

PRIMARY EDUCATION

# Hill students' dropout rate higher

*Absence of mother tongue-based textbooks blamed*

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A MAJORITY of the primary schools in the Chittagong Hill Tracts do not instruct local students in their respective ethnic mother tongues, leading to a disproportionate dropout rate among the ethnic minority students.

Barring about 10 per cent schools affiliated to NGOs, most other schools have failed to introduce multi-lingual education (first-language-first system of education). The government also failed to deliver on its promise to publish and distribute textbooks in ethnic languages for the pre-primary class by January 2014.

National Curriculum and Textbook Board chairman Narayan Chandra Pal and member (primary) Abdul Mannan said the government has now planned to publish textbooks in five languages of national minorities in 2016.

According to reports submitted by district primary education officers of the three, hill districts — Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban — to Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, only 125 primary schools out of 1561 in CHT area have mother tongue based Multi-Lingual Education (MLE) system at the pre-primary level.

DPEOs sent the report as prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, asked the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs officials to ensure mother tongue based education beside Bangla for national minority children during a visit to the ministry in September 2014.

DPEOs said that 98 primary schools of Bandarban, 15 schools of Rangamati and 10 schools of Khagrachari follow the MLE system.

Of the 1,561 primary schools in the three hill

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districts, 600 are at Rangamati, 621 in Khagrachari and 340 in Bandarban, and there are 2.17 lakh students enrolled at these schools, said officials.

Besides, UNDP, under its Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facility project, had supported MLE system in 32 schools at the pre-primary level. Material has been developed in 12 CHT languages.

Education activists said in absence of MLE, hill students are suffering a lot. Children of national minorities at school struggle with Bengali text and the teachers from the Bengali community.

In the three hill tracts districts, the average dropout rate from primary was 59 per cent, a Manusher Jonno Foundation study said in September 2012. According to the Directorate of Primary Education, the national dropout rate is 26 per cent.

According to the study

64 per cent of the teachers in the three districts use and speak Bangla while taking classes, 27 per cent of them use both Bangla and the languages of the ethnic groups, and nine per cent uses the languages of the ethnic groups exclusively.

The report quoted 70 per cent of the teachers as stating the text books do not reflect indigenous people's way of life.

A right activist and writer Tandra Chakma, who was engaged in the MJF study, said that distance of schools, communication problem, language barrier and unfavourable school environment were some of the reason of the high drop out in the area.

Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samity information and publicity secretary Mangal Kumar Chakma said the government agreed in the CHT accord to provide indigenous children with primary education in their

mother languages but no initiative has been taken so far.

Bandarban district primary education officer Riton Kumar Barua said most of the students of the hill area schools are from national minorities and many of the teachers are from Bengali communities.

Books of hill communities language is must for expansion of education and keeping students at school, he said.

Most of the primary schools following MLE system do it with support from NGOs, he said.

The government had taken up a plan in 2012 to publish textbooks for children of national minorities or ethnic groups in six such languages towards the beginning of 2014.

The primary and mass education ministry in October 2012 decided to publish textbooks in the six languages. A national committee is working on it beside the NCTB technical committee.

January 2014 deadline as the committee appointed for the task had been slow and also because of a controversy over which of the Roman and the Bangla alphabets to employ to write Santali.

The government has now planned to publish the textbooks in five languages of Santali, in 2016.

NCTB officials said they would first publish textbooks for pre-primary students and would gradually move on to Class III.

NCTB member (primary) Abdul Mannan said they were making progress in the work. 'We are at the final stage of preparations on writing the textbooks and will commence following a workshop.'

According to a 2011 household census, 17,84,000 people belong to 27 national minority groups while leaders of such groups, who call themselves 'indigenous,' claim that they, accounting for 50 lakh people, belong to