

Make education free from politicisation

Speakers tell roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a roundtable yesterday called for making the education sector free from politicisation.

They also identified poverty as a major factor hindering the goal of achieving universal primary education.

Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) organised the roundtable on 'Bangladesh in next five years: Strategies for reducing inequality in access to quality education' in the city.

Education has to be freed from the grip of politicians, which was snatched from the hands of teachers, said Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed, president of Biswa Sahitya Kendra.

The representatives of political parties must be withdrawn from the school management committees to protect education from inefficient operators, he added.

Presenting a paper, BIDS Research Director Dr Rushidan Islam Rahman said children from the households of the lowest income group have much lower school enrolment rate compared to

the higher income groups.

At present, the enrolment rate in the primary education is 85 percent for the lowest income group and 94 percent for higher income groups, while in the secondary education, it is 54 and 80 percent and at tertiary level, it stands at 8 and 14.2 percent.

"Policies counteracting the negative force of poverty should be urgently pursued," said Dr Rushidan Islam.

Besides, about 45 percent of the students do not get optimal support from schoolteachers and the teacher-student ratio stands at 1:60.

Dr Mahmudul Alam, senior research fellow of BIDS, in his paper said though gender parity has been achieved in many respects during the period from 1997 to 2005, the enrolment of boys in primary education has fallen.

He also said that performance in universal primary education is better in metropolitan areas and district towns than in rural areas.

The speakers stressed the need for strengthening the local government and community monitoring to improve the performance of the

rural schools.

Manzoor Ahmed, director of IED, Brac University, suggested arranging special teachers' training on quality education and introducing inclusive education in rural areas.

He also called for bringing underprivileged children and ethnic children under the primary education programme.

The speakers also stressed the need for universality of education and quality education.

They called for effective implementation of competence-based and result-oriented curriculum, recruitment of qualified teachers and better school environment and academic supervision.

Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, Dr Rasheda K Choudhury of CAMPE, Dr Kaiser of World Bank and Dr Zafarullah Chowdhury of Gonoshasthya Kendra also spoke at the roundtable moderated by Dr Quazi Shahabuddin, director general of BIDS.



BIDS Director General Dr Quazi Shahabuddin speaks at a roundtable on 'Bangladesh in next five years: Strategies for reducing inequality in access to quality education' in the city yesterday. On his right is Biswa Sahitya Kendra President Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed and on his left is BIDS Research Director Dr Rushidan Islam Rahman.

TORNADO IN COASTAL AREAS Coordination needed to reduce losses

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Coordination among the authorities concerned is a must to reduce loss of lives and properties in coastal areas during the natural calamities, said the speakers at a roundtable yesterday.

As there was a lack of communication and cooperation among the meteorology department, Coast Guard and marine department, the forecast about the tornado that hit fishermen as well as the coastal people last month could not reach them timely, they added.

The roundtable titled 'Experience of Tornado in September: Ways to Protect the Fishermen' was organised by the Coast Trust at the National Press Club in the city.

The roundtable was organised in association with Jago Nari, Sangkalpa Trust, Dvip Unnayan Sangstha, Sagorika, SEHD, Manusher Jonno, Action Aid and Care Bangladesh.

The speakers said the meteorology department as usual issued its weather bulletins that took more time to reach the media for broadcast.

Moreover, the wireless communication system of the Coast Guard also proved ineffective during the time when tornado lashed the area, they added.

The speakers alleged that there is no secured shelter where the fishing vessels could take shelter during any natural calamities.

They called for transferring meteorology department to shipping ministry from the defence and shifting its headquarters from Dhaka to Chittagong.

They also suggested establishing modern radar and facsimile

centres, broadcasting accurate weather bulletins in association with the weather centres of Kolkata and Bangkok, prohibiting fishing in the Bay of Bengal during disaster-prone three months.

The speakers demanded identification as well as withdrawal of hazardous vessels.

They also demanded compensation for the families of the fishermen

who lost their lives in the tornado.

The roundtable was moderated by Dr Tofayel Ahmed and Rezaul Karim Chowdhury of Coast Trust while Mahbubur Rahman MP, Delwar Hossain MP, Commander Mokbul Hossain, principal of Marine Fisheries Academy Chittagong and Aminul Islam, deputy commissioner of Cox's Bazar, were present on the occasion.

Veena Sikri meets Speaker

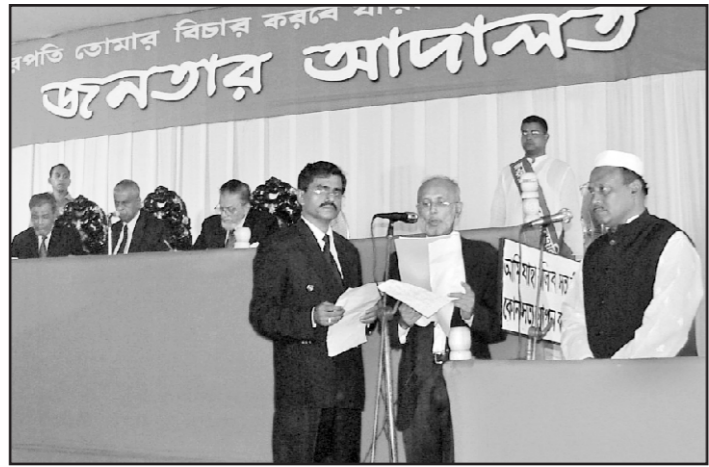
UNB, Dhaka

The outgoing Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Veena Sikri yesterday made a courtesy call on Speaker Mohammad Jamiruddin Sircar at his Sangsad Bhaban office.

They discussed matters of mutual interest and termed the diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and India as strong.

Veena Sikri expressed her satisfaction about the mutual good relations between the Parliaments of the two countries.

Whip Alhaj Mohammad Zahed Ali Chowdhury and Advocate Bilkis Akhter Jahan Shirin MP were present on the occasion.



Mayor Mohiuddin Chowdhury gives his deposition at the 'Janatar Adalat' at Shaheed Minar in the port city yesterday.

WEATHER TODAY

Light to moderate rain likely

UNB, Dhaka

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely at a few places over Rajshahi, Sylhet and Chittagong divisions and at one or two places over Dhaka, Khulna and Barisal divisions in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country, Met Office said in a forecast.

Highest temperature 35.1 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Khulna and lowest 23.4 degree Celsius at Sayedpur.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:41pm today and rises at 5:52am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	32.3	28.1	68	72
Chittagong	33.0	24.9	76	73
Rajshahi	33.4	26.1	75	81
Khulna	35.1	26.8	85	71
Barisal	34.5	26.4	89	92
Sylhet	31.0	24.6	91	78
Cox's Bazar	32.5	26.0	84	80

ELEVATED EXPRESS MoU signed with US co to conduct feasibility study

BSS, Dhaka

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and American Transport System Corporation (ATSC) here yesterday to conduct feasibility study on construction of elevated express railway in the capital to ease traffic congestion.

Chief Executive Officer of DCC Saifuddin Ahmed and ATSC President Norbert Von Boode signed the MoU on behalf of their respective sides in presence of City Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka at Nagar Bhaban.

After the signing, the mayor told the state-run news agency that the American company would conduct feasibility study on setting up of elevated express railway or sky rail line in and around the capital.

Younusuzzaman, local partner of ATSC, said nearly 100-km rail lines will be installed under the project that includes 40-km lines from Narayanganj to Joydebpur, nearly 40-km lines from Sadarghat to Savar and 20-km circular rail lines.

The project will be implemented at a cost of Tk over 6,500 crore, he said, adding that a 50-MW power plant will be installed to meet electricity requirement to run the trains on all routes.



Trade Union Kendra stages a demonstration at Muktangan in the city yesterday demanding implementation of tripartite agreement to ensure minimum wages for the workers.

'80pc workers to be deprived of new labour law'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Labour Law 2006, passed in parliament last month, would not protect the interests of the workers, rather it would serve the interests of the owners, said Karmojibi Nari (KN) President Shirin Akhter yesterday.

At a view-exchange meeting at Dhaka Reporters' Unity auditorium, she said a total of 80 percent workers would be deprived of its benefit as agricultural and domestic workers have been kept out of its purview.

"As per the new law, working hour in factories will be 10 hours which go against the ILO rules.

Besides, the workers' right to organise trade union and bargain for salary and other facilities have been curtailed," said Shirin.

She demanded immediate cancellation of the provisions that

go against the interest of the workers.

While presenting the theme paper Director Alok Sarkar said the law did not bring any change in the fixation of minimum wage, working hours, leave and other holidays.

"No basic changes have been made in the law to solve its implementation problem," he added.

For instance, the maternity leave has been extended to 16 weeks from 12 weeks, but the way it has been fixed before and after giving birth to a child, it would not let the female workers to enjoy the leave according to their needs, he said.

Besides, the amount of compensation fixed for the workers in the law is not time-worthy and it should be fixed at Tk 3-5 lakh.

The speakers said the law gives waiver in some situations which make it flawed and would

be a tool for the owners to repress the workers.

They said any indecent behaviour towards the female workers by their male colleagues would be punishable, but for this three months' imprisonment or payment of Tk 1000 in fine is too little to resist such actions.

Member of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour Law Affairs Shajahan Khan MP, President of Jatiya Samik Federation Shafiqur Rahman Majumder, Senior Advocate of Labour Court Syed Azadul Haque, Director of KN Mahmuda Imam, Executive Director Rokeya Rafik Baby and Sultanuddin Ahmed of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies were also present on the occasion.



Vehicles get stuck in a traffic jam for hours at Andar Killa intersection in the port city yesterday during the on-going traffic month.

Pakistani earthquake town stuck in squalid limbo

REUTERS, Balakot

Their town sits right on an active geological fault skirting the western Himalayas.

When the plate shifted a year ago, about 8,000 of Balakot's 40,000 population died, a disproportionate number of them children sitting in classrooms when the walls and ceilings of their schools caved in.

A geological survey confirmed what the earthquake on October 8, 2005 made sadly obvious - Balakot is a dangerous place to live.

The small town in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province suffered even more intense devastation than Muzaffarabad, the ruined capital of Pakistani Kashmir.

The government declared it a "red zone", meaning no new construction would be allowed, and floated proposals to relocate the town to a new site 22km (14 miles) away.

But for all their grief, many of the survivors are too emotionally attached to leave their place on a mountain slope above the Kaghan river.

Having lost five members of his family in the quake, vegetable seller Mohammad Iqbal epitomises the sense of fatalism pervading the town.

"Red zone or no red zone. Life and death is in God's hands. This is our land, it belonged to our ancestors. The government should just allow and help us reconstruct our houses," he said, while bringing bread for the daily ritual of breaking fast during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

While the people in Balakot are digging in their heels, so are the 1,600 families in Bakriyal area, who would be displaced if the town was shifted.

"All of us have said we are not interested in vacating or selling our land and we want to stay here. They should look at some other land," said Hukum Dad, one of the farmers growing tobacco, vegetables and corn in the fertile soil in the rolling landscape ringed by the foothills of high mountain ranges.

"Where will we go if they take over our land? We have farmed this land and it has belonged to our ancestors," Dad asked.

UP IN THE AIR

The government is still carrying out a topographical survey of the area, and the project, district administrators say, is still very much in the balance.

"The talk about the new Balakot town is not final as yet. It is up in the air now because some people are protesting over it and some don't want to shift from the old Balakot town," said Javed Khan, a programme director in the district reconstruction unit.

If the rebuilding process has been slow elsewhere in the quake zone, the plight in "red zones" is even worse.

The rubble has been largely cleared, but a year on people in Balakot are living in a squalid limbo, not knowing what the future has in store.

Five thousand houses were destroyed, and many of those left are missing walls. This is a rigidly conservative society and families have put up sheets to segregate the women.

Still living in tents and pre-fabricated shelters, with no drinking water on tap or sanitation available to them, people see no point in celebrating the Eid-ul-Fitr festival once Ramadan ends in late October.

"There will be no Eid celebration

for us. It will be just another day to mourn our dead," said Iqbal.

Sitting in his dirty tent, with just two mattresses and a few items of warm clothing, the very thought of Eid makes Ghulam Jilani snap: "We are human beings and not animals. For how long does the government expect us to live in these conditions?"

Haunted by memories of the horror a year ago and the 40 members of his extended family who died, including his brothers and grandchildren, the 58-year-old man knows no peace of mind.

"We have money problems and we don't have the means to feast when breaking our fast," he explained as his wife offered tea, prepared on a kerosene stove as night fell over the town.

LOST TIME

Sardar Mohammad Yousef, the mayor of Mansehra district, which Balakot belongs to, said people needed to be patient.

"We understand the frustration of the people of Balakot. But it does take time to recover completely from a natural disaster of such massive scale," he said.

"It is true it would take three to four years to shift the survivors of Balakot town to their new, safer dwellings, but we are ensuring with the help of ERRA and aid agencies to provide them drinking water, sanitation, schools and decent shelters," he said, referring to the government's Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority.

Given the slow pace of reconstruction, townsfolk fear they could end up living in makeshift dwellings for years.

Jubo League leader murdered in Comilla

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Comilla

A Jubo League leader of Chouddagram upazila was killed allegedly by his rivals at Payerkhola village on Wednesday night.

The victim was identified as Hadatulhah, 35, son of Ali Hossain of Shaktola village in Choura union in Chouddagram upazila.

Police said they recovered the body of Hadatulhah from near the Joganathdhigee pond yesterday morning. The body bore several marks of stab injuries and the limbs were broken. He was also shot in his abdomen.

Police said previous enmity or political feud might lead to his killing.

Family members said Hadatulhah was abducted from his furniture shop at Duschora on Wednesday evening.

A case was filed against Chouddagram Shibir activities.

Tk 1.10 crore ASA loan for munga-hit people

ASA, a micro finance institution, has started a special flexible loan programme for the munga (famine-like situation) affected people of greater Rangpur, says a press release.

ASA is providing Tk 1.10 crore as the short-term assistance among the munga-hit people of Rangpur, Kurigram, Gaibandha, Nilphamari and Lalmonirhat.

Besides, it is also providing interest-free loan of Tk 27 lakh to the people of greater Jessore and Khulna affected by waterlogging.

A total of 2700 families marooned due to waterlogging in the districts will receive Tk 1,000 each from ASA.

Death anniversary



Today is the sixth death anniversary of M A Rouf, former chairman of Bangladesh Mujiboddha Sangsad and former Secretary, says a press release.

Relatives, friends and admirers are requested to pray for salvation of the departed soul.

Obituary



Md Shamsul Alam, a director of Bangladesh Rural Development Board, passed away at his residence on Wednesday at the age of 57 years, says a press release.

He was also a former president of BRDB Officers' Association.

He is survived by his wife, one son and two daughters.

Mahbubur Rahman Gorha



passed away due to cardiac arrest on September 28 at the age of 77, says a press release.

He was buried at his family graveyard beside Baitul Jannat Jame Masjid in Nakhhalpara in the city.

On the occasion, a Qurankh-wani and discussion will be held after Juma prayers and doa mahfil after Asr prayers today at Baitul Jannat Jame Masjid.

Friends, relatives, neighbours and admirers are requested to attend the programmes and pray for salvation of his departed soul.

DHAKA TODAY

Memorial discussion

Jatiya Shikha-Sangskriti Andolon organises a discussion in memory of Nilun Kunda, a renowned artist and sculptor. It will be followed by poetry recital and musical soiree. Venue: Liberation War Museum, Segun Bagicha. Time: 4.00pm.

Dress exhibition

A two-day dress exhibition, organised by Bikash Boutique of Chittagong, will be inaugurated. Venue: Gallery Chitrak, Dhanmondi. Time: 10.00am.

Conference

An organisational conference of the city unit of Workers' Party will be held. Venue: Shaheed Asad Auditorium, Tophkhana Road. Time: 3.30pm.

Discussion

A discussion on the Teachings of Ramadan will be held. It will be followed by an Iftar party. Venue: Dakkhin Basabo Government Primary School.