousands of students. Apart from putting considerable psychological pressure on them, it made parents worried about the impact of this unprecedented length of school closure.

"We are waiting for the day when our children will go back to classes again. Because school is more than a centre of learning; it is a source of social activities and human interaction," said Mizanur Rahman, father of a school-going child.

BRIDGE THE GAP

Both Prof Manzoor and Prof Siddiqui said the government needs to ensure digital devices and accessibility to all in order to cope with the new reality as well as to reduce the digital divide.

"During the pandemic, students from affluent quarters have had better access to online classes than their peers in poor households," said Prof Manzoor, also the founder-director of Institute of Educational Development of Brac University.

"As a result, the gap between students from affluent and disadvantaged groups is being widened further," he added.

Prof Siddiqui said the government must learn lessons from the pandemic.

One of the lessons is to enhance teachers' capacity, properly equipping them so that they can impart education effectively using distance learning methods including online education, he said.

Prof Syed Md Golam Faruk, director general of the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, said they will take steps to change the classroom instruction process.

"We will continue online classes alongside the traditional classroom teaching," he said.

It is true that many students do not have digital devices, he said. "We would need a lot of money if we want to give digital devices to all. We will look into the matter in future planning."

He said the government will continue to give assignments to school students even after the Covid situation gets normal as it will also lessen dependence on digital devices.

As per the government's directive, assignments are given to the students on the first day of the week and they submit handwritten copies at the end of the week. The students can submit and take the assignment in person or via a guardian from the school, or online.

The assignments include explanatory questions, short question-answers and creative questions. Once these are submitted, the teachers are directed to receive the assignments, evaluate, put their comments and show that to the students.

The process of giving assignments began on November 1.

Education Minister Dipu Moni said they would give more importance to online education in the coming days.

HIGHER EDUCATION

On-campus classes at universities have been closed since mid-March, creating worries about session jams.

The University Grants Commission (UGC), on several occasions, asked universities to begin online classes, but many universities were not ready institutionally for such a transition.

Both private and public universities, however, took some time to adopt online classes amid fears that students from disadvantaged backgrounds would be left behind due to the digital divide.

In such a situation, the UGC in August asked the public universities to prepare lists of students who could not access online classes due to not having smartphones.

Thirty-nine public universities sent lists of 41,501 students who needed assistance. The UGC decided to provide these students with an interest-free Tk 8,000 loan each so that they can buy smartphones to attend online classes.

In mid-December, the UGC announced that public universities can hold honours and master's final examinations following proper health safety measures if the respective academic councils approve.

Meanwhile, in a major development, 19 public universities announced that they would hold a uniform admission exam titled "Central Admission Test" to reduce the hassles faced by admission seekers.

Prof Muhammed Alamgir, a member of UGC, said a significant lesson of the pandemic was that universities need to develop a strong and vibrant platform for holding online classes.



New home

FROM PAGE 1

Saiful had a difficult time moving about as it was risky and had to sit alone and idle in his cramped tarpaulin makeshift home.

"Here, the land is plain and open. I can walk about easily," the 7-year-old said.

Other children like Saiful were also happy after arriving at the char expressed their joy when they arrived at the island.

1,804 Rohingyas arrived at Bhashan Char yesterday, of whom 848 were children.

They said they were motivated by the first batch, consisting 1,642 Rohingyas, who arrived at the island on December 4. They heard that the housing arrangement is good on Bhashan Char and there is scope of earning a livelihood too.

"My cousins went there with the first batch. They told us about Bhashan Char. And now we are going there," Abul Kalam, father of two daughters, told The Daily Star yesterday, adding that many of his neighbours in the Cox's Bazar camps told him to inform them of what it's like at the char and they will join too.

Mariam Khatun, another Rohingya to arrive at the island yesterday said she would rather call it "Shantir Char (island of peace)".

"I am going there for peace. I am moving from unrest to peace.

Mariam is among the several lakh Rohingyas who fled to Bangladesh and took refuge in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar following the brutal military crackdown.

Almost all the Rohingyas confirmed moving to Bhashan Char after seeing pictures and videos of the facilities being built under the Tk 3,100-crore housing project by the Bangladesh Navy.

The first batch of Rohingyas is basically working as an ambassador of Bhashan Char. They are motivating people to come here," said Commodore AA Mamun Chowdhury, director of the Ashrayan-3 Project (the official name of the Bhashan Char project).

He said that initially it was between 500-700 people, but with time, the number reached 1,772. After some people joined the last minute, 1,804 Rohingyas were relocated yesterday.

Another refugee Shafi Alam said he spoke to those from the first batch who told him the government was arranging work for them and education for their children, along with places to practice religion.

"The Bangladesh government has given us shelter and now it wants to relocate us. The government has arranged everything for us. So why shouldn't we go there?"

He believes in the coming days more and more Rohingyas will come to Bhashan Char as their security is ensured here.

The department of forest, ministry of agriculture, ministry of education and some other ministries have already visited the island to provide services to the Rohingyas.

The project director said the education ministry will give a report on what sort of education can be offered here.

Ikram Aktar Sweety, 14, said that the Cox's Bazar camp had become unsafe for girls, especially at night.

"I hope I can go to school here without being disturbed," she said.

Abu Bakar Siddik, who came here with his wife and four sons, embraced his cousin who came Bhashan Char in the first phase.

"I am feeling good. This is the kind of land [plain] we are used to living on. It was difficult for us in the hilly area. We were not used to live in hilly area. It's a relief," he said.

After arriving at the char, they were taken to a warehouse where they offered a mass prayer expressing gratitude to the almighty.

From there they were taken to their houses. Meanwhile, the United Nations and other development partners expressed concerns and had demanded independent assessments of the housing project before relocation began. A UN team has still not been allowed to visit the island.

The UN and rights groups have been questioning the relocation plan, saying the island was prone to floods and could be submerged during high tides.

Former Jubo League leader, 'robber' held in Bogura

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

Lutfar Sheikh, the former president of Chaluabari union Jubo League in Sariakandi upazila and also known to be a notorious robber, was arrested on Monday in Bogura.

A team of Bogura Detective Branch (DB) with the help of Sariakandi police arrested Lutfar Sheikh alias Lutfar Pagla in Sujauler Para Char on the Jamuna around 1:30pm.

Police recovered a gun and two bullets from him during the raid. A case has been filed against him with the Sariakandi Police Station for illegal possession of the firearms and ammunition.

Senior Judicial Magistrate Omar Farooq yesterday placed Lutfar in a seven-day remand after police asked for a 10-day remand. Lutfar refuted all allegations, said Emran Mahmud Tuhin, inspector of Bogura DB.

According to the police, there are 15 cases against him, including four murders, filed with police stations in Rangpur, Joypurhat, Gaibandha, Jamalpur and Bogura. Lutfar was the leader of an inter-district gang of robbers in this region, claimed police.

He had 11 warrants pending with Sariakandi Police Station, said Additional Superintendent of Police (Administration) Ali Haider Chowdhury, who led the operation with the DB team.

Ayub Tarafdar, president of the Sariakandi upazila Jubo League unit and also a vice-chairman of the Sariakandi upazila parishad, told The Daily Star, "We suspended Lutfar from his post [of Chaluabari union Jubo League unit president] a year ago after

receiving many robbery complaints against him."

After staying under cover in remote char areas for 12 days, the law enforcers were able to arrest Lutfar "Dakat", said Bogura DB inspector Tuhin.

"Police have long been trying to apprehend Lutfar but he escaped by taking advantage of the char areas to his advantage," Ali Haider told The Daily Star.

The ASP said Lutfar used to spend nights in boats and robbed in remote char areas of Bogura, Jamalpur, and Gaibandha.

There are many rumours about Lutfar's robbery in the char areas. When visiting the areas, locals told this correspondent that Lutfar is a feared robber. Many local news outlets have reported that Lutfar terrorised the Jamuna char areas while living in a luxury, air-conditioned boat and he has many properties and a house worth Tk 1.5 crore.

Lutfar Sheikh, however, denied everything while speaking to The Daily Star at the Bogura DB office, before being taken to court yesterday.

"People have filed these cases against me out of enmity. I have never even slapped anyone in my entire life. I have a farm of 45 buffalos in the char area which is looked after by the 20 other members of my family. I never robbed anyone, never killed anyone," said Lutfar.

"I don't have a house worth Tk 1.5-2 crore or a boat with AC. The locals and some local newspapers have spread false rumours about me. If there is a robbery incident in the char areas, people file cases against me," Lutfar said.

30 more die, 1,181 get Covid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thirty more people died from Covid-19 in the country in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, while India's health ministry reported the first eight cases of the mutated coronavirus strain among United Kingdom returnees.

To keep at bay the new faster-spreading strain of novel coronavirus found in the UK two weeks ago, the Bangladesh government on Monday announced that every UK returnee would have to stay in institutional quarantine for 14 days, but decided to continue air communications with the country.

The Indian administration, however, suspended all flights from the UK with effect from midnight of December 23 till December 31, 2020.

Quoting the Indian health ministry, the India Times newspaper reported that the mutated UK strain was detected in samples tested in the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, Bengaluru, in the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad, in National Institute of Virology, Pune, and King Institute of Preventive Medicine and Research in Chennai.

All these people have been kept in single-room isolation in designated health care facilities. Their close contacts have also been put under quarantine.

Comprehensive contact tracing has been initiated for co-travellers, family members and others, India's health ministry said in a press release.

The presence of the new UK variant has so far been reported in Denmark, the Netherlands, Australia, Italy, Sweden, France, Spain, Switzerland, Germany, Canada, Japan, Lebanon and

Singapore.

The list of all the UK returnees has been shared by the Bureau of Immigration with states and all passengers who arrived between November 25 and December 20 are being tracked by the IDSP State Surveillance Units and District Surveillance Units.

Meanwhile, the number of Covid-19 cases in Bangladesh rose to 5,11,261 as the Directorate General of Health Services reported 1,181 new cases in 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday.

With them, the death toll reached 7,509 and the death rate was 1.47 percent.

Against yesterday's 14,588 tests, the positivity rate was 8.1 percent and the total positivity rate was 15.98 percent.

A total of 1,245 Covid-19 patients recovered in the 24 hours. The number of recoveries rose to 4,54,563 and the recovery rate stood at 88.91 percent.

Among the 30 deceased, 19 were male.

One was aged under 10, three were aged between 41 and 50, five between 51 and 60, and 21 were above 60 years, added the release.

The mutated coronavirus strain spreading in the UK is on average 56 percent more contagious, scientists have warned in a study. They have urged a fast vaccine rollout to help prevent more deaths.

The new variant, which emerged in southeast England in November, is likely to boost hospitalisations and deaths from Covid-19 next year, according to the Centre for Mathematical Modelling of Infectious Diseases at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Tk 89,500cr

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Briefing reporters after the meeting, Planning Minister MA Manna said the five-year plan is focused on how to cope with coronavirus-related problems.

Shamsul said there are 244 strategies in the five-year plan to recover the socio-economic losses caused by the pandemic. Of those, five would be focused directly on the impact of Covid-19, he said.

Asked about the strategies, he said

one of the five strategies would be to increase the expenditure on the health sector efficiently.

Besides, a data centre would be created on the beneficiaries of the social safety net programmes in the country, said Shamsul.

The five-year plan proposed introducing a universal healthcare system to tackle the pandemic and other challenges the health ministry is facing.

Ex-DSCC mayor Khokon sued for embezzlement

FROM PAGE 1

The magistrate took the case into cognisance and recorded the statement of the complainant yesterday. The court will pass an order over the issue today, said bench assistant Atiqur.

According to the case document, Khokon and six others conspired with one another and built shops, violating the main design of Fulbaria City Supermarket-2. The accused then announced allotment of the shops.

When the traders approached the DSCC, former mayor Khokon contacted the other accused and asked them to allot the shops, the case statement said.

The traders then communicated with accused Kamrul, Helena, Swapan and Walid for getting the allotment of shops.

In the case statement, the complainant mentioned that the accused took around Tk 34.89 crore from the complainant and 26 other traders in the name of "allocating shops at the market's 'blocks -- A, B & C' between June 21, 2015, and September 29 last year. But now, the shops are being demolished for violating the original design of the market.

The plaintiff also appealed to the court to issue arrest warrants against the accused.

On December 8, the DSCC knocked down several hundred illegal shops at the Fulbaria Supermarket-2, which were built violating the main design of the supermarket.

Traders and shop owners protested the DSCC move that day.

DSCC officials initially faced

obstruction from shopkeepers when they went to demolish the illegal parts of the supermarket. Shopkeepers threw brick chunks from inside the market at the DSCC team. Police fired teargas canisters to bring the situation under control.

On the same day, DSCC Mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh after a programme at the Nagar Bhaban said many shops were constructed violating the main design of the DSCC supermarket.

People on different occasions built the shops in the open and parking spaces, he added.

Some 911 shops were erected illegally in the open and parking spaces of the market's A, B, and C blocks (City Plaza, Nagar Plaza and Zaker Plaza) over the years, say DSCC officials.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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Date: 29.12.2020

e-Tender Notice

This is to notify all concern that the following tender have published through e-GP portal.

Tender ID & Package No.	Name of Goods	Publication Date	Last Selling and Closing Date & Time
530047 RJSC-G-2020_21-PKG-1	Supply Installation, Configuration, Testing, Commissioning & Maintenance of Servers etc.	30.12.2020; 10.00 A.M;	19.01.2021; 12:00 P.M & 19.01.2020; 15:00 P.M

The interested persons/firms may visit the website www.eprocure.gov.bd to get the details of the tender. This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP portal and no offline/hardcopies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender registration in the National e-GP portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

Further information and guideline are available in the National e-GP system portal and e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

(Md. Mokbul Hossain)

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এতদ্বারা সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, অত্র দপ্তরের স্মারক নং-৫১৭৪/৩, তারিখঃ ২৮/১২/২০২০খ্রিঃ মূলে প্রকাশিত দরপত্র নং- e-GP/64/EE/CRD/RHD/2020-21 (ID-529460) অনিবার্য কারণবশতঃ বাতিল (Cancelled) করা হলো।	
Tender/Proposal ID	Name of work
ID-529460 e-GP/64/EE/CRD/RHD/2020-21	Construction of 1 (one) No. Foot Over Bridge (Teriail) at 196th(P) Km (Ch: 195+200m) on Dhaka (Jatrabari)-Comilla (Moyanamati)-Chattogram-Cox's Bazaar Teknaf National Highways (N-1) under Chattogram Road Division during the year 2020-2021.
মোঃ মহিনুল ইসলাম পরিচিতি নং-৭০০২৪৪ উপ-সহকারী প্রকৌশলী, সওজ চট্টগ্রাম সড়ক বিভাগ, চট্টগ্রাম	সেগুন প্রসাদ বড়ুয়া পরিচিতি নং-৬০২০৭০ সহকারী প্রকৌশলী (চপদাঃ), সওজ চট্টগ্রাম সড়ক বিভাগ, চট্টগ্রাম
জিডি-২০৯৮	জুলফিকার আহমেদ পরিচিতি নং-৬০২১৩৮ নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী, সওজ চট্টগ্রাম সড়ক বিভাগ, চট্টগ্রাম