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Learning Loss in Pandemic: Govt to buy digital contents for students

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The government is going to buy digital contents containing interactive and communicative lessons to help secondary students tap the potentials of distance learning.

The contents include recorded video lectures of teachers with visual presentations on various topics. Those will also contain infographics and slideshows related to a specific topic so that students can easily understand it, according to officials of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB).

"These contents will be interactive and communicative for students... The details of the contents will be sorted out soon," NCTB Chairman Prof Narayan Chandra Saha told The Daily Star yesterday.

Those will also help the students make up for the learning loss caused by the Covid-induced shutdown, he said.

NCTB officials said the digital contents for the students of class VI to X will be aired on television channels and also uploaded on different educational websites so that they have easy access to those.

Narayan said 5,000 digital contents would be bought from Startup Bangladesh Limited under the ICT Ministry for around Tk 17 crore.

Of the amount, Tk 3 crore will be spent on validation of contents by experts, he mentioned.

The duration of each digital content will be 20 minutes, he said, adding that more contents will be bought if necessary.

Earlier, talking to journalists after a meeting yesterday, Additional Secretary of the Cabinet Division Shamsul Arefin said the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the proposal of the NCTB to buy digital contents through direct purchase method.

The government move comes amid closure of all educational institutions due to the pandemic. The authorities are yet to decide on the reopening of educational institutions that have remained shut for nearly 17 months.

On March 17, 2020, the government closed all educational institutions to check the spread of Covid. The closure has recently been extended till August 31. The long closure has led to cancellation of exams and left academic calendars in disarray.

Following the closure, the government launched TV education programmes through state-run Sangsad television channel for secondary and primary students. Later, it asked all schools to introduce online education.

Most of the students in urban areas have access to learning through the internet, but the digital divide has so far proved to be a great disadvantage for the underprivileged learners, mainly for a lack of devices and poor access to the internet.

At the end of last year, the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education asked all the secondary schools to start giving assignments to students.

All these interim efforts were made so that students do not suffer learning loss during the closure.

The term "learning loss" refers to any specific or general loss of knowledge and skills or to reversals in academic progress, most commonly due to extended gaps or discontinuities in a student's education, according to educationists.

The NCTB chairman said they chose the direct purchase method to buy the digital contents from Startup Bangladesh Limited as no other organisation can produce and provide such digital contents.

"I do not think that Tk 27,000-28,000 for each content is too much," he said in reply to a query.

All the digital contents will have to be validated by experts who will determine whether those were made in line with the national curriculum and are of the required standards, he added.

Seeking anonymity, a top official of Startup Bangladesh Limited told this newspaper that they had earlier produced and supplied many educational contents that were aired on Sangsad Television channel.

"We will be able to produce quality content."

Asked about the average production cost of a content, the official said, "We need to pay for studios, recording, editing and other purposes." The official couldn't give any specific amount but said the average cost would be around Tk 25,000.

Startup Bangladesh Limited under the ICT Ministry is the first and only venture capital fund sponsored by the government. It started its journey in March 2020 with an allocated capital of Tk 500 crore, according to its official website.

The Covid-induced school closure for over a year has put a minimum of 3.42 million primary students and 2.50 million secondary students at risk of learning loss, said a joint study of Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) and Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) released on May 10.

The survey was based on telephone interviews of heads of 6,099 rural and urban slum households having school-going children.

The researchers said learning loss was caused as students were not studying at all or they became irregular in their studies.

At the survey launching ceremony, PPRC Executive Chairman Hossain Zillur Rahman said the learning loss was causing students to lose their skills, eventually making it difficult for them to become human resources in the future.