Schools throughout the country, with some 3.7 million students and over a million teachers, are closed due to the coronavirus pandemic. The ongoing shutdown is likely to continue beyond the approaching Ramadan until the end of May. So what can we say about the millions of students, their learning and their wellbeing?

A BRAC survey of 2,675 households in 64 districts using the network of microcredit groups, carried out between March 31 and April 6, shows that the average monthly income of the sample households has dwindled from Tk 14,599 to Tk 3,742. The bread-earners of these families include rickshaw pullers, factory workers, hotel or restaurant workers, and non-farm day labourers, many of whose income has been reduced to zero. Fourteen percent of the low-income families have no fund left and no job to earn any income. Children from these families are also in school, thanks to the expansion of access to school education.

As part of its relief and support measures, the government has announced a plan to provide a monthly cash aid of Tk 2,000-3,000 to each of 3.4 million families. Cash will be sent out starting from April for three months through mobile fund transfer. Economists argue that at least ten million families need this support to survive through the crisis. Many fear that hunger, not the coronavirus, will kill them.

The school education authorities have so far responded in two ways. They have started broadcasting via TV subject-wise lessons for primary and secondary schools, using the spare BTV channel designated for broadcasting national parliament proceedings. Secondly, being concerned about the disruption of the school calendar, they have suggested some changes in the public and school-based exam schedule.