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For one taka

Street children given meal, education

MD AMINUL ISLAM with ANDREW EAGLE

There's a difference between buying and begging: one taka. Opposite the Mymensingh railway station every afternoon up to eighty street children gather, each proudly presenting a solitary taka to buy their lunch. Since 11 December 2016 the 'Reading for Food' project run by NGO Biydanondo Foundation has combined free education with a basic meal. With two sites in Mymensingh town, with the second one on Zilla School Road, a total of over one hundred street children benefit each day.

"My children Niloy and Sejuti Das are both primary level," says Dipali Rani Das, a widow who lost her husband two years ago. "The free education and meal they receive from the foundation helps us a lot."

"The lessons here are delivered with love and kindness," says another student's mother, Rupali Saker. "It leaves the children happy."

Tamana, Apu, Rakib, Konika and Smriti all study informally through 'Reading for Food.' Their enthusiasm for both classes and the one-taka meal is unanimous.

"One taka is charged per meal to ensure the children understand that they are not begging," says Umme Kulsum Shipra, a voluntary teacher of the organisation who is also an assistant teacher at Progressive Model School in the town. "Like our other teachers, I joined this programme to support the education of street children."

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PHOTO: AMINUL ISLAM

Street children studying near Mymensingh Railway Station. They get free education and a meal for Tk 1.

For one taka

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Around 15 teachers are involved with the programme. They work entirely as volunteers, without honorarium.

"It's a joy to teach the children," says Popy Akhter, a teacher who is also an honours student at Ananda Mohan Government College.

The Foundation which nowadays focuses on volun-

tary education support to prevent poor students from missing out on education was first established in 2013 in Narayanganj, when philanthropist and expatriate living in Peru, Kishor Kumar Das, opened a public library.

Programmes similar to the one in Mymensingh are also being run in Narayanganj, Dhaka, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and

Rajbari. All rely on donations from affluent community members. The Foundation also provides stipends to meritorious, poor students and runs Sompriti Anthaloya orphanage in Cox's Bazar.

In Mymensingh, up to twenty elderly citizens and people with disabilities also avail themselves of the programme's one-taka meals.

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