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1.7m students drop out in pandemic

Covid-induced financial hurdles of
families key factor, say experts

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Education in Bangladesh took a major hit from the Covid pandemic, which caused 17.62 lakh students to drop out of educational institutions, according to government data.

A total of 2,49,159 university students discontinued studies between 2020 and 2021, according to a report of the University Grants Commission.

Besides, 62,104 secondary school students and 14,50,719 primary school-level students dropped out in the same period, according to data from Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (Banbeis) and the Directorate of Primary Education.

Educationists say many of these students permanently left educational institutions.

Noted educationist and former chairman of

University Grants Commission Prof MA Mannan said the economic crunch caused by the pandemic was one of the main reasons behind the fall in the number of students.

According to the Unesco Global Education Monitoring Report 2022, households cover almost two-thirds of the total cost of education in Bangladesh.

"Many parents married their daughters off during the pandemic. Some of them [students] left the country as migrant workers," said Prof Mannan.

Many university students used to meet their study expenses by working as tutors. But they lost that source of income during the



Bangladesh Railway is implementing the Padma Bridge Rail Link Project, the railway's biggest project, to build a 169-km rail line from Dhaka to Jashore via the Padma Bridge at a cost of Tk 39,247 crore. The authorities are hopeful of opening the Dhaka-Bhanga section of the line within June this year. Installation of tracks on a major part of the section has already been done. The photo was taken at Mawa Railway Station in Munshiganj yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

LEVEL	NUMBER OF STUDENTS 2020	NUMBER OF STUDENTS 2021
Primary	2,15,51,691	2,01,00,972
Secondary	1,02,52,126	1,01,90,022
University	46,90,876	44,41,717

pandemic and dropped out of universities, he said.

Educational institutions were closed on March 17, 2020 due to Covid, and partially reopened on September 12, 2021. The 543-day school closure in Bangladesh was one of the longest in the world.

The UGC report submitted to President Abdul Hamid on Thursday night shows that there were 44,41,717 university students in 2021, down from 46,90,876 in 2020.

According to the Banbeis education statistics, there were 1,01,90,022 secondary school students in 2021, while the number was 1,02,52,126 in 2020.

Of the 62,104 students who dropped out of secondary schools, 52,838 were girls.

The Annual Primary School Census 2021 said there were 2,15,51,691 students in the primary schools in 2020 and the number came down to 2,01,00,972 the following year. Of the 14,50,719 students who left the schools, around 10 lakh were girls.

Talking to this newspaper, Prof Nehal Ahmed, director general of the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE), blamed the pandemic for the drop in the number of students. He, however, added that many students were coming back to schools, and hoped it will be reflected in the government reports for 2022.

He added that the number of girl students fell as many guardians married off their daughters during the pandemic.

UGC member Prof Muhammed Alamgir also attributed the fall in the number of students to the pandemic.

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BNP'S CARETAKER MOVEMENT

Final phase when Dhaka units ready

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The BNP wants to make a final push to realise its demand for holding the next general election under a neutral caretaker administration only after the top brass finds the party's Dhaka city units fully prepared for an all-out movement.

Insiders said the BNP was successful in staging massive protests in the last few months despite various obstacles from the ruling party and administration. It all has fuelled enthusiasm among leaders and activists who now can't wait anymore for the final phase of the movement.

But the party high-ups were not satisfied with the performance of the Dhaka city leaders on the last two occasions -- the December 10 Dhaka rally and January 11 mass sit-ins.

These issues were on the agenda in the BNP standing committee meeting, the highest policymaking body of the party, on Thursday night, when the leaders discussed in detail the future course of action and analysed the two big events.

Party's acting chairman Tarique Rahman virtually chaired the meeting where they also talked about the arrest of Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and standing committee member Mirza Abbas and the police raid on the party's Nayapaltan headquarters.

Contacted yesterday, standing committee member Goyeshwar Chandra Roy said the movement has already begun and gradually it will be intensified. "Our movement will continue till the goal is

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US assistant
secretary
flies in today

DIPLOMATIC
CORRESPONDENT

US Assistant
Secretary at
the Bureau
of South
and Central
Asian Affairs
Donald Lu
will arrive in
Bangladesh today on a two-day visit.



Donald Lu

Lu will meet senior government officials and civil society groups during the visit.

He has plans to discuss bilateral issues including trade, economy, human and labour rights, and Indo-Pacific strategy.

Assistant Secretary Lu served as the US ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic and Albania. He also worked on the Ebola crisis in West Africa.

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Almost entire family lost to house fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chattogram

Khokon Basak woke up around 2:00am yesterday hearing his children scream.

"Father, father, there is a fire. Come out of the room..."

All six members of the family rushed to the veranda of their house to escape through the only exit. But there were flames on the way out.

Khokon, 42, somehow managed to rush out asking the others to follow him, but no one else could. His wife, two children and parents were burned to death inside the house, said Khokon's neighbour Saju Basak.

The tragedy unfolded in Parua union of Chattogram's Rangunia upazila.

The dead are Khokon's father Kangal Basak, 68, mother Lalita Basak, 57, wife Rakhi Dey, 33, son Sourav Basak, 12, and four-year-old daughter Shayanti Basak.

Khokon, an autorickshaw driver, was undergoing treatment at the Burn and Plastic Surgery Unit of Chattogram Medical College Hospital with 20 percent burns.

Dr S Khaled Chowdhury, assistant professor at the burn unit, said Khokon's respiratory tract was badly damaged.

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First phase of Biswa Ijtema begins

UNB, Dhaka

The first phase of the three-day Biswa Ijtema, billed as the second largest congregation of Muslims after Hajj, began yesterday morning on the bank of the River Turag in Tongi after two years of Covid hiatus.

The 56th edition of the annual event started with the "ambayan" (general sermons) of Pakistani Islamic scholar Maulana Ziaul Haque after Fajr prayers.

Thousands of devotees from home and abroad -- including India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Syria, Chad, Tajikistan, Turkey, Afghanistan, Palestine, the UK, and the US -- thronged the bank of Turag to listen to scholars reciting and explaining verses from the Quran and renew their commitment to Islamic values.

Tablighi Jamaat has been organising the congregation at the venue since 1967. In 2011, it divided the Ijtema into two phases to accommodate the large number of attendees.

The second phase of Ijtema will be held from January 20 to 22.

In the afternoon yesterday, the country's largest Juma prayers, led by Maulana Hafez Zobair Ahmad, leader of a faction of Tablighi Jamaat, was held at the venue.

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People offering Juma prayers on Tongi Station Road in Gazipur during the first phase of Biswa Ijtema yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Mild cold wave sweeping some parts of country

UNB, Dhaka

A mild cold wave is sweeping several parts of the country but it may abate in some areas, said the Met office yesterday morning.

The regions that are under the cold spell include Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions and Faridpur, Madaripur, Manikganj, Moulvibazar, Cumilla, Feni, Jashore, Chuadanga, Kushtia, Barishal, and Bhola.

Temperature between 8 to 10 degrees Celsius is considered a mild cold wave, 6 to 8 degrees Celsius a moderate cold wave and less than 6 degrees Celsius a severe cold wave.

The lowest temperature in the country was recorded at 8 degrees Celsius in Dinajpur in the 24 hours till 6:00am yesterday. The highest temperature was recorded at 30.2 degrees Celsius in Teknaf.

Besides, moderate to thick fog may envelop the river basins and light to moderate fog may occur elsewhere from midnight to morning and it may continue till noon at places.

"The weather may remain mainly dry with a temporary partly cloudy sky. The night and day temperatures may rise slightly," the BMD said.