

Primary education in haor belt in peril

Mohiuddin Alamgir

PRIMARY education system in the remote haor belt of the country has virtually collapsed due to little monitoring.

During a tour of the haor belt of Sylhet in the first week of September New Age found that only the headmasters were present in 10 schools.

The other teachers were absent.

One could easily notice the shortage of class rooms which were badly dilapidated.

The absence of the teachers during the rainy season was attributed to communication problem.

In the dry season movement gets difficult for all in the haor belt lacking roads.

In the monsoon movement by hiring boats gets costly in the inaccessible terrain.

The broken benches were stacked at class room

corners and the old and damaged blackboards were found totally unusable.

In the neglected haor belt, the class rooms provide no atmosphere for education to the young learners, said disappointed parents.

Sylhet division deputy director of primary education Tahmina Khatun said that even if they wish upazila education officers and assistant upazila education officers cannot visit schools due to communication problems and high cost of movement.

Each upazila education officer is required to visit five schools and each assistant upazila education officer is required to visit 10 schools every month, she said.

Several upazila education officers in Sylhet division said that they cannot visit schools in the inaccessible areas as they are not connected by roads.

In the monsoon, it is im-

possible to visit schools in the area without hiring a boat, they said.

Hiring a boat for three hours costs up to Tk 3,000, which we can't afford with the pay we get, they said.

The view was echoed by upazila assistant education officer of Dirai, Sunamganj.

In the first week of September, during visits to six schools in Sylhet district New Age found that education officers and assistant education officers of Companiganj upazila paid their last visits to Raipur Government Primary School in 2011.

The last visit to Dighal Baker Par Government Primary School took place 2012.

The information regarding the Beki Murar Par Government Primary School and Fethergaon Government Primary School could not be gathered as they were under lock and key.

Only the headmasters

were present at many of the primary schools in ramshackle conditions with the windows missing.

There were no libraries for the students and the latrines in most of the primary schools in the haor belt were found unusable.

Tahmina said another reason for failure to monitor the schools was that 55 per cent posts-out of 220 upazila assistant education officers in Sylhet division had been vacant for years.

Teachers, officials and the campaigners for improvement of education facilities in the area demanded payment of haor allowance to the teachers and education officials in the haor belt just like 30 per cent of basic pay enjoyed by their compatriots in the three hill tract districts as hill allowance.

On August 5, parliamentary standing committee on primary and mass education

made a strong recommendation to pay haor allowance to the primary schoolteachers.

In 2012, the government's Haor Development Board also recommended payment of financial incentives to the teachers of primary schools in the remote haor belt having no communication facilities.

Regular supervision and monitoring alone can bring a positive change in classroom teaching in primary schools, said Brac's director of education Safiqul Islam.

Both Safiq and Tahmina said that payment of haor allowance to the teachers and education officials could address the problems of the high rate of absence of teachers from the class rooms and monitoring of the schools.

Payment of haor allowance to the primary school teachers is under the government's consideration, said primary and mass education minister Mostafizur Rahman.