

Tuesday, November 05, 2019



High pry school enrolment shown to steal funds

Ershad Kamol | Updated at 11:50pm on November 04, 2019

A section of primary school teachers and field-level officials have long been involved in the practice of showing higher number of students enrolled and registered for primary education completion examination than the actual to misappropriate government incentive money.

State minister for primary and mass education Md Zakir Hossain recently told New Age that he had learned from Directorate of Primary Education officials that teachers of primary schools and madrassahs and field-level officials embezzled stipend funds and other benefits in these ways.

‘We have unearthed the corrupt practice following the introduction of making payments through mobile banking and of digital surveillance and we are trying to ensure transparency in the incentive programmes,’ he said.

Both enrolment and exam registration rates fell after the introduction of stipend payments through mobile banking in 2016 and the recent cross-checking of registrations for examinees with national identity numbers of their parents from the central server, DPE officials said.

Some of the officials and teachers involved in the malpractice have been punished, claimed project director of the stipend project M Yousuf Ali.

DPE director general AFM Manzur Quadir said that they were not sure how much money was misappropriated but the government was running 10 types of stimulating funds and stipend programmes for government primary schools, madrassahs and NGO-run schools, and also for their students.

‘But now we are getting the true picture,’ he said.

Educationists, however, say that the government’s tendency to manipulate data to exaggerate its development performances helped institutional corruption grow in the primary education sector.

‘For years the government has been showing high enrolment and pass rates and low dropout rates in order to demonstrate that it has been achieving the sustainable development goals now and the millennium development goals earlier,’ Jahangirnagar University’s economics professor Anu Muhammad said.

But these data do not reflect the reality, he added

When visiting some government primary schools and ibtedayi madrassahs in the capital recently this correspondent found mismatch between the number of enrolled students claimed by the teachers and the figure mentioned by students concerned.

The directorate’s Annual Primary School Census 2018 showed that the net enrolment rate dropped by 0.11 percentage points from 97.77 per cent in the census report of 2017 which was 97.66 per cent in 2018 report.

The difference between the numbers of net students enrolled in the two years should be 17,600 if the percentage rate is calculated based on country's total 1.6 crore children aged between six and 10 years as shown by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics data, DPE senior system analyst Anuj Kumar Roy said.

He claimed that they had scrutinised the figures of net enrolment of students cross-checking their birth certificates from the server but could not get the actual number of the gross enrolments as both overage and underage children studied at schools and madrassahs.

The gross enrolment data in the APSC 2018 indicates that the figure increased again compared to the APSC 2017 following a sharp fall in the APSC 2016.

The gross enrolment figure in the APSC 2018 is 1,73,38,100 while it was 1,72,51,350 in the APSC 2017 and 1,86,02,988 in the APSC 2016.

But, the number of total enrolled students showed in the APSC 2014 was 1,95,52,979, which was 22,14,879 more than the total enrolled students from pre-primary to Class V as stated in the APSC 2018.

According to the 2018 BBS survey, the population growth rate in the country was 1.33 per cent over the period under consideration.

DPE stipend project director M Yousuf Ali said that the number of stipend beneficiaries dropped by over 3,00,000 when the government started distributing the stipend money via mobile banking to their mothers from July 2016 in the rural schools and madrassahs.

In the fiscal year 2015-16 the number of total beneficiaries was 1.17 crore and Tk 1,342 crore was spent for paying stipend to them at the rate Tk 100 per student, project office records showed.

After introducing the new payment system, records showed, the number of total beneficiaries was 1.14 crore and the money spent for paying the stipends in FY 2016-17 was Tk 1,328 crore, which was 14 crore less than paid in the previous year.

Even after the mobile bank-based payment system was introduced in all 65,626 government primary schools, 5,164 ebtedayi madrassahs and 293 Shishu Kalyan Trust schools across the country in FY 2018-19, the number of total beneficiaries stood at 1.37 crore while the total fund spent was Tk 1,492 crore.

The Finance Division published a report titled 'Diagnostic Study on Stipend Programmes in Bangladesh with Focus on Primary Education Stipend Project', which recommended some measures to check corruption in the sector.

One recommendation said that the primary education directorate should make some interventions as the database of beneficiaries was not owned or possessed by the DPE authorities but was under Rupalii Bank and a DPE-appointed private firm.

Anuj Kumar Roy said that the number of registrations for the PEC examination also dropped following a cross-checking of the registrations with the respective NID numbers.

A total of 27,76,882 students were registered for the PEC examinations in 2018 while the number was 28,06,06 in 2017 and 29,34,087 in 2016, he said.

'Through random screenings we found many cases of duplication of the NID numbers of the parents of government and NGO-run primary school students and in case of schools operated under the DPE's Reaching Out of School Children project,' he said.

'It indicates that NGO-operated schools showed government primary school students as their pupils for taking benefits from donors and the ROSC project,' he said.

Many students, he said, were registered using duplicate NID numbers in the past years, who did not appear at the examination.

The number of absent students in the general section of the PEC examination 2018 was 1,23,986 while it was 44,481 for the madrassah section, DPE data showed.

ROSC project director M Delowar Hossain said that each student of the 4,755 schools under the project got Tk 1,000 for registration for the PEC examination.

‘In addition, every student gets Tk 125 as stipend in rural schools and Tk 300 in urban schools along with free educational materials,’ he added.

He disclosed that 11 NGOs were appointed for operating ROSC schools in the 10 city corporation areas while such schools in the remaining areas were run by ROSC implementation committees, headed by upazila nirbahi officers.

‘NGOs also get additional service charges for operating the schools,’ he added.

DPE officials said that by showing higher number of students, teachers of different types of schools and DPE officials allegedly also misappropriate funds meant for purchasing materials for pre-primary students and disabled students and for sports, midday meals and other welfare benefits.

In some government schools with very poor infrastructure in Dhaka, greater numbers of students are shown for substantiating their logic of posting greater numbers of teachers as the policy stipulates one teacher for 40 students, they said.

Some schools and madrassahs are also involved in selling additional textbooks in the black market, they said.

‘The number of enrolments will decrease if surveillance is accurately done,’ said Anu Muhammad, adding that the prime target for the government should be raising the quality of education, not the number of enrolment.

State minister Md Zakir Hossain said that ‘zero tolerance’ would be shown in making the schools and officials accountable.

‘We are also trying our level best to improve the quality of the schools and the education system,’ he said.



Editor: **Nurul Kabir**, Published by the Chairman, Editorial Board ASM Shahidullah Khan on behalf of Media New Age Ltd. 30 Tejgaon Industrial Area, Dhaka-1208 Phone: 880-2-8170450-56 (PABX), Fax: 880-2-8170457

© 2019 Media New Age Limited or its affiliated companies. All rights reserved.

