

## School feeding boosts students' attendance

BSS, Dhaka

Selina, a class IV student of FMB Government Primary School in Jessore, rarely used to stay for classes after the break for tiffin.

"I cannot concentrate on my studies when I am hungry. I used to eat 'panta bhat' in the morning and had to spend the whole day in school without eating anything else," she said, adding that is why she could not wait to escape from school after tiffin break.

"But now I do not want to miss anymore classes because our school provides us free food," said the thin but lively 12-year-old.

Nowadays Selina is a regular student and her teachers could not be more pleased.

Attendance of students increased rapidly after the launch of school feeding programme. Students of class I to V are getting free food under the programme, said teachers of the school.

According to Primary Education Department of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and the Bangladesh government launched the "School Feeding Programme" in July 2002, targeting schools located in food insecure rural areas and slums in the capital.

The programme was intended to distribute fortified biscuits to elementary schoolchildren in the targeted schools every day. The biscuits provide 300 kilocalories (about 15 percent of daily calorie requirement) and a range of micronutrients, contributing about 75 percent of vitamin A, zinc, folate and iron.

The goals of the programme were to increase school enrolment and attendance, reduce school repetition and dropout rates, improve attention and learning capacity by cutting short-term hunger.

The government and WFP are currently supporting some 33.95 lakh schoolchildren with high energy biscuits every day when they come to school, according to the Awami League website.

In 2010, the programme started at all primary schools in 72 upazilas in the country when its first edition was approved. After continuing its successful implementation, Ecnec gave its nod to the second phase in December, 2014 with the expenditure of Tk 314,552.20 lakh. Among the allocation, the government spent Tk 214,599.65 lakh and rest of the money came from the donor organisations.

Based on the WFP model, the government now covers 25 lakh students under 72 upazilas from its own funding for the National School Feeding Programme. On the other hand, the WFP with the support from the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education has brought nine lakh students of 21 upazilas under the programme to increase the attendance rate of primary students.