

Students in Haor areas miss schools due to lack of transport facilities

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LACK of transport facilities during the monsoon forces tens of thousands of children of Haor areas to miss their schools for about half of the year while Bangladesh Haor and Wetland Development Board's plan for introducing school boat facilities remains in paper only for last three years.

These rural students also face trouble accessing schooling even when classes remain open in dry season as most of the Haor areas are not connected with roads.

Students of Haor areas can't go to school, and teachers also fail to reach school in many cases and miss their classes when all the lands are submerged in water in Haor areas', said Sylhet division deputy director of the Directorate of Primary Education Tahmina Khatun.

Bangladesh Haor and Wetland Development Board under its master plan taken up in 2012 envisaged a project titled 'School Boat Facilities for Inaccessible Areas' that was scheduled to be launched the same year.

But the board's director general Afroza Moazzam confirmed New Age that there was no headway in implementing school boat project.

According to the board, Sunanganj, Habiganj, Sylhet, Maulvibazar, Brahmanbaria, Netrokona and Kishoreganj districts are dotted with as many as 373 Haors or large bowl-shaped wetlands.

DPE officials do not have data as to how many primary schools are located in the Haor areas.

Tahmina Khatun and others district primary education officials said 40 to 60 per cent primary schools were affected during monsoon period.

Haor board master plan 2012 said that 7,148 out of 8,381 primary school in seven districts were situated in Haor areas.

DPE said that currently there were 12,800 primary schools in the seven districts having 30 lakh students.

During a recent visit to some schools in the Haor areas in Companyganj Upazila in Sylhet district, New Age Correspondent found that most of the students

were absent.

At Raipur Government Primary School on September 2, some people were seen cleaning cow dung from the corridor. The school building was in a rundown position and no classrooms had any windows. Two teachers including the school's acting head teacher Subarna Rani were present and two others were on deputation.

None of 215 students of Dighal Baker Par Government Primary School, that appeared like an island in the vast water of the Haor, was present. Head teacher, Jatish Chandra Chowdhury, out of three teachers, was present at the school where sacks of paddy were piled up in a class room.

Beki Murar Par Government Primary School and Fethergaon Government Primary School were under lock and key on September 2. Companyganj upazila education officer Sharadindu Das on the next day confirmed that schools were not officially closed.

Subarna Rani and Jatish Chandra Chowdhury, both head teachers, argued that

students and teachers could not come to school due to lack of transport facilities during the monsoon season.

New Age on September 3 found that none of students and teachers, except the head teacher, of Mitrimahal Government Primary School of Guayanghat upazila, was present at school.

Sitangshu Ranjan Das, the head teacher of Chhalia Government Primary School of Sylhet sadar upazila, said that 14 out of 36 class V students, 38 out of 64 class IV students and 15 out of 56 class III students were present.

From April to October when all the lands are submerged in water in Haor areas causing full closure of most of the primary schools, some schools remain open with very low attendance of students and teachers in Haor areas of Sylhet division, said officials.

Many parents could not afford to send their children to school because of inaccessibility and huge transport cost.

Tahmina Khatun said that suffering of students reaches the peak during examina-

tions and they often miss the tests when they fail to catch boats to go to their schools in the Haor areas.

In dry season students sometimes need to walk a long distance for reaching their schools as roads were limited in many remote places.

Tahmina proposed for introducing boat facilities for the students and teachers for improving the situation.

BRAC director of education Safiqul Islam said that boat facilities would definitely help students and teachers attendance in the primary schools. He said that they operated some boat schools that used to pick up and drop students and the attendance was very high in those schools.

Primary and mass education minister Mostafizur Rahman said that he would soon visit the Haor region to see for himself the problem. 'We don't have any plan to provide boat facilities to the schools currently, but we will welcome if any national and international agencies came forward to provide such facilities', he added.