

Sri Lanka: Education sector yet to return to normalcy

Thursday 23 June 2022, by [HANNAN Sarah](#) (Date first published: 12 March 2022).

Schools reopened last week for the second half of the third term for 2021, with school children preparing for their promotion tests to move on to the next grade.

While schools were initially only conducting in-person lessons based on the number of students per class due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a circular was issued by Ministry of Education Secretary Prof. Kapila Perera on Friday (11) to allow students to attend classes from Monday (14) as per usual, with instructions issued to school authorities in this regard.

The circular issued by the Education Ministry noted that all students should be summoned to schools as per usual from next Monday, adding that if an issue with regard to the functioning of schools arises owing to the pandemic, necessary action could be taken with the approval of the zonal director of education.

Pandemic aside, two new problems have arisen in the form of the fuel shortage and scheduled power cuts, which will further impact the continuity of education in Sri Lanka.

Adding fuel to the fire is mismanagement of resources and delays relating to proposed education reforms, leaving the country's education system in a quandary.

The Sunday Morning spoke to several stakeholders for their views on ensuring the basic right of access to free education in the country.

Ceylon Teachers' Union (CTU) Secretary Joseph Stalin noted that they believed that school children and university students were suffering due to the present method of education.

Stalin is of the view that the incumbent Government is trying to use the fuel shortage and dollar crisis to cover up the deep-rooted issues relating to education, administration, and governance of the country, and is conveniently using them to distract citizens from the socioeconomic instability they have to deal with each day.

"Children who have nothing to do with politics and the state of the country are suffering because of the incompetence of this Government and how it has chosen to govern the country. Today, children are unable to go to school because the bus that takes them to school cannot function without diesel. They are unable to follow online lessons due to power cuts and teachers have to conduct lessons at least five times a day. Then we have children who do not have access to the necessary technology and have missed out entirely on lessons all these 18 months," Stalin elaborated.

To top it all off, Stalin charged that the Government was also appointing people who had not even taken the Sri Lanka Administrative Services exams to the post of directors due to being its henchmen and helping further their political agendas during the teacher-principal trade union action period, which saw 11 requests being put to the Government.

“They were to appoint a special committee to look into the 11 requests that we made. However, all we saw was that they removed the State Minister for Education Reform and changed the Cabinet Minister for Education, and now we are back to where we started without any solution to the problems that school children, teachers, and principals are facing amid this chaotic environment,” Stalin revealed.

The CTU has also hinted at a return to trade union action if their requests are not addressed as promised by the middle of the year.

Stalin noted that the erratic method in which syllabus coverage was required amidst the economic crisis would have a massive impact on children who will sit for the GCE Ordinary Level examination of 2021 in May this year.

“How can the children expect the syllabus to be covered or any type of revision work to be done? What of the children who will not be able to travel to school and are unable to face the exams?” Stalin questioned.

Education Forum Sri Lanka Co-founder and renowned educationist Dr. Sujata Gamage speaking to *The Sunday Morning* termed the current status of the education system a tragedy caused by the destabilised economy.

“It is sad to note that the children of this country are at the receiving end because the policymakers of this country have not been able to come up with a solution, even after two years. Time and time again we have made suggestions as to how important it is to adapt to emergency learning methods, yet none have been put to action,” Dr. Gamage opined.

Although several attempts were made to contact the Ministry of Education Secretary Prof. Kapila Perera and the Minister of Education Dinesh Gunewardena for comment, *The Sunday Morning* could not get through to them.

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