

Many school, madrassah buildings risky

DPE, DSHE have no statistics

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OFFICIALS involved in the construction and repair of primary and secondary buildings said that many such buildings across the country were risky. Officials of the Directorate of Primary Education and engineering officials of the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, however, failed to give any figure of such buildings amid cracks reported by the media to have developed in about 120 school buildings in May.

In many such schools where buildings are in a run-

down condition, students continue to attend classes under the open sky to head off any disaster. According to media reports, cracks were spotted in about 120 primary and secondary schools only in May. These buildings stand the risk of collapse any moment. A high Education Engineering Department official said that more than 6,000 secondary schools and 4,000 dakhil madrassahs were 'risky'. Many of these school buildings, tin-shed or half-brick, may collapse in natural disasters. DPE officials said that most of these schools, which

were registered institutions, had been nationalised in January. According to the draft of the Annual Sector Performance Report 2012 on primary education, 76 per cent of class rooms were brick-built. Of the classrooms in government primary schools, 19 per cent were in a 'bad or unusable' condition, 28 were in a 'moderate' condition and 53 were in a 'good' condition, the report said. Seventeen per cent of classrooms of the primary schools, which were then registered but now nationalised, were in a 'bad or un-

usable' condition, 35 were in 'moderate' condition and 48 per cent were in a 'good' condition. The Education Watch 2008, a report of the Campaign for Popular Education, said that 60 per cent of the primary schools were brick-built. The CAMPE report for 2006 said that 90 per cent of government secondary school, 67.5 per cent of non-government secondary school and 34.6 percent of dakhil madrassah buildings were in 'a good condition'. Both the DPE director general, Shyamal Kanti Ghosh, and the DSHE director general, Fahima Kha-

tan, told New Age that their agencies did not have any statistics on 'risky school buildings' but they were collecting data. The education minister, Nurul Islam Nahid, and the primary and mass education minister, Afsarul Ameen, told New Age that they would consider safety issues of the students and teachers. Guardians in the capital Dhaka said that they were worried about their children being exposed to risk as cracks had been spotted in many of the buildings of renowned education institutions such as Viganunnisa. *Continued on page 4 Col. 5*

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Noon School and College, the second branch of Manipur School and College, Motijheel Ideal School and College, South Point School and College and others. Santhia Pilot High School in Pabna, Gudamer Chawra Government High School in Lalmonirhat, Rajapur Pilot High School in Jhalakati, SKJB High School, SA High School and Begum Arafatunnesa Girls' School and College in Patuakhali became risky as cracks developed in the pillars, walls and roofs of the buildings, according to newspaper reports. Students of 35 registered primary schools in Charfesson in Bhola were attending classes in vulnerable buildings. In many of these schools, chunks of plasters were flaking off, exposing concretes and even iron rods, according to media reports. Twenty-one primary schools at Kotalipara in Gopalganj, 18 government primary schools in the Chandpur district headquarters, and 17 government primary schools at Amtali in Barguna and two primary schools in Jhenidah district have risky buildings, according to re-

ports. The Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme 2010 study report said that in the capital Dhaka alone, about buildings of 1,200 schools were highly vulnerable to moderate earthquakes. Schools in cities such as Chittagong and Sylhet and in the country's north are also vulnerable, said the report, part of which is published on the UNDP web site. Cyclones and floods usually damage a large number of school buildings, according to an ActionAid Bangladesh publication of 2010. In the 1998 flood, 13,718 primary school buildings were either destroyed or damaged; 9,287 school buildings were destroyed or damaged in the 1991 cyclone, 17,853 in the 2004 flood, 8,873 in the 2007 flood, and 2,888 in the 2009 cyclone. Six thousand of primary and secondary schools were either destroyed or damaged as Cyclone Sidr crashed into the Bangladesh coast on November 15, 2007. According to media reports, cyclonic storm Mahasen, which made a landfall on May 16, damaged more than 1,300 educational

institutions in the coastal districts. The CAMPE executive director, Rasheda K Choudhury, said that faulty construction, old building and the lack of supervision had increased the risk for students and teachers attending and taking classes in these schools. Accidents may take place in these schools any time, she said. 'It is really sad that in our country we do not have any preventative measures to head off man-made or natural disasters.' Rasheda said that a large number of the risky school buildings were located in remote areas such as hills, char land, hoar areas and the coastal belt. The Viganunnisa Noon School and College principal, Manju Ara Begum, said that they were holding regular academic activities in a risky condition. 'Accidents can take place any time.' Ziaul Kabir Dulu, president of Abhibhabak Oikya Forum, a platform of Dhaka-based guardians, told New Age, 'Action is a must for risky buildings for the safety of students.' The education minister said that they were alert to risky buildings and would

not compromise on the safety of students. 'We take immediate action whenever we receive the news of any risky buildings. We are also repairing many run-down school buildings.' The primary and mass education minister said, 'There could be some run-down buildings as these had been constructed many years ago. We have already sought information from upazilas on risky, cracked and run-down buildings.' There are about 2,57,14,000 students and 6,83,600 teachers in various types of primary and secondary schools and ibtedayi and dakhil madrassahs. According to the Primary School Census report of 2010, there are about 79,000 primary schools and ibtedayi madrasahs, including 63,860 government primary schools, in which 1,69,57,900 students are taught by 3,95,281 teachers. The Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics said, that 75,10,200 students are taught by 2,23,550 teachers in 19,070 secondary schools and 12,46,300 students are taught by 64,771 teachers in 6,669 dakhil madrassahs.