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FIGHTING POVERTY WITH EDUCATION

Children's edn takes priority in Burichang

WASIM BIN HABIB,
Back From Comilla

Poverty could not hold back Maya Debnath, daughter of a rickshawpuller, from continuing her education. She didn't even miss a single class at her school. According to her teachers, she is also doing well in her studies.

Maya, a student of class V at Burichang Government Primary School, also helps her family earn some money as her ailing father Khokon Debnath finds it difficult to make ends meet.

She along with her siblings makes paper packets and sells them to nearby shops. Her younger sister Shikha is also a student of class two at the same school.

Maya lives in a thatched house with her parents, which is located just behind the school. They have no property except this house. But she did not surrender to poverty. She manages to keep her and her sister's education on track through selling paper packets.

Her source of inspiration is her mother. "My mother told me that poor students can also do many things like others through education," said Maya.

"Our schoolteachers also inspire us a lot to pursue studies," she added.

Mohammad Yunus, headmaster of Burichang Primary School, said they give old answer sheets to Maya's family and they made packets from the sheets in a particular time of a day. Maya then sells the packets to different shops, which helps meet educational expenses of the two sisters.

Against all the odds, the two sisters did not miss a single class and they are doing well in their studies, he told a group of journalists who visited several schools in Burichang recently under a project titled 'Communication activities for children and women development'.

Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) is executing the third phase of the project with the financial assistance of Unicef.

There are many other families like

Maya's in Burichang, Comilla, who give topmost priority to their children's education, although they are suffering from grinding poverty.

The enrolment rate in the schools in Burichang is about 96 percent and the mothers play a vital role in this regard, according to a survey on primary education.

A total of 46,816 children, aged between 6 and 10, are currently enrolled at a total of 137 government, registered non-government and community primary schools where the percentage of girls is higher than that of boys.

The dropout rate has also decreased to 5 percent, it added.

Government scholarship programmes also contribute to the rise in the attendance in the primary schools, said many schoolteachers and parents in Burichang.

If the government increases the number of such scholarships, many parents will refrain from sending their children to workplaces, they observed.

Mohammad Yunus said a total of

59 students, out of 61, have completed the primary level last year.

He also said the dropout rate of the school is only three percent and the number of dropout has decreased in the last couple of years.

He, however, said the attendance rate decreases during the harvesting period as many parents engage their children in the work at fields.

"But we are trying to increase the number and we often hold meetings with the parents to encourage them to send their children to schools," he said.

Upazila Education Officer Sanchita Das said about 96 percent of children in Burichang are now going to school and they are trying to raise the figure to 100 percent.

However, she thinks quality teachers and structural development of the schools have contributed to the rise in enrolment in the primary schools.

"We are trying to enhance the quality instead of quantity," she said.