

# DOWN TO EARTH

## School Admission Conundrum

By A S M Nurunnabi

At the beginning of every year, we are faced with the lingering problem of school admission. This year has been no exception. By this time, in many of the schools, admission tests have been completed. From the statistics of vacant seats and the number of candidates for those seats, as ascertained, it appears that the pressure of admission seekers is greater on those schools, both government and private, which carry a good name. In some schools, the total number of admission seekers is ten to fifteen times the number of vacancies in a class. There was an extreme case in the Government Laboratory High School for 180 seats in class I, 4500 candidates took the test.

There are 16 government boys' and 8 girls' schools in Dhaka. For obvious reasons, they bear the brunt of the admission pressure. It appears that this year the Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board, Dhaka took a step, though palliative in nature, instructing all government schools under it to admit 10 per cent more students than last year in all classes. The Board sources also pointed out that it has already introduced, where feasible, double shifts in some schools to ease the pressure. The Government Laboratory School operates three shifts.

Sources in the Primary Education Directorate said that, in view of the government decision to introduce compulsory primary education in the whole country from this year, there is no problem of admission in government primary schools, as they are un-

der obligation to accept all students who seek admission. There is, however, a snag here. Government primary schools are mostly attended by students of poorer classes. This class distinction tends to compound the problem of admission in the lower classes of the high schools, both government and private. There is also a prevailing notion that government primary schools are poor in standard and facilities.

What is the reason for greater admission pressure on certain schools than on others? The obvious answer is the image such schools have built up by virtue of their academic performance. Even in respect of government schools, such common notion of differential image operates. This aspect of the problem was raised in discussion with a high-level source in the Education Board. As learnt from the Board, to narrow down any gap in standard among government schools, the Board has been steadily working for balanced development of all the schools under it. Under this policy, appropriate transfer of teachers is made from time to time to shore up image of such schools where there is need for it.

There is another aspect of the problem. The general idea of difference in standard operates not only in respect of government schools but also between government schools on the one hand and private schools on the other. Some private schools enjoy a reputation equal to that of the best government schools. Notwith-

standing this, it is felt, by and large, some private schools lack in satisfactory standard. In this context, it may contribute to the easing of pressure on the good schools if the existing gap in standard between the two categories of schools can be bridged over with recruitment of suitable teachers and provision of relevant facilities.

Government perhaps has not much control over private schools in admission matters. It, however, seems they will be well-advised if, as in the case of government schools, they also allow 10 per cent more admission in all classes this year. Sometimes in private schools, the admission procedure is vitiated by the system of accepting donations or other substantial gifts. Such a system only puts a premium on extra-academic considerations at the expense of merit.

In the opinion of observers, to meet the challenge of the needs of the burgeoning student population, long-term planning for building educational infra-structure is necessary. That, however, involves considerable financial outlay and a time factor. In the short term, it is felt, the private schools should be encouraged to play a greater role in tackling admission problems as per guidelines to be given by government. To counter the notion of image differential among the schools, greater attention needs to be paid to improve the standard of those schools lagging behind, so that no situation arises where there are vacant seats in some schools and an inordinate pressure on others.



Parents anxiously waiting outside during admission test at a city school. —Star photo

## Clinton to press for war crimes trial of Serbian President

WASHINGTON, Jan 15: President-elect Bill Clinton said he will press for the war crimes trial of Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, seen in the West as the Bosnian Serbs' main backer.

"Some of the things that have been done there plainly violate international law," Clinton said on the ABC television network's 'Prime Time Live' programme.

"The question of whether he is a war criminal depends upon what he ordered, of what he knew about that he could have stopped, under the Nuremberg rules," Clinton said, "I certainly think that should be investigated."

He said he would press hard for a trial.

The administration of President George Bush has also called for a trial of the Serbian leader who recently beat back an election challenge by Milan Panic, who campaigned for a peaceful end to the turmoil in the former Yugoslavia.

Meanwhile, the leader of Bosnia's Serbs lashed out at the European Community and the United Nations in comments published Friday and said his people will not buckle under international pressure.

Rejecting an EC deadline of six days for Bosnian Serb acceptance of key points of the Geneva peace plan, Radovan Karadzic accused the European Community of acting in an "arrogant and insolent way."

"This is the twilight of the international institutions and the United Nations," he said, in comments published by the Belgrade-based Tanjug news

agency. His toughly worded statement, to Serbian radio and television late Thursday, appeared calculated to show resolve amid accusations by even more radical Serbs that conditional acceptance by Karadzic of the Geneva plan countered Bosnian Serb interests.

### AL leader

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## Biswa Ijtema

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da Zia and leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina have given separate messages expressing the hope that the successful holding of the congregation would play a significant role in strengthening the brotherhood of Muslim Ummah.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has taken special interest and directed the concerned ministries to take all necessary measures for holding Biswa Ijtema smoothly and peacefully.

The Ministry of Health has placed two ambulances, and formed an eight-member sanitation team to look after the necessary sanitation facilities. Similarly all doctors and paramedics of Tongi hospital have been directed to render whole time services to the people attending the congregation.

Bangladesh Railway started running of special trains from yesterday till January 20 to facilitate the travelling of the participants of the Biswa Ijtema.

Besides, all inter-city trains excluding the Mahanagar will stop at Tongi Station for two minutes.

Special ticket counters have been opened at Tongi Station for convenience of the devotees.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authorities and Private Bus Owners' Associations have also arranged special bus and coaster services for the devotees.

Minister for Health and Family Welfare Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, Works Minister Rafiqul Islam Miah and State Minister for Religious Affairs Prof. Abdul Mannan had already visited the venue of the congregation to see for themselves the arrangements made for the participants. They assured the Biswa Ijtema Committee that all facilities would be made available for the pilgrims by the government.



Sector Commanders of the Liberation War at a reception in their honour organized by Muktiyoddha Sammilani Sector-5 at the Hotel Sundarban yesterday. —Star photo

## Accident claims 6 more Ijtema-bound men

By Staff Correspondent

Six devotees were killed when a minibus bound for the Tongi Biswa Ijtema rammed the railings of a bridge and fell into the river below in Narasingdi district early Friday.

Another 11 persons were injured in the accident which took place at about 2-30 am at the bridge near Marjia of Raipura thana of the district. The injured were admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The minibus was carrying devotees from the Kanaighat thana in Sylhet district. In a similar accident on early Thursday, eight devotees were killed and another 47 injured when a bus from Jessore hit a bridge railings and fell into the river Isamati at Uthul of Shibalaya thana in Manikganj district, 79 kilometres off Dhaka.

The victims included the brother of a minister. In Narasingdi accident, four persons died on the spot while two others succumbed to their injuries at the Narayananj Hospital.

Our Narayananj correspondent said that all the victims, except Irfanullah (45) of Kanaighat, remained unidentified.

Our DMCH correspondent

reports: The injured admitted to the hospital were: Abul Kashem (40), Abdul Khaleq (30), Siddiq Ali (30), Mashuk Ahmed (35), Abdul Noor (30), Abu Sukkur (25), Fariduddin (17), Abu Ahmed (40), Abu Seyed (20) and two other unidentified males.

## 4 die of diarrhoea at ijtema camp

From Our Correspondent

GAZIPUR, Jan 15: At least four devotees died today at Tongi as diarrhoea broke out at a camp built for the participants of Biswa Ijtema.

Another 150 were given treatment for diarrhoea and other diseases. Of the diarrhoea affected patients two were taken to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) in a critical condition.

Of the four dead two died at the Tongi Hospital and two others at the Ijtema ground. They were identified as Abed Ali (55) of Sokhpur of Tangail district and Abdul Majid (90) of Bannapara of the Haluaghat thana of the Mymensingh district. The names of two others could not be known.

## Violence in Delhi

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Muslim shops were shut for a general strike. In Bombay, Muslims today waved black flags and hurled curses at Prime Minister Narasimha Rao as he toured areas of the metropolis bruised by 10 days of non-stop religious strife.

Security forces cordoned off south-central city districts and ordered residents not to come out of their homes as a motorcade carrying Rao wound its way through streets littered with wreckage of cars and trucks, witnesses said.

"You have hatched a conspiracy to finish off the Muslims," screamed Muslims at Reay Road as the premier on a day's trip to riot-hit Bombay cruised through the partly gutted residential and business district, they said.

Police said Rao, during his 90-minute tour visited at least six of the 14 riot-torn neighbourhoods but did not stop to talk to people.

Reuters says, Rao warned India today it was in danger of breaking apart if communal hatred that triggered in Bombay was allowed to fester and spread.

"If this country forsakes secularism it will break. I am absolutely convinced of that," Rao told reporters after touring riot-hit areas of Bombay.

Meanwhile, former Prime Minister, V P Singh, leading a band of his supporters, today began an indefinite fast at 'Hutatma Chowk' here, describing his act as an appeal for peace in the riot-ravaged megapolis.

"I want to share the sorrow of the bereaved families," Singh, observing silence, scribbled on a piece of paper responding to journalists' queries, as he sat at the pandal surrounded by scores of securitymen.

Singh said "If all of us introspect and eschew appeals of hatred, a path will be found." He was joined by Janata Dal's state unit leaders including Mrs Mrinal Gore, Mrs Pramila Dandavate and others.

PTI says a senior Shiv Sena leader has claimed that the Sena planned and initiated the demolition of the Babri Masjid but Bal Thackeray, the Sena chief says it is an absolutely spontaneous act, although he maintains, "I wanted a demolition."

The entire planning was the Shiv Sena's and the men who led the demolition belonged to the Shiv Sena, Jaibhagwan Goyal, president of the North India branch of the Shiv Sena told video magazine Newstrack.

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Shoppers at a Meena Bazar organised by Zonta Club III at Gulshan Park yesterday. —Star photo

## Sector commandars recap war memories

After 22 years since the War of Liberation the Sector Commanders and leading freedom fighters of the country met together yesterday evening at a city hotel to recall the memories of the most glorious chapter of the national history, reports BSS.

Muktiyoddha Sammilani, a forum of the Sector Number-Five, led by Lt General (Retd) Mir Shawkat Ali MP, arranged the function to give reception to the Sector Commanders of the War of Independence.

Commander of Sector No-Three and former Army Chief Major General (Retd) M Shafiqullah Bir Uttam, Lt General (Retd) Mir Shawkat Ali Bir Uttam of Sector No-Five, Colonel (Retd) Kazi Nuruzzaman of Sector No-Seven, Lt Colonel (Retd) Abu Osman of Sector No-Eight and Major (Retd) Jainal Abedin, Commander of the Sector No-Nine attended the reception.

## Hartal observed in Rajshahi

RAJSHAHI, Jan 15: Islami Chhatra Shibir observed a half-day hartal in the city today (Friday) protesting the killing of a Shibir activist and demanding punishment of the killers, reports UNB.

Most of the shops remained shuttered till 11.30 am and buses remained off the road during the hartal hour from 6 am to 12 noon.

The Shibir activist, Mohammad Yahia (20), died at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital of his injuries sustained during a clash with rivals.

## IDLC to float shares

By Staff Correspondent

The Industrial Development Leasing Company (IDLC) will offer Taka 7.5 million worth of ordinary shares for subscription today.

The first and largest equipment leasing company of the country, IDLC will offer 75,000 ordinary shares of Taka 100 each at 50 per cent premium and subscription will commence with the opening of banking hours on the day and will close on January 21.

Incorporated in 1985, the company has an authorised capital of Taka 100 million which is divided into one million ordinary shares of Taka 100 each.

Five foreign institutions hold 45 per cent of the shares while another 45 per cent is held by three local financial institutions.

The foreign shareholders include the Korea Development Leasing Corporation, the largest leasing company in the Asia and Pacific region, International Finance Corporation, an affiliate of the World Bank, Korea Long Term Credit Bank, Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development and the German Investment and Development Company.

The domestic companies holding IDLC shares are the Industrial Promotion and Development Company, City Bank Limited and Sadharan Bima Corporation.

According to the company's prospectus, the return on equity stood at 39.83 per cent per share in 1991, 46.93 per cent in 1990 and 33.4 per cent in 1989.

Earnings per share stood at Taka 60.32 in 1991, Taka 99.6 in 1990 and Taka 42.64 per share in 1989 while cash dividend during each of those years stood at Taka 15 per share.

Operational growth, in contract amount increased by 39.62 per cent in 1991 while it was 21.08 per cent in 1990 and 17.63 per cent in 1989.

Net profit per share for the next three years is projected to average Taka 40 under existing conditions.

The prospectus lists the major risk factors as: A major change in the industrial policy particularly in the textile sector may affect the profitability since the company's exposure is highest in this sector; loan recovery situation may worsen if the loan court judgments cannot be effectively executed and market share may decrease if large number of leasing companies are permitted to operate in the country.

# The Midnight File

## Somalia's warring factions sign truce accord

ADDIS ABABA, Jan 15: Somalia's feuding factions signed a hard-won accord today to declare a national ceasefire and disarm their unruly militias. The agreement was signed in the Ethiopian capital after more than a week of bargaining by 14 factions, including those of rivals Mohamed Farah Aided and Ali Mahdi Mohamed, reports Reuter.

## Frenchman named as head of Euro-Disneyland

PARIS, Jan 15: A Frenchman was named Friday to take over as head of Euro-Disneyland in April, replacing the American executive who oversaw the theme park during its troubled first year. Euro-Disney SCA announced Friday that Robert Fitzpatrick, the company's chairman, will be replaced April 12 by Philippe Bourguignon, currently president, reports AP.

## Israel allows ICRC to supply aid to deportees

JERUSALEM, Jan 15: Israel today agreed to allow the Red Cross to take medicine and letters to more than 400 Palestinian deportees stranded in South Lebanon, Defence Ministry spokesman Oded Ben Ami said, reports AFP.

# WB threatens

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The Ashuganj NGL fractionation plant is awarded, given the pivotal role of this facility.

The mission 'reminded' that although the Government of Bangladesh is financing the plant and the Project Implementation Unit (PIU) of the Petrobangla is executing the implementation supervision contract, "these two activities are still within the legal framework of the Development Credit Agreement and Project Agreement for the Second Gas Development Project."

The government decided to pay for the project after the World Bank had refused to endorse the terms of the contract, awarded to a Canadian company, following a second evaluation of bids from three technically responsive firms with financial proposals revised, and the subsequent expiry of the closing date of the credit.

The Petrobangla's taking more than a year to decide on the contract and delays at various other control points also led to the lapse of the credit. The money may now be diverted to the proposed Third Gas Development Project.

But the Canadian company, the Colt Engineering Corporation, failed to sign the contract, initiated November 9 last year, within the stipulated time and consequently the Petrobangla encashed the bid bond worth 150,000 US dollars on November 26.

The tender was first floated for the project, proposed to be funded by IDA, in July 1990.

Even after the award of the contract with substantial concessions agreed during the pre-contract negotiations, the Colt Engineering Corporation refused to sign the contract, and at one stage asked for a third bank guarantee for payment, an unprecedented claim in recent years when the Government of Bangladesh is the funding agency.

Last month, the Colt proposed to extend the bid validity upto January 15 and confirmed that it would sign the contract within the extended bid validity period. The firm also asked for some changes in the terms of payment in the initial draft contract, a plea the Petrobangla has been refusing to agree to.

Officials said that the Canadian company did not show up to sign the contract until yesterday, the renewed deadline.

But, they said, they are still negotiating with the firm on its proposals for change in payment terms, and are expecting a positive outcome shortly.

## Polish ferry capsized: 54 bodies found

STRALSUND (Germany), Jan 15: German and Polish rescue teams searched Friday for signs of life inside a Polish ferry that capsized in the Baltic Sea, killing at least 54 people. Experts said the chance of finding anyone alive was slim, reports AP.

Police at the search and rescue headquarters in the northern German city of Stralsund said 54 bodies had been recovered.

## Iraq drives off

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gun. Abdellatif Kabbaj, spokesman for the UN Iraq-Kuwait Observer Mission (UNIKOM), said any Iraqi failure to comply would be reported back to the Security Council, which set the deadline.

US Defense Secretary Dick Cheney said Friday it was "entirely possible" the United States would strike Iraq again if Saddam Hussein doesn't fully comply with allied demands.

Asked in an interview with the American network NBC-TV whether another air strike might be necessary, Cheney replied, "I think that's entirely possible. I would hope it would not be necessary, but there shouldn't be any mistake on his (Saddam's) part. We are prepared to do it again if we have to."

Saddam Hussein will challenge Bill Clinton soon after the President-elect takes office despite Wednesday's Allied bombing raid, outgoing Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger predicted Thursday.

"I could make you a bet that he will," Eagleburger told reporters. "He'll try to push Clinton within the first month or so of his being in office." Clinton takes office Wednesday.

## JS session

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Sheikh Hasina in the chair. Political sources said the parliamentary groups of the ruling party and the Opposition would decide their respective strategies in facing each other on recent political developments in the region after the razing of Babri Mosque in Ayodhya and subsequent outbreak of communal violence.

Indefinite postponement of the SAARC summit, repatriation of Myanmar refugees and stranded Pakistanis, and domestic political and economic issues are also expected to raise stormy debates in the current session.