

Schoolbags

FROM PAGE 1

effect in six months. It asked the government to instruct schools to ensure no children carry heavy bags.

Hailing the verdict, guardians of students in different schools urged the government to formulate the law immediately.

Hasibul Alam, father of a class-I student at an English medium school, said, "My son often looks weary when he returns home from school. Apart from textbooks, he carries a few exercise books and a diary. He tells me his shoulder aches when he carries the bag on one shoulder for a long time."

Rokshana Yesmin, mother of a class-IV student at St Francis Xavier's Girls' High School, said children are forced to carry excessive books because of the vast syllabus.

"If some subjects are curtailed, the pressure will be eased," she said, adding that children get no time to play due to the huge pressure of studies.

A teacher of a private school said, "It's true that children carry heavy schoolbags.

"We will follow whatever the government instructs us to do," the teacher said.

The HC yesterday also asked the authorities concerned to form a monitoring cell for taking necessary steps to stop this practice and take punitive actions against those responsible for children having to carry heavy bags.

The court observed that forcing primary schoolchildren to carry heavy weight is cruelty and violation of human rights.

Children's bodies get hurt and they have to suffer for their entire life if they are forced to carry heavy bags, the court commented.

The court ordered the government to issue a circular in 30 days before formulation of the law, incorporating necessary instructions for schools so that they can ensure that no child carries heavy backpacks.

The HC bench of Justice Moyeenul Islam Chowdhury and Justice Ashish Ranjan Das came up with the judgment after hearing a writ petition filed by Supreme Court lawyers Masud Dolon, Ziaur Rahman and Anarul Karim on August 9 last year.

The full text of the verdict was not released yesterday.

Citing from experts' opinions, the petitioners said children were having spinal deformities because of heavy school bags.

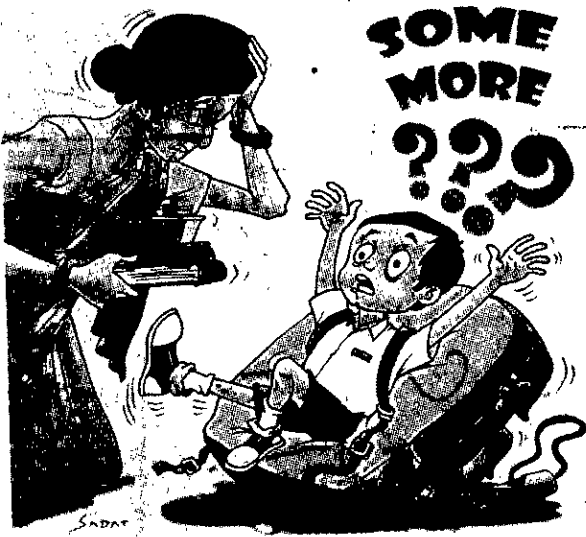
Students carry overweight bags as their schools compel them to carry many books, papers and instruments, the petitioners said, adding that there was no specific law or regulation in Bangladesh prohibiting school authorities from doing so.

Citing the petition, Masud Dolon told The Daily Star that on average a student has to carry a bag weighing 30 to 40 percent of their body weight.

Following the petition, the HC on August 11 last year issued a rule asking the government to explain why it should not be directed to formulate a specific law or regulation prohibiting children from carrying schoolbags that weigh more than 10 percent of their body weight, and pre-primary children from carrying any bags at all.

The HC directive follows a regulation issued by the Indian State of Maharashtra in July last year that said children must not carry schoolbags that exceed more than 10 percent of their body weight.

Deputy Attorney General Motaher Hossain Sazu yesterday told The Daily Star that the government responded to the HC rule saying that it had



Lighten schoolbags

HC asks govt to make a law

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

To lighten the load of children burdened with heavy schoolbags, the High Court yesterday prohibited the carrying of satchels that weigh more than 10 percent of their body weight.

The HC delivering the verdict on a writ petition directed the government to formulate a specific law to this

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1