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School feeding finally resumes at homes

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Mohiuddin Alamgir

Valueimpression

Government officials and teachers are distributing 30 lakh primary school students so that they are not affected by the coronavirus outbreak.

"We have started distributing 30 to 50 packets of food to the students at their homes," School Feeding Programme



He added that field-level government officials, teachers and representatives of NGOs are distributing the biscuits while following health guidelines and maintaining social distance.

"We are giving 30 packets of fortified biscuits in the areas where we have fewer stocks of biscuits. The beneficiaries were supposed to get these biscuits in March and April," he added.

He said that they plan to reach all beneficiaries by May 15, but they would realistically need till May 20 to reach all students.

"After finishing this round, we will reach all students with another round and if the crisis continues, we will also continue the initiative," he said.

The biscuit distribution programme had been on hold since March 17, when the government closed down all schools in a bid to curb the spread of Covid-19.

The government then extended the closure of all educational institutions till May 30. But Directorate of Primary Education sources said according to their academic calendar, all primary schools will remain closed until June 6 for Ramadan, Eid-ul-Fitr and summer vacations.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on April 27 said all educational institutions would remain closed till September if the coronavirus situation did not improve.

The project officials sent a letter on April 25 to the DPE director general requesting him to take steps to enable the distribution of 50 packets of biscuits at a time to each student in the project area through upazila nirbahi officers and upazila primary education officers and teachers.

On one hand, the expiry dates of many biscuits are fast approaching and on the other, students are being deprived of nutrition as the schools are closed, said the letter.

Project officials said they have at least 7,212 tonnes of biscuits in stock.

Officials said in order to ensure nutrition, reduce hunger, dropout rates and increase attendance in the classroom, the government was carrying out the programme in 104 upazilas in poverty-prone regions.

Under this project, the government gives packets of fortified biscuits, each weighing 75 grams, to nearly 30 lakh children at about 15,800 primary schools in those 104 upazilas.



The government introduced the programme in 2010, following in the footsteps of the World Food Programme, which ran a project to feed primary schoolchildren from 2001 to 2009.

Project officials said that the rate of attendance at school has increased by five to 13 percent in schools that fall under the programme.

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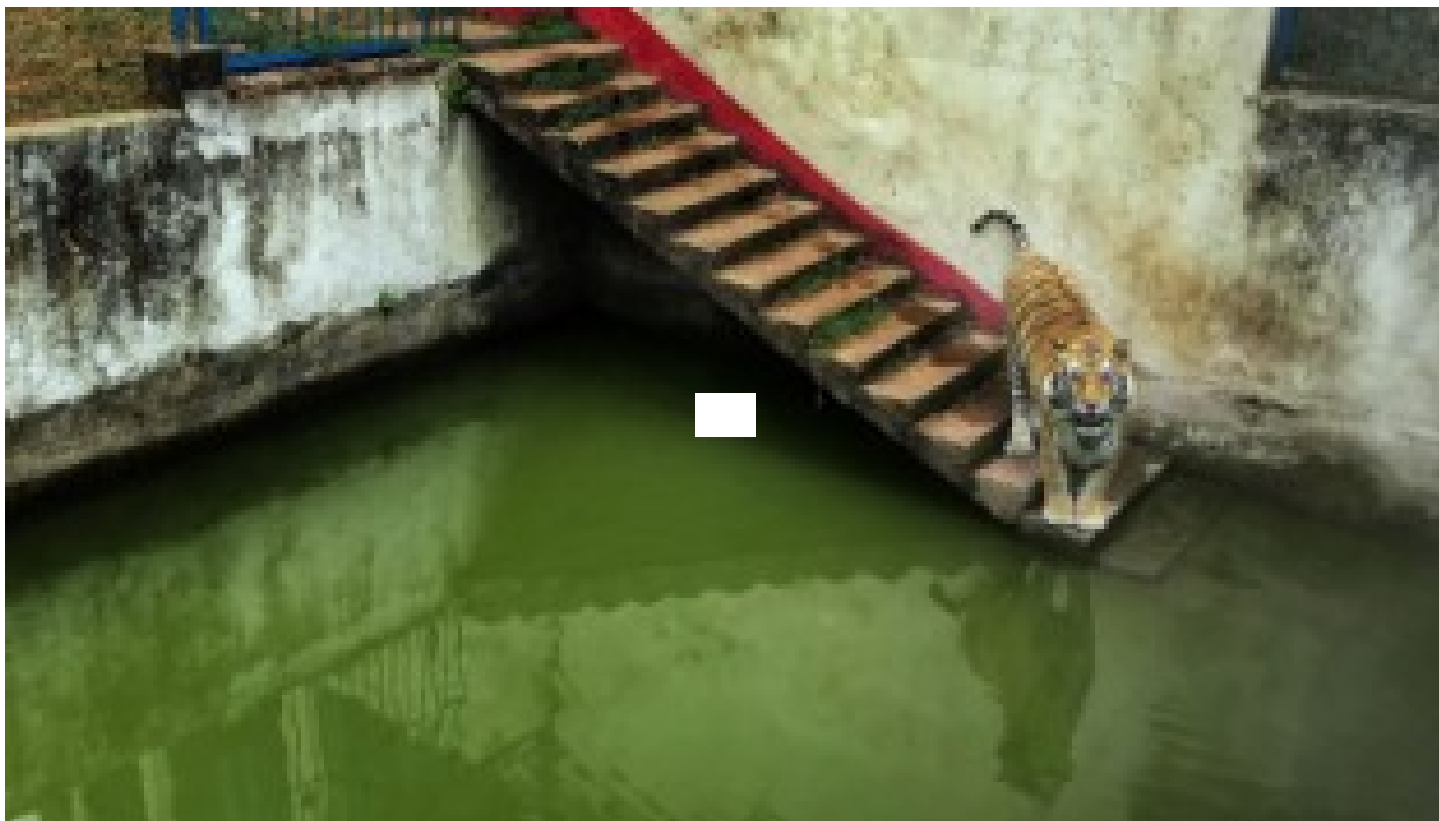
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