

Education quality suffers on shoe-string budget

MUSTAK HOSSAIN
 Bangladesh's educational spending, the huge chunk of which is gobbled up by teacher's salaries and infrastructure, is not enough to raise the standard of education, experts and watch-ers said.
 Although the sector was given the highest allocation of Tk 6,871 crore or 16 per cent of the total budget in the current fiscal, only a trickle goes to developing learning materials and textbooks, they said.
 Monitoring and supervision, also vital for raising quality, remains equally neglected.
 "The budgetary allocation for education is poor in terms of Gross

National Product (GNP) and most of it is spent for other than quality improvement," said Manzoor Ahmed, convenor of Education Watch, an independent research and monitoring organisation.
 He said only two per cent of the GNP was dedicated to the sector. It should be taken to five per cent in the next five years and new resources should be allocated for quality management.
 UN bodies recommend for spending more than 6 per cent of GNP for education.
 Experts said Bangladesh's spending per student in primary level is about \$15, one of the lowest in the world and lower than other South

Asian countries. However, a comparative figure is not available.
 A recent Education Watch survey says teachers' salary eats into 94.6 per cent of government school allocation, 87.6 per cent of private school budget and 93.9 per cent of madrasa spending. While it is 51.1 per cent of non-formal school fund.
 Seventy-two per cent of total budget of the country's autonomous universities are spent for salaries and allowances of teachers and employees while only 13 per cent for education and research, a report of the University Grants Commission (UGC) said.
 Of the public university budget, Tk 265.62 crore out of Tk 302.80 crore was spent for paying salaries and other

allowances of teachers and employees. The report said only Tk 36.03 crore was spent for education and research purpose during the period.
 The country's education sector holds little promise as nearly 70 per cent of government and non-government educational institutions are either below or semi-standard, says a education ministry survey.
 The survey that covered 23,000 non-government schools and colleges, categorised 8,330 institutions, or 36.32 per cent as below standard, 7,067 or 30.82 per cent as semi-standard, 6,939 or 30.26 per cent as standard and 597 or only 2.60 per cent as high standard.
 The grading of an institution was
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'Export or set up gas-run plants'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
 Former Indian prime minister Inder Kumer Gujral has said Bangladesh should go for optimum use of its natural resources.
 "You have to ensure proper use of gas. Either you export it to any country or set up gas-run chemical plants," the veteran Indian politician said while speaking at a programme at a local hotel yesterday afternoon organised by 'South Asians for Human Rights' (SAHR).
 He called on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina yesterday and discussed a wide range of issues, including gas, with them. "I don't want to tell you that you should export gas to India. You can export gas to any country of your choosing."
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Former Indian premier IK Gujral chats with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office in the city yesterday during a courtesy call. PHOTO: PID

'Keep BoI above controversy'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
 The business community yesterday said the Board of Investment (BoI) should be kept above all controversy for attracting local and foreign investment.
 "We would expect the relations between the BoI and the business community to remain good," said an unsigned statement issued by 10 organisations representing the business community.
 The statement was prompted by an incident in which the BoI executive chairman allegedly received a death threat from a businessman for not issuing a licence to produce beer.
 The organisations are: the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), Foreign Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), American Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AmCham), Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI), Chittagong Chamber of Commerce
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Lawyers yesterday protest appointment of 10 judges to the High Court division. PHOTO: STAR

Damaged Boeing joins Biman fleet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
 One of the five damaged aircraft of the Biman Bangladesh Airlines, a Boeing 737, joined the fleet yesterday after its minor damages were repaired.
 The Boeing flew to Kolkata in the afternoon and then to Sylhet.
 The aircraft -- three Airbuses, one Boeing 737 and one F28 -- were damaged at Zia International Airport (ZIA) on Tuesday night when a nor'wester lashed the city at a wind speed of 111 km per hour.
 They are now being repaired and the authorities hope they would join the fleet within a few weeks.
 "Local and foreign engineers are working together and we are hopeful that all the damaged aircraft will become airworthy within a few weeks," said a top Biman engineer, asking not to be named.
 Two representatives of Lloyds, the insurer, are assessing the financial losses, officials said.
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Plan to form South Asian body on minority rights

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
 Leaders of the South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR) have decided to form a high-powered, non-governmental citizens' commission on rights of the minorities in South Asia.
 The commission will investigate all aspects of religious and cultural minorities in the region, they said at a press conference at Sheraton Hotel yesterday afternoon.
 They called upon the governments of India and Pakistan to admit to their failures to resolve differences nor standing in the way of regional affairs as a whole.
 They also urged the two countries to lift restrictions on bilateral trade, restore full diplomatic relations and hold regular talks to ease tension and bring peace to the region.
 "Agree upon and implement policies which promote religious tolerance and develop mutual stakes in promoting and sustaining a democratic institution," said Co-Chairperson Asma Jahangir quoting a paper on India-Pakistan peace.
 The paper underscored immediate steps to revitalise the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) so that it can play its due role in ending regional distance and to implement SAARC agreements and protocols.
 The SAHR will organise activities at national level in South Asian countries to cement social and cultural bonds among people and strengthen solidarity for regional peace and prosperity, said Asma Jahangir.
 In another statement on the fallout of the Iraq war on South Asia, the SAHR leaders opposed the war as a means of resolving international disputes. It also blamed the UK and the US for violating Article 2 of the UN Charter.
 They protested the use of missiles and cluster bombs in the name of a regime change, leading to death and destruction in Iraq. "Consequences of the war are echoing the rest of the Middle East as a talk of pre-emptive war becomes a daily diet in Washington," the paper added.
 The South Asian concern is that such unilateral aggression may become a precedent to a pre-emptive attack amid hostility in the
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Babul demands probe into allegation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
 The chairman of Jamuna Group, Nurul Islam Babul, yesterday demanded a neutral probe into the allegation of his misconduct with the executive chairman of the Board of Investment (BoI) on Monday.
 Dismissing the allegation, Babul said in a press release yesterday that BoI Executive Chairman Mahmudur Rahman "has tarnished his image by spreading false and misleading information in a planned way".
 "The BoI executive chairman has dramatised the whole issue to hide his failure," Babul alleged.
 The press release, signed by the director of Jamuna Group, said Babul went to meet the BoI chairman last Monday, after he had failed to get any response from the BoI in the last seven months regarding the registration of one of the group's organisations.
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Merit, not politics should dictate appointment of Judges: Dr Kamal

ZAYADUL AHSAN
 Appointment of judges should not be based on political consideration or patronisation, says Dr Kamal Hossain, architect of Bangladesh constitution.
 The appointments should depend on merit and discussions with Supreme Court judges and Bar members, the eminent lawyer thinks.
 Services of additional judges after two years should be confirmed in line with the chief justice's recommendations and constitutional conventions, Dr Kamal told The Daily Star Saturday at his chamber.
 If there is any argument on constitutional conventions, the government should amend the constitutional provisions to comply with the chief justice's recommendations.



Dr Kamal's arguments came amid a recent dispute over appointment of additional judges and non-confirmation of their services. "I believe the Supreme Court
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10 HC judges sworn in amid protest by lawyers

UNB, Dhaka
 Ten newly appointed additional judges of the High Court took oath of office yesterday morning amid protest by a section of lawyers.
 Chief Justice Mainur Reza Chowdhury administered the oath at the Supreme Court Judges' lounge. Judges of both divisions of the Supreme Court were present on the occasion.
 Those who took oath are Afzal Hossain Ahmed, AFM Ali Asgar, Farid Ahmed, Shamim Hasna, AFM Abdur Rahman, Md Abu Tarik, Begum Jinat Ara, MA Hafiz, Dr Syed Rifat Ahmed and Syed Shahidur Rahman.
 Soon after the oath, the new judges sat in benches constituted afresh by the Chief Justice.
 Earlier, a large number of lawyers took part in a demonstration organised by the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) in front of the main entrance of the court. The protesters stood in silence for about an hour with written slogans hanging from the neck.
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Ban on 40 unfit launches goes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
 The government yesterday withdrew its ban on 40 big passenger launches, which were found 'unfit' and classified as 'D' category.
 The owners of the 'D' category vessels have been asked to get fitness certificates from engineers and ship surveyors.
 The Ministry of Shipping had imposed the ban on the vessels last Thursday after a big launch mishap in the Buriganga that killed 131 people.
 The government formed a committee to classify passenger launches into four categories after a capsized that killed 400 people. The committee reported that the 'D' category launches are totally unfit for plying, while B and C-category ones should be improved through some modifications.
 Allegations are there that the government was forced to withdraw the ban on 'D' category launches by launch owners.

Non-formation of Parliamentary bodies Funds under withdrawal threat

NAZRUL ISLAM
 The government's failure to form parliamentary standing committees may lead to withdrawal of two million pound sterling in British funds by June-end.
 "Donors are annoyed at the long delay," said a source involved with the plan implementation, pointing to a warning last year of suspending funds.
 The British government endorsed the funds as preliminary supports, including technical, technological and managerial assistance, to enhance the functions of parliamentary committees.
 The funds approved under the Strengthening the Parliamentary Democracy have remained unused for nearly two years.

Representatives of donors who want to see an effective committee system through the best use of funds met with Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar and talked about formation of the committees, yielding no results as such.
 The donors look forward to good governance and transparency and accountability of the government through parliamentary committees -- especially those dealing with public accounts.
 The committees would have received more funds, if they had been functional since the beginning of eighth parliament, the source said preferring not to be named.
 Although the ruling BNP insiders kept telling the media that the government would form committees in "this session" of the Jatiya Sangsad, no

committee has yet been formed for reasons unknown.
 This time round, the BNP says the procedure is complete and the list of committee chairmen and members is pending with the Prime Minister's Office. The BNP hopes the committees would be announced in the coming session of the House.
 "The committees will be formed in the next parliamentary session beginning on May 8," said a ruling party whip.
 The main opposition Awami League (AL) accused the government of deliberately delaying the plan as the ministers do not want to face the blame from both opposition and ruling MPs for their failure to run the government well.
 The AL demanded a proportionate share in chairmanship and member-

Separation of judiciary SC surprised at govt plea to empower it to amend rules

UNB, Dhaka
 The Supreme Court yesterday expressed surprise at a government petition seeking to empower it to modify or amend the rules and regulations it had finalised to separate the judiciary from the executive.
 Moving the petition requesting further extension of time to implement the directives of the highest court, Attorney General AF Hassan Arif submitted that the government has been facing problems to implement the 12-point directives for separation of judiciary from the executive.
 Interrupting the attorney general, the seven-member full bench of the Supreme Court wanted to know what modifications the government exactly wanted as the petition did not specify.
 The Court also wanted the attorney general to explain why it took
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Khaleda cancels meeting with French minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
 Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday cancelled her scheduled meeting with the visiting French Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Renaud Muselier.
 "This afternoon (Sunday) I was scheduled to meet the prime minister, but she cancelled the meeting on personal grounds. You've to ask the prime minister why the meeting is cancelled," Muselier told newsmen at a press conference at Sonargaon Hotel last night.
 The French minister later opted for not holding talks with Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina. "I prefer to maintain a balance. It does not look good from political point of view. Since I could not see the prime minister, I'm not meeting the opposition leader," he explained.
 "But, I'll be meeting some members of the opposition. I met the parliament speaker too."
 Addressing the press overnight prior to his departure this morning, Muselier attached importance to his Bangladesh visit.
 "This is the first ministerial-level visit to Bangladesh from France in the last 12 years, undertaken at the request of (French) President (Jack) Chirac," he said.
 There was no word from the government explaining the reason for the cancellation of the prime minister's scheduled meeting with the French minister on a short notice.
 Muselier, who arrived in Dhaka on Saturday on a three-day visit, however, had official talks with his Bangladesh counterpart Reaz Rahman. He had separate meetings with Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan and Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury.
 Expressing his satisfaction at talks with Bangladesh leaders yesterday, he said, "We shared common views on international issues including the current Iraq situation."
 Terming Bangladesh as a peace-loving country, he lauded Dhaka's role in maintaining regional stability, particularly through SAARC grouping.
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Renaud Muselier

Industrial hub proposed on Adamjee Jute Mills land

UNB, Dhaka
 The government has initiated the process of transforming the vast abandoned premises of the now defunct Adamjee Jute Mills (AJM) into an industrial hub by setting up new-general industrial units, official sources said.
 The huge jute mills that was shut down a year ago has 300 acres of valuable land well connected with road, rail and river communications.
 A high-level meeting of ministers, business leaders and top officials here yesterday held elaborate discussions to identify the possible industrial sectors to be accommodated in this industrially potential site in the vicinities of the Narayanganj river port.

Industries Minister MK Anwar chaired the meeting where Textiles Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury, Disaster Management and Relief Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, Jute Minister Hafiz Uddin Ahmad and State Minister for Industries Prof Rezaul Karim were present.
 Industries Secretary AFM Sarwar Kamal, Textiles Secretary Syed Tanvir Hossain, Jute Secretary ASM Abdul Halim, FBCCI president Yussuf Abdullah Harun, BTMA chairman MA Awal, BGMEA president Kazi Moniruzzaman, BKMEA president Manzurul Huq and BJMC chairman Mujibur Rahman also attended the meeting.
 The meeting decided to give priority to the establishment of backward-linkage industry, specially dyeing and finishing for woven fabrics and knit yarn, and export-oriented garment industries in the AJM land.
 "Setting up of weaving mills, central effluent treatment plant, container depot, jetty and other support services industry will also be considered in phases," the meeting decided.
 The meeting urged the Jute Minister to dispose of the machinery and spare parts of the jute mills to prepare the land for the newly planned industries.
 It also requested the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief to
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