

A threat to regional stability

Foreign secy on extended presence of Rohingyas

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Extended presence of Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar is jeopardising social cohesion, ecological balance, economic viability, and the law and order situation, Bangladesh told Global Refugee Forum yesterday.

"Some Rohingya individuals in the camps show an increasing inclination towards criminal activities, and there is a genuine risk of radicalisation and violent extremism, posing a potential threat to regional stability," said Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen at the three-day forum that ended in Geneva.

Masud said Bangladesh has hosted 1.2 million Rohingyas for six years, striving to provide humanitarian aid despite challenges. However, with dwindling funding (Only 47 percent of the Joint Response Plan this year has been funded), there's been a 33 percent cut in food rations in the first half of the year.

He called on the international partners, regional countries, UN agencies and ASEAN to play assistive roles to scale up their activities in the Rakhine State to build resilience among communities and to create livelihood options for quick repatriation of the Rohingyas.

He pledged to further improve the living conditions of Rohingyas with international support, strengthen security and continue to work for their safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation to Myanmar.

For women, by women

Narsingdi entrepreneurs selling handicrafts to achieve solvency

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

A group of women in Narsingdi have achieved solvency by selling handicrafts, Jamdani sarees, Nakshi Kanthas (embroidered blankets), yarn and jute products, among other items.

They are selling their products on online platforms and delivering those via couriers, besides running their shops at Narsingdi Sheikh Russel Municipal Park once a week on Saturdays.

They also sell birthday cakes, food, different daily necessities, saplings and sauces.

Most of them said they began their businesses being inspired from YouTube videos during the pandemic.

Sabrina Akter, who created a Facebook group to launch her business, said, "Facing financial struggles during the pandemic, I initiated a handicraft business that gained significant demand, and now, with a small factory, I earn an average of Tk 40,000 monthly."

Later, she named the group "Narsingdi Jela Nari Uddyoktader Mela", which is now a shared platform for 60 women's businesses with around 53,000 members.

Mou Akter Mousomi, 25, a resident of Purba Dattapara, said they were struggling financially during the pandemic as her husband had to quit his job.



Mou started selling clothing items designed by herself online.

Mahedrin Zaman Shuchona, a first-year student of Narsingdi Govt College, is another woman on the platform selling products made of yarn.

"Sourcing yarn from Dhaka, I create and sell plant hangers, tissue holders, bangle holders, and wall mats based on customer demand, resulting in a monthly income of Tk 20,000-25,000 with a team of six employees," she said.

Sharmin Sultana Priya, a customer, said, "After discovering the market



through social media, I visited on a Saturday and found the prices of products to be reasonable. Inspired by these women, I now plan to open my own chocolate shop soon."

She also said many women like her visit the market to buy handicrafts.

Amzad Hossain Bacchu, mayor of Narsingdi Municipality, said, "To aid these women's businesses, we permitted them to sell their products at Narsingdi Shiekh Russel Municipal Park without any fees, and we are planning to establish a permanent structure for them."

ILLEGAL GAS USAGE SINCE 2012

Collect cost from consumers: HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court has directed the authorities concerned to determine how much gas has been used illegally in Dhaka, Chattogram, Narayanganj, Narsingdi, Munshiganj, and Gazipur in the last 12 years, and collect its cost from the consumers.

The court on December 13 ordered the secretary at the energy ministry to form a committee to determine the quantity of gas and its cost in six months. The finance secretary has been ordered to collect the cost from the consumers under the Public Demand Recovery Act-1993.

The HC bench of Justice Mustafa Zaman and Justice Md Atabullah also directed the energy secretary to form committee to probe allegations and identify the officials and contractors involved.

'I visited and had tea'

Amu tells journos at EC office when asked about 'polls code violation'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League leader and aspirant for Jhalakathi-2 constituency Amir Hossain Amu yesterday refused to make any comment after giving his explanation to the Election Commission for allegedly violating the electoral code of conduct.

Amu gave his explanation to CEC Kazi Habibur Awal and other commissioners as the EC sought an explanation regarding the alleged violation.

"They requested me to come [to the commission], I visited and had tea... I have nothing to say," he told reporters while leaving the EC.

On December 9, the commission asked Amu to present his explanation on December 15 in person.

According to an EC letter, the polls code violation occurred when speakers sought vote for Amu at a programme in Jhalakathi on December 8.

Army chief returns home from Qatar

UNB, Dhaka

Chief of Army Staff of Bangladesh General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed returned home yesterday after attending the "Qatar Grand Prix-2023" held in Qatar.

During his visit, he held a bilateral meeting with Chief of Staff of Qatar Armed Forces Lt Gen Salem Bin Hamad Bin Mohammed Bin Aqeel Al Nabit.

He also inaugurated the "Victory Day Fair" organised by the Bangladesh embassy in Doha.

The army chief went to Qatar on December 12.



PRAYER TIMING
DECEMBER 16

Fajr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 5:20	12:45	3:45	5:22	7:00
JAMAAT 5:55	1:15	4:00	5:25	7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Dengue deadly even Migrant activist

FROM PAGE 5

"The high infection rate among vulnerable groups, including the elderly, infants, obese individuals, pregnant women, and those with comorbidities

such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart, kidney, lung, and liver issues, is another contributing factor," said Nazmul.

Many patients are coming to the hospital late with shock syndrome, which is another factor for the high number of deaths, he said.

Experts also underscored the importance of strengthening local health facilities.

FROM PAGE 5

Advocate Noman Hossain Talukder, who moved for Noyon's bail on Thursday, said Noyon was an employee of SHSUK and supported the helpless migrant workers, who were sent to Iraq by the recruiting agencies and brokers but were not provided jobs.

Noyon did not file the case against Joy or anybody else. Therefore, the case

brought against him is baseless, Noman said.

Contacted yesterday, Morshed, who has not been arrested, said the case of sending workers to Iraq was clearly a case of trafficking in the name of labour migration.

"If the recruiting agencies claim that all the documents for sending the workers to Iraq were right, then the question is why they were unemployed and confined there for 10 months," he said.

Morshed said if there was nothing wrong with the workers, why the Bangladesh embassy would help their repatriation. If they were working well, why couldn't they send remittance home, he asked.

Shariful Hasan, associate director of BRAC Migration Programme, said BRAC will legally fight for Noyon.

He said Noyon, who himself was a victim of

labour trafficking to Malaysia in 2007-08, has been working for migrants' welfare since his return home in 2008.

"There is nothing sadder than this if true migrant rights activist is penalised for good works. I am sure, there is a strong syndicate working to defame and suppress the rights advocates. The policymakers need to seriously look into the matter so that the innocent is not punished."

Marina Sultana, director (programme) at Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, said it's matter of deep concern that rights advocate like Noyon faces jail for good work.

"This creates a fear factor for other rights activists. We would demand immediate release of Noyon and call for thorough investigation into the matter," she told The Daily Star yesterday.

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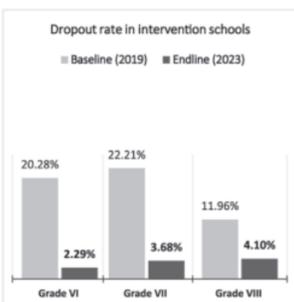
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৮,৫০০ বর্গফুটের প্রতি ফ্লোর-৮, ৯, ১৩, ১৪, ১৫ তলা ভাড়া হবে। ২,০০০ বর্গফুট হতে যেকোনো মাসের অফিস ভাড়া দেওয়া যেতে পারে। ৮৯, উত্তরা, সাঈদ গ্র্যান্ড সেন্টার।
যোগাযোগঃ ০১৭১২২৭৬০৭৮, ০১৮১৯২২৫৭৭৪

Financial support, institutional governance crucial to reduce school dropouts in slum areas: Study

Education — Bangladesh
Kamran Siddiqui

Comprehensive interventions addressing financial and logistical challenges, parental awareness, home and school environments, and institutional governance can significantly reduce school dropout rates in slum areas, according to a recent study.



The study was conducted under the project "Child Bride to Bookworm (CBB): Reducing School Dropout in Urban Slums in Bangladesh" initiated by Plan International Bangladesh and its local partner Surovi.

A total of 22 secondary schools in and around slum areas of Dhaka participated in the three-year development project launched in September 2020.

The project bolstered the capabilities of educational institutions by implementing targeted interventions to curb dropout rates.

The study report highlights a remarkable decline in dropout rates in different grades. In Grade VI, the dropout rate plummeted from 20.28% to 2.29%, while in Grade VII, it dropped from 22.21% to 3.68%. Grade VIII also witnessed a significant

decrease, with the dropout rate falling from approximately 12% to 4%.

The project has had a positive influence on school management committees (SMCs) and teachers, encouraging them to enhance their capacity and actively participate in school governance, as per the study.

The project focused on individual secondary schools and employed a three-step strategy: improved school governance, school- and community-based initiatives, and model development and influence.

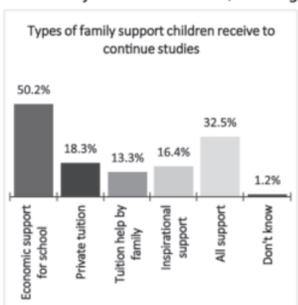
Community-based initiatives like alternative learning support, tuition and admission fees, school dress support, and awareness-raising among parents and the community in pandemic situations were taken that helped thousands of marginalized children continue their education in secondary schools in Dhaka

slum areas.

On behalf of Plan International Bangladesh, the Research and Development Collective (RDC)

conducted the field study between August to October of this year.

The study uncovered that, among



the students who re-entered school, approximately 82% were still enrolled in 2023 in the intervention schools.

Farzana Bari, manager of the Child Bride to Bookworm Project of Plan International Bangladesh, told The Business Standard, "The interventions that demonstrated higher levels of relevance were: establishing a school brigade with representatives of pupils, school management, teachers, parents, local government, and community leaders as a platform for discussing and addressing dropout effectively."

"This is done by building the capacity of school management committees and school cabinets to fulfil their roles in the governance of the school and enabling them to work properly together," she added.

The project covered 10,079 students, 675 teachers, 201 school management committees, 1,167 parents, and 2,015 marginalized families.

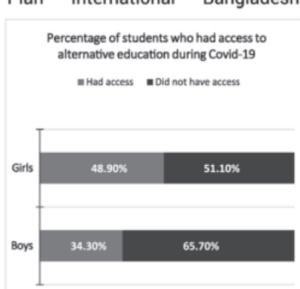
The primary data for the research were collected from 660 key stakeholders in the intervening 22 secondary schools.

Those schools were in and around five slums under Dhaka South City Corporation: Malek Member Slum, Mironjilla & IG Colony, Robidas Para, Dholpur (City Palli), and Dhaka Match Colony.

The latest census data from Bangladesh in 2022 reveals that approximately 18 million out of 165 million people live in slums, with Dhaka hosting over 5,000 slums inhabited by an estimated four million residents.

The issue is exacerbated by a high rate of school dropouts, especially at the secondary level, with factors such as chronic poverty, parental unwillingness, financial constraints, inadequate school infrastructure, biased social practices, and child labour contributing significantly to the problem.

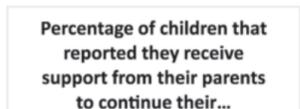
In response to these challenges, Plan International Bangladesh



initiated the project in January 2020.

According to most informants, the

primary reason for school dropout is the inability to pay tuition fees due to financial crises, particularly prevalent in the slum area. Many students come from extremely poor families, and some face additional challenges after being evicted from slums, leading to increased



financial hardships. Schools, with the support of school management committee members, have implemented measures to address financial challenges faced by students.

A "half-tuition" provision is provided for those in financial crisis, and school management committee members contribute to providing school fee waivers for students from impoverished backgrounds.

School management committee members actively engage with parents, conducting discussions to encourage continued education for their children. They play a proactive role in identifying potential dropout cases through visits and convincing parents about the value of ongoing education.

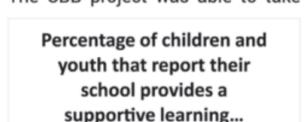
Home-based teaching and learning during pandemic
During the pandemic, after the

blanket shutdown of schools in the country, the government introduced technology-based alternative distance learning initiatives across the country. But around 90% of the households in the slum areas did not have access to this distance learning due to a lack of those devices or connectivity.

The project introduced home-based teaching and learning with voluntary teachers from the communities.

First, teachers (who were studying in college and university) were trained to provide teaching support in the slums. It turns to tutorial support for 557 learners who live in poor households in the slums from grade VI to VIII.

Due to longer breaks from education, they could drop out of school. The CBB project was able to take



them all back to school after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prof. Dr. Mesbah Kamal, Chairperson, RDC, was the team leader of the research titled "End line Study of The Child Bride to Bookworm (CBB) Project".