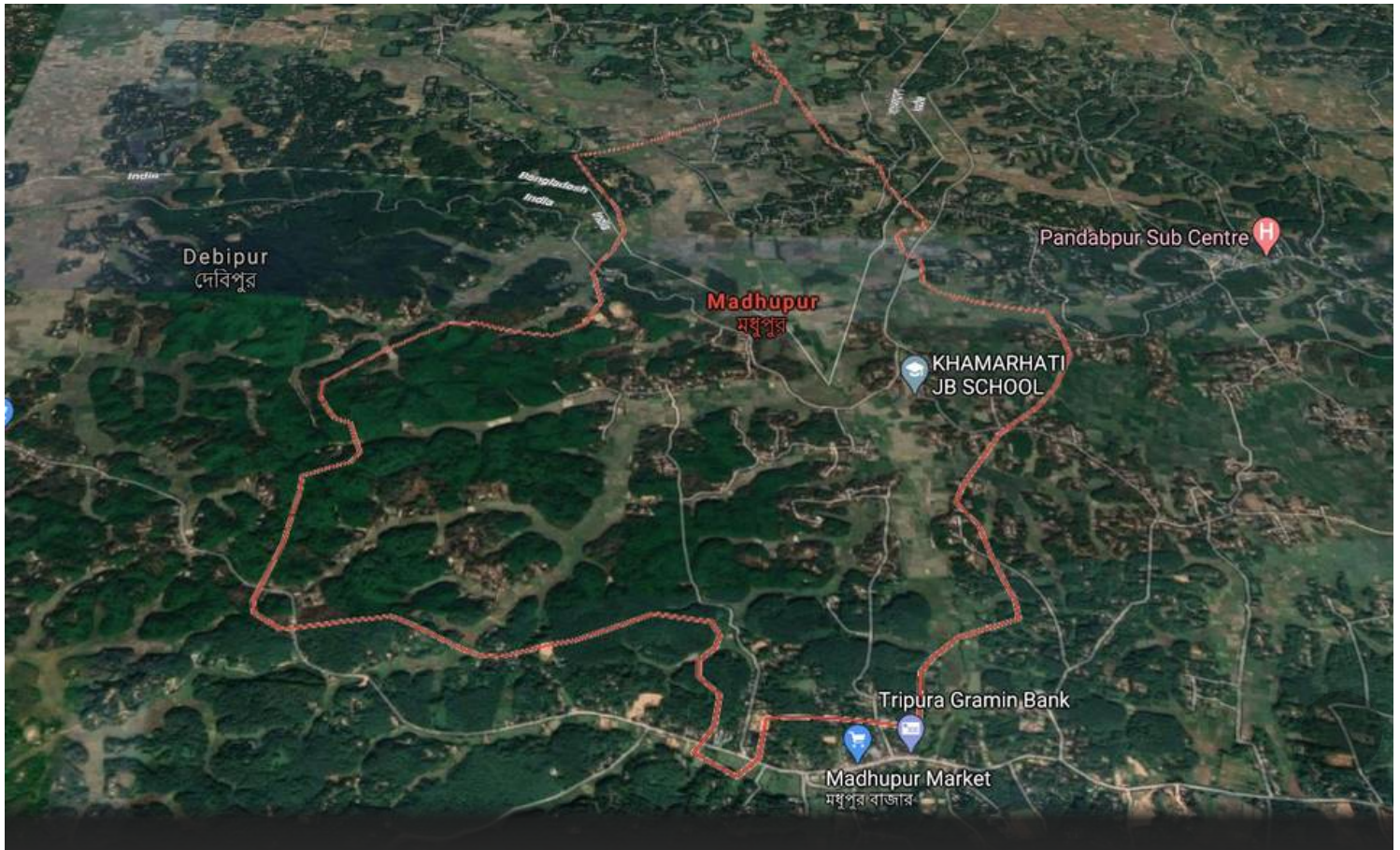


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# Coronavirus lockdown | Tripura man dies after failing to buy a smartphone for daughter



## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI: , JULY 02, 2020 19:34 IST

UPDATED: JULY 02, 2020 21:33 IST

## Police said he was under pressure for his inability to facilitate her online classes

A daily-wager was found dead at his residence in western Tripura's Sepahijala district after reportedly failing to buy his 15-year-old daughter a smartphone for her online studies.

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The police said the 45-year-old Sukumar Bhowmik's death in Madhupur village on July 1 was "unnatural".

The district's Superintendent of Police Krishnendu Chakraborty said the man had been facing a financial crisis after COVID-19 restrictions made jobs hard to come by.

"He, nevertheless, bought an ordinary feature phone which his daughter rejected as she needed a smartphone for her online classes. A quarrel with his wife and daughter ensued," he said.

A member of Mr. Bhowmik's extended family said he went into depression after the daughter smashed the phone and refused to speak to him unless he gave her a smartphone.

This was the second such instance over failure to attend online classes in the absence of a smartphone.

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A 15-year-old boy in western Assam's Chirang district was found dead near his house on June 23. The district police said the boy, who studied in Class X at Tukrajhar High School, had been worried he would lag behind his classmates who had access to online classes through smartphones.

"His parents did not have the resources to buy him even the cheapest of phones that could support the apps needed for the online classes," an Inspector of the district's Runikhata Police Station said.

## 'Ration for the mind'

Guwahati-based psychiatrist Sangeeta Datta said online classes, "inevitable without any alternative in the COVID-19 scenario", have led to issues of mental health unforeseen even during the initial days of the nationwide lockdown.

"If the students were feeling the pressure initially, poor and jobless parents are being stressed out now. We have been counselling people, but the government needs to seriously think of providing financial support for students as online teaching could be long-term," she told *The Hindu*.

"Just as food and essentials are ration for the body for people caught in lockdown, financial package for smartphones to facilitate online classes should be treated as ration for the mind," she added.

Tripura's Education Minister Ratan Lal Nath said the State government has taken a step in this direction by deciding to provide ₹5,000 each to 14,608 undergraduate students for buying smartphones.

Officials said a similar programme could be undertaken for school and college students from economically weaker classes.

Those who require assistance for overcoming suicidal thoughts may see

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/suicide-prevention-helplines/article25612310.ece>

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