

HIGHER EDUCATION

Crisis Cuts the Quality Short

by Md Asadullah Khan

*It is not the architecture of the buildings or manner of the students or teachers that makes it great. Rather, greatness lies in shaping an average student into a good one.*

EDUCATION in the country, either in the primary, secondary or higher stages is swamped in a crisis. Frequent changes in syllabi or curriculum brought about by successive governments during the last one-and-a-half decades have dealt a stunning blow to the actual growth of education. On the other hand, there has virtually been a mushroom growth of schools, madrasahs, colleges and universities in the country with very little thought and indication about the improvement of the quality of education. The problems are two faced: lacking resources and declining quality. Hopefully, there are still some institutions that are fighting hard to retain the excellence they once had — retaining their existence in the face of cash-crunched and dearth of logistic support. Take the case of a premier institution of technical education in the country — BUET. This institution gets an annual allocation of 18 crore taka inclusive of development grant to meet the expenses towards laboratory development and research for 5000 (five thousand) students covering the undergraduate and post-graduate classes, salary of 430 teachers that include 200 PhD's, and officers and employees numbering about 1400. Sadly true, this allocation remains static although the fact remains that technical education now goes apace with increasing dimension and diversification encompassing global needs and competitiveness that entail steep rise in cost factor.

This migration of talent only serves to widen the gap between those lands of plenty and this land of poverty. Did we ever realise that this cycle tends to perpetuate itself as more people leave for those lands of promise? This means more brain drain for this already impoverished country that has in recent times seen the trend, more than ever before, as to be taking from the poor and giving it to the rich. "It is indeed paradoxical," says a scholarly scientist of the country, that the underdeveloped countries which are in the greatest need of scientists, engineers and managers, are in fact losing many of their well-educated young talents to the developed countries.

Side by side, the country is losing outstanding students who win admission, say, to US universities, and who not surprisingly, accept challenging jobs and high salaries there upon their graduation. These talented scientists, teachers and even the budding meritorious students are a treasure to any country and it is unfortunate that the home country does not have the resources to nurture and hold them on. University authorities in our country can't provide housing facilities to teachers who join the university after doing PhD from abroad. Frustrated at the nightmarish experiences of living, housing and educational opportunities of their children, they ultimately jump to the offer of opportunities they receive from outside.

In BUET's Chemical Engineering Department alone, ten teachers having PhD left their ties to teachers who join the university after doing PhD from abroad. Frustrated at the nightmarish experiences of living, housing and educational opportunities of their children, they ultimately jump to the offer of opportunities they receive from outside.



Preparing for the next century: Will they make it?

quired financial allocation or to treat it in the same footing with other institutions that have shown sufficient signs of decay in standard, quality and excellence. This should be borne in mind that hundreds of institutions or universities are, no doubt, catering education in the country but only some of the universities or institutes, general, technical or medical ap-

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appear to be the breeding grounds for future leaders in the respective fields. Looking back to global situation, we can also see that no institution in Japan, or perhaps all of Asia, is more associated with power and privilege than the University of Tokyo. Today, as it is widely known, has produced 10 of

Japan's 24 postwar Prime Ministers, including Nakasone, Yasuhiro, and Miyazawa Kichiro; seven of the 21 Cabinet Ministers are alumni, as are a large number of civil service mandarins. Talking about real power, one can take comfort in the fact that 500 heads of Japan's top corporations are drawn from Todai ranks. Enrollment in this university is about 26,300 students, some 1700 of whom come from abroad. Entry in this university, as alumnus testify, is a grueling battle.

One hopeful tried for 14 consecutive years (I) before he was admitted in 1995. Dhaka University that once presented an image of the elitist class and once considered the "Oxford of the East" is now floundering.

Politics that seems to have taken precedence over education and learning, has pushed this premier seat of learning into oblivion much to the chagrin and disappointment of the sensible citizenry who value education most and place enlightenment through education above any other material development in the country.

In trying to assess and grade quality of education, one must look to myriad of factors or criteria such as curriculum design in line with the developed universities, teaching, learning and assessment, research and publications, extension activities, organisation and governance, infrastructure development, financial resources and last but not foremost of all, goals and objectives.

The other aspect of university education that distinguished it as different from other types of education is the importance it lays on promoting free thinking and liberal values. People are there to judge how far and to what extent Dhaka University, BUET, Jahangirnagar University and universities at Chittagong, Rajshahi, Kustia and Khulna look to strive beyond the syllabi, at least in disseminating human values, the primary goal of education.

In many of the universities in the country, we have sadly failed to lay stress on all-round personality development brought about by debates, recreational and cultural activities that unquestionably contribute towards making better citizens. In the perspective, BUET's greatest asset is that it attracts students with good academics with an aptitude for learning matched by the merit of the faculty members who are greatly committed. Even when the standard of education has steadily deteriorated in the country, it is heartening to learn that there are some educational institutions which have not compromised, and BUET is one of them. BUET's alumni are in good demand outside the country and find admission to post-graduate courses in the universities of the US, for instance, without hindrance. But at the same time people wonder whether one or two institutions alone can shape the destiny of the new generations coming up.

Now the question is what makes an institution earn a good name? Teachers in most of the good institutions select the "cream" among the students, pay individual attention to them and then the results of these students bring the institution repute. It is not the architecture of the buildings or manner of the students or teachers that makes it great. Rather, greatness lies in shaping an average student into a good one.

But the future of higher education in the country looks grim as the funds crunch hits such institutions hard lowering the quality. In many of these institutions in the country science teaching in the "Higher Secondary" stages are greatly

affected because of the shortage of qualified, efficient and committed teachers, vitiated further through dearth of laboratory equipment and want of chemicals which are expensive. Such all pervasive resource crunch has invaded the colleges destroying or inhibiting the growth of science education in the country.

Notwithstanding the fact that enrollment has increased and new departments have been opened with concomitant expansion of facilities, grant from the government remains static. And since the government grant has started dwindling and earnings from other sectors that are politically sensitive could not be enhanced, the state of higher education in the country has received a severe jolt. The result: efficiency, professionalism, expertise and excellence have dipped low. Shrinking grants only make sure that these universities can't keep pace with the standard abroad. To make the profession of teaching attractive to young talented teachers, pay and other benefits have to be commensurate with, say, the marketing executives at the entry point. Gone are those days when famed professors came walking to deliver lectures in the class from their houses far away from the university premises. In recent times reports are rather rife that teachers in some universities, although they enjoy in-campus housing facilities, have lost interest in taking classes and are indifferent to examining scripts that causes delay in the publication of results. Reports are also rife that a section of teachers, who, possibly, came to the profession of teaching not by aptitude, are engaged in extraneous business and consultancy jobs often forgoing classes at the universities.

On the other hand, students are also apathetic to studies. Pre-occupation with politics, frustration and joblessness even after snatching degrees have driven them away from classes and studies. Result: absenteeism among students is rampant and a larger number of bright boys are drawn to private tuition that fetches handsome earnings hardly possible even when they enter job market.

The present state of affairs triggers an ominous situation for the country heightened by a further cut in the budget for higher education. Government policy of shifting the priority to primary education that also seems to be in doldrums has not paid off. Primary education now devours a major chunk of educational budget. "Literacy for all" has become a buzzword or popular slogan these days. Planners of education in the country have reasoned that if 60 per cent of the children drop out before they complete class V, then something must be done to stave off that critical situation. Justifiably true, if the primary sector is not working, then investments in other sectors would be set at naught.

Aid-giving countries have stopped giving subsidy to higher education in poor countries like Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. There is a widespread feeling in the aid-giving agencies that investment in higher education in a poor country like Bangladesh will turn out to be a "wasteful subsidy, and to speak more specifically, the donor countries felt that the social rates of return in this sector are low. Investments made. They have reasoned that investment in "universal literacy" had helped improve the social equity and remove income imbalances. Resource-crunch in the government sector to handle higher education on a competitive edge has resulted in a terrifying vacuum of quality and the colleges and universities in the country have failed to respond to the challenges. With allocation in the higher education sector dwindling, commitment of teachers is eroding fast and students are appallingly growing apathetic to studies. People wonder if the government's bid, mostly suffused with rhetoric, to improve the quality of education would ever come true.

Breastfeeding and Environment

by Dr. Shaheda Parveen

*Breastfeeding is environmentally sound and there is nothing to pollute anything at any stage of breastfeeding. Moreover, breastfeeding creates a decline in population growth rate thereby decreasing population pressure on the nature.*

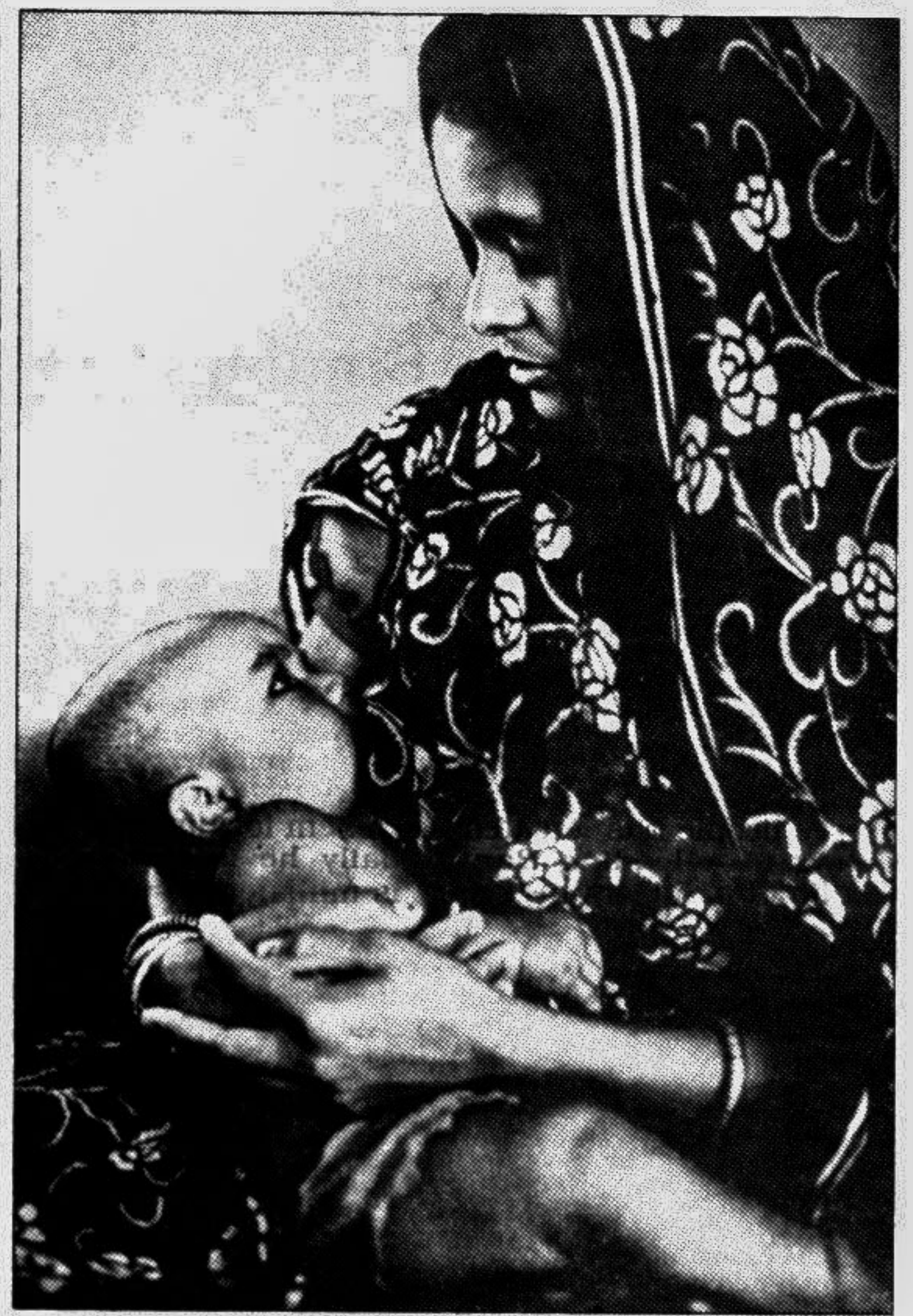
THE theme of the World Breastfeeding Day is "Breastfeeding Nature's Way". That means breastfeeding is the natural way to feed the baby, to nurture it and to fulfill its demand. Breast milk is the divine gift for offspring of all species. It is the natural right of every child. To restrain the baby from this is against the nature's law. But, we, the human beings are the only one in the nature who are breaking it. We are the outlaw in the earth. By violating nature's law we have done gross indignity (outrage) to the earth and brought untidiness in our own life. Have we ever realized in how many ways we are torturing our beautiful earth, and in the process, making it unhealthy and unsuitable for living? We are slowly, selfishly and probably unconsciously slow poisoning the earth everyday. But now the time has come to realize our fault. Mothers who are bottle-feeding their babies, do not know how this in every step from its manufacturing to disposal is causing pollution to the environment not to speak of its harmful effect on the baby.

We are born to live, by mak-

litre of water to make the artificial milk and about two litres for sterilizing the feeder and the nipple for a single baby per day. In many parts of the world there is scarcity of the safe drinking water. And we have to use boiled water. For boiling, where gas is not available, we have to use 73 kg wood per year for only one child, again cutting the forest!

What we do for disposal of bottles, rubber, tin, plastic and glass which are all wastes of artificial feeding? It we burn these, they pollute the air, if we dispose them in the water they pollute the water, if we just throw them they pollute the land. Since plastic feeding bottles, teats and pacifiers take 200-450 years to break down when disposed in landfills. We are also destroying our scarce land area for this dumping.

During the production of the powdered form of cow's milk, a very high degree of temperature is required. This means a lot of electrical energy, which comes mostly from hydro-electric or nuclear power plants. Both are expensive and cause damage to the environment during their process of conversion. The manufacturing process of arti-



cial milk requires addition as well as extraction of some components to make it suitable for children, which again requires much money and time. Besides, artificial milk may often be contaminated with salmonella infection, chemicals, radioactive particles, foreign bodies and insects.

On the other hand, mother's milk is the most suitable food for her baby. It changes from time to time, day to day according to her child's demand. Breast milk contains living cells, this is the most nutritious, pure and perfect food for the baby up to six months of age.

Let us reiterate the slogan — "Breastfeeding nature's way". Our future generation will be free from environmental pollution. Let us save life on earth.

The writer is Lactation Management expert, Bangladesh Breastfeeding Foundation.

ing the world beautiful, and definitely not by destroying it. Feeder, nipple, pacifier, artificial milk, during production are causing pollution one way or the other. While packaging a lot of materials like papers and polythene is required. For this you lay your hand on forests. And by continuous destruction of forestry we are turning the world into deserts, and with emissions from factories reducing the ozone layer, thereby causing greenhouse effect. Next, during the stages of reaching the artificial baby food and feeder from factory to consumer it involves fuel, vehicle and road with impact on environment. But breastfeeding is environmentally sound and there is nothing to pollute anything at any stage of breastfeeding. Moreover, breastfeeding creates a decline in population growth rate thereby decreasing population pressure on the nature. Generally, we have to spend one

Tom and Jerry



By Hanna-Barbera

James Bond



DRAWN BY JOHN McLUSKY

BFUJ calls for nat'l newspaper policy

RAJSHAHI, Aug 3: Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) president Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury today called upon the government to immediately formulate a national newspaper policy for the smooth growth of the industry in the country, reports BSS.

Speaking at a discussion, organised by Rajshahi Union of Journalists (RUJ) here at Kartash auditorium, the BFUJ president said that the editor of a newspaper should have at least fifteen years experience as a working journalist.

Presided over by RUJ president Mustafizur Rahman Khan, the function was also addressed by BFUJ secretary general Abul Kalam Azad as special guest. Leaders of different units of BFUJ and a large number of local journalists were also present.

DUJ general secretary Azizul Islam Bhuiya, Dainik Barta unit chief Shaifur Rahman, BSS special correspondent M A Mohaimin, Dainik Bangla staff reporter Moloj Bhowmik and Dainik Ittefaq reporter Anisur Rahman, among others, spoke on the occasion.

Training course for BCS (Foreign) Cadre officials begins

Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad has said efforts would have to be made to increase export and employment and attract investment besides boosting the country's image abroad, reports UNB.

He said this while inaugurating a six-month specialised training course for newly appointed officials in BCS (Foreign) Cadre at Bangladesh Foreign Service Academy yesterday.

"We are working for peace, security and progress throughout the globe," the Foreign Minister told the officials at the threshold of diplomatic careers. Samad Azad said human rights, empowerment of women, environment preservation, refugee problems, drug abuse and poverty alleviation are the issues now surfacing in making relations with different states of the world.

Presided over by Foreign Secretary Faruk Sobhan, the opening session of the training course was also addressed, among others, by State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury and Academy Principal Anwar Hashim.

Fire-extinguishing, rescue rehearsal held in city

Firefighters conducted a fire-extinguishing and rescue operation demonstration in the city's Mouchak market Saturday as part of their drive for creating awareness about fire incident, reports UNB.

Firefighting units from headquarters, Khalgaon, Tejgaon and Mohammadpur stations took part in the mock operation.

Officials said it was part of their weekly demonstration, aimed at devising strategy, getting clear conception of the source of water and training up the guards and shopkeepers of the shopping malls.

Earlier, the Fire Service and Civil Defence authorities had organised similar exercise at Banga Bazar and Rajdhanii Super Market.

2 killed at Ctg shipyard

CHITTAGONG, Aug 3: Two workers were killed as they fell from a height of 30 feet while working at a shipyard in Sitakunda yesterday morning, police said, reports UNB.

The workers, Biplob, 22, and Zahir Sheikh, 20, were engaged in ship breaking at a unit of the shipyard, Kabir Steel Ltd, in Madambibirhat, at around 10.30 am.

Meanwhile, two other workers died in a gas explosion in the shipyard two weeks ago.

Runa Laila to perform in Singapore Aug 9

Internationally renowned singer Runa Laila will perform in Singapore on August 9 on the occasion of that country's National Day, reports UNB.

Runa Laila along with her team members, including singer Kumar Biswasjit, actor Alamgir, comedian Kajol and Model Mou, will perform in the Harbour Pavilion of the World Trade Centre.

HERE and THERE

Nat'l Coordination Council

A six-day workshop on labour law and collective bargaining began in the conference room of Hotel Sundarban in the city yesterday, reports UNB.

Organised by Bangladesh National Coordinating Council, the seminar was presided over by BNCC president and SKOP leader Mujibur Rahman Bhuiyan.

It was addressed, among others, by Norioki Suzuki, BNCC secretary Z M Kamrul Anam, Bangladesh Garments Workers League general secretary Badruddoza Nizam.

Labour leaders Roy Romesh Chandra, Khorshed Alam, Anwar Hossain and labour representatives of Japan-based labour organisation ZENSEN were present.

Nat'l STD/AIDS Network

The annual general meeting (AGM) of the National STD/AIDS Network Bangladesh was held at its secretariat Voluntary Health Services Society (VHSS) in the city recently, says a VHSS release.

A 15-member executive committee of the Network was elected Dr Nasir Uddin, Executive Director of VHSS was elected chairperson, Ahmed Elias of Al-Falah-Bangladesh and Dr Nazma Kabir were elected the vice chairperson. Dr Najmus Sahar Sadiq of UNDP was elected the Treasurer of the Network. The committee was elected for the 1997-98 and 1998-99.

Agonomists urged to evolve high yielding crop varieties

Agriculture and Food Minister Matia Chowdhury has asked the agronomists to evolve high yielding varieties of crops and make them available to the growers in shortest possible time, reports UNB.

She was addressing a workshop on 'Innovation and Transfer of Technology' at Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI) in Gazipur yesterday.

The Agriculture Minister laid emphasis on evolving high yielding varieties of vegetables, pulses and fruits, particularly the jackfruit, using tissue culture technology.

She also called for innovating effective pesticides to save the country's agricultural products.

Agriculture Secretary Dr A K M Shawkat Ali, head of the Agriculture Extension Department, researchers and scientists concerned attended the workshop.

Tree fair in Rajshahi ends

RAJSHAHI, Aug 3: Deputy Minister for Primary and Mass Education Prof Zinnatnassa Talukder has said that deforestation is the main cause of environmental pollution in the country and called upon all to plant trees to face the situation, reports BSS.

"Plant trees wherever there is scope in fallow land, roadside and in homestead in a planned manner," she told a function here yesterday at a ceremony marking the conclusion of 12-day tree-fair.

Jointly organised by district administration and local forestry authority, the function was presided over by deputy commissioner of Rajshahi Kazi Farid Ahmed.

Prof Zinnatnassa Talukder said there was no alternative but to plant more trees to keep this land ever green and also pollution free. All of us should plant more trees voluntarily to make the country pollution free within the shortest possible time, she said.

She also distributed prizes among the participants in the fair to encourage them in carrying out afforestation programme in North Bengal.