

FED to launch IT training from grass-roots level

The President of the Foundation for Education & Development (FED) Muslehuddin Ahmad, a former secretary and diplomat and founder president of North South University recently spoke to the press on the IT project FED has initiated to develop computer and internet skill among the students of schools in the country, says a press release.

He said that the main objective of FED, a non-profit organisation, is to promote education at all levels with particular emphasis on promotion of computer and other Information Technology (IT) skills at the level of secondary schools with a view to prepare the students to face challenges of modern technological world and equip them accordingly.

The computer and IT skills are to be imparted at the grass-root level to prepare the nation to compete with the countries that are already advanced in the IT sector. This is the only way to bridge the digital divide that exists today.

With this end in view, he said the

FED got in touch with World Computer Exchange (WCE) through FED's Member Seema Ahmad MPP (Harvard) who is also the Executive President of FED's Committee in the USA. In fact she has been playing a pivotal role in getting used computers from the USA.

The FED has signed a formal agreement with The World Computer Exchange (WCE) of USA which has agreed to supply used computers to the FED which has been designated as the Lead Organisation in Bangladesh of the WCE. WCE is helping over 30 other developing nations in a similar way, he added.

The FED would also call upon companies, banks and other institutions in Bangladesh to come forward with their help and donate either used or new computers.

FED's President Muslehuddin Ahmad met the NGO partners on March 3 to finalise the project activities. The NGO partners have shown keen interest in FED's IT project.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina leaving the holy city of Makkah for Mina Valley in Saudi Arabia yesterday in the first ritual of the annual Hajj.

First Arab in Israeli cabinet to work to 'temper' hardliners

AFP, Jerusalem

The first Arab to serve in an Israeli cabinet said Saturday he will travel to Gaza City to meet with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and will work to "temper" Israeli hardliners.

"I promised (Arafat) that I would go and do all I can to alleviate the suffering of Palestinians in the territories," Salah Tarif, the designated minister without portfolio, told Israeli television.

Tarif said he would work to "temper" hawkish Defence Minister-designate Benjamin Ben Eliezer by doing "everything so that (he) also understands the other side, its problems, alongside his efforts to assure (Israelis) security."

He added that he plans to tell hardline Prime Minister-elect Ariel Sharon "to act differently."

Tarif is set to become the first Arab to serve as a cabinet minister since the Jewish state's 1948 creation, after members of his Labour party chose him as one of its eight ministers in the national unity government led by Sharon.

A Tarif spokesman told AFP earlier that Arafat had telephoned Tarif to congratulate him and invite him to Gaza City.

Tarif also received congratulations from the embassies of Egypt and Jordan, the only two Arab countries to have signed peace treaties with Israel, the spokesman said.

After his selection Friday, Tarif

said he was "surprised and filled with emotion. This is a historic moment, as this isn't a nomination or a gift but an election."

"I'll do all I can to represent the Arab minority with dignity and to advance policies that promote equality in rights for all citizens," he said.

Tarif is a member of Israel's 80,000-strong Druze community who, unlike other Israeli Arabs, serve in the army.

A former parachutist commander, Tarif was president of the student body at Haifa University and entered politics by becoming mayor of his hometown, the Druze village of Julis.

Masuda Bhatti defends her interview with Mahmud Ali

BSS, Dhaka

Journalist Masuda Bhatti, who recently interviewed BBC's Bangla Service Chief Syed Mahmud Ali, yesterday defended the text of her interview as objective and termed the BBC World Service statement as "unclear".

Masuda Bhatti's interview taken in London and published by The Janakantha on February 21 caused a furor and invited a strong demand of Bangladesh government for an urgent investigation into Mahmud's involvement in the assassination plots on August 15, 1975 and November 3, the same year.

Defending the interview, Masuda Bhatti in a statement issued in London, said that she had truly reported what the former Pakistan Army officer Mahmud Ali, now the BBC Bangla Service Chief, had said.

"There was no exaggeration as mentioned by the BBC World Service," Bhatti said and added: "I have not received any reaction from Ali so far."

Masuda Bhatti also termed the BBC World Service statement as "not acceptable."

BBC World Service on Friday issued a statement saying Mahmud Ali's interview was "misrepresented."

It said: "The BBC has full confidence in the impartiality and objectivity of the Bengali Section and its head."

Following the publication of Ali's lengthy interview, various organisations including the Dhaka University Teachers' Association (DUTA) and the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB), came out with strong demands for removal of Mahmud Ali as the Chief of the BBC's Bangla Service.

In the interview, Ali was quoted as confessing that he took part in the Bangladesh Liberation War in favour of Pakistan. Ali also said he was at the Dhaka Radio station on August 15, 1975 and arrested Tajuddin Ahmed under the order of Khandaker Moshataq Ahmed.

The DUTA and ADAB statements said that such clear confessions conclude that Ali was involved in the 1975 plots and a prestigious media like BBC should remove him immediately to preserve its image and neutrality.

'Acidic dust' damaging equipment at Patenga naval base

UNB, Chittagong

Some valuable and sensitive equipment of Bangladesh Navy are being damaged by "acidic dust" emitted from a clinker factory adjacent to the naval base at Patenga in the port city.

The Environment Directorate has decided to take some emergency measures to stop emission of chemicals from the plant after Navy informed the Environment and Forest Ministry about its hazardous impact.

Officials said the proposed measures include washing out dust by creating artificial rain on the factory area, setting up of a "fabric partition" between the factory and the Naval base, and regular monitoring of the pollution.

Several BN ships, radar, and other sensitive electronic communications equipment at the Naval Base are at peril due to industrial exhausts from privately owned Chittagong Cement Clinker

Grinding Factory.

A high-level meeting of the concerned departments here on Thursday took the decision following an official letter from Navy Chief Rear Admiral A Taher to Environment Minister Sajada Chowdhury on the matter.

Environment Directorate sources said a notice was already served to Chittagong Cement Clinker Grinding Factory at Patenga asking its management to immediately take anti-pollution measures at their own expenses.

Earlier, evidence of damage to the Naval ships and equipment as well as health hazard to the inhabitants of Naval colony was found in two field-level studies conducted at the instruction of the ministry.

When contacted, General Manager of the factory Mohammad Abul Kalam said they had already taken steps to permanently stop emission of acidic dust from the plant and initiated process of modernisation of the factory.

Hajj today

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that are meant to blur the difference between prince and pauper. Men wear simple two-piece seamless white robes and women cover from head-to-toe in modest dress.

Among the pilgrims this year are Sudanese President Omar el-Bashir, Pakistan's military ruler Gen. Pervez Musharraf, Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid, and the prime minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina.

The pilgrims will remain in a tent city at Mina overnight in prayer and reflection.

The faithful believe the plain is the site of Prophet Ibrahim's intended sacrifice of his son to prove his faith in Allah.

At dawn today, pilgrims will pray in Mina and resume their journey to Mount Arafat, where they must

arrive before dusk.

The arrival in Mount Arafat, a gentle hill 19 kilometers southwest of Makkah, marks the peak of the Hajj and the Day of Arafat is spent praying and in frequent recitation of "here I am, oh Almighty, here I am". It symbolises the day of judgement, when Islam says every person will stand before Allah and answer for his deeds.

Prophet Mohammed delivered his last sermon at Arafat in 632, three months before he died. It was during the sermon that the last passage of the holy book, the Quran, was revealed to Mohammed.

The other rituals of the Hajj will be performed tomorrow, on Tuesday and Wednesday. Pilgrims will throw stones at two pillars outside Makkah that symbolize the devil, then circle the holy Kaaba.

To quit JS or to give ultimatum?

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ment will not be able to hold by-elections in the vacant seats if the opposition lawmakers resigned right at the moment, but BNP does not want to do what AL did during the BNP regime by resigning en masse from parliament.

He said BNP still wants a peaceful exit of the AL government from power. However, if it did not resign by this month, the opposition will have no other option but to go for tougher action programmes.

Sources said the JP and Jamaat along with the BNP hardliners are trying to convince BNP chief and leader of the opposition Khaleda Zia to issue a seven-day ultimatum to the government at the March 21 public meeting in the city.

They have suggested announcement of a series of action programmes as well as tendering of

en masse resignation on the first day of the ensuing session of parliament if the idea of ultimatum does not seem feasible.

Sources said Khaleda has advised them to think what can be done after the Eid and her return from China. The opposition leader is expected to leave for Beijing on March 7.

Meanwhile, BNP is also closely watching the developments over former President and Chairman of a faction of JP HM Ershad's release from jail and his subsequent detention.

Sources said that Khaleda after having talks with senior party colleagues decided to keep JP in the alliance.

"We will not take responsibility of a split in the alliance if Ershad really go for an understanding with the government. We will try our best to keep him in the opposition camp," said a top BNP leader.

He said chances of an understanding between Awami League and Jatiya Party are very slim, but leaders of the component parties are not ruling it out, he added. He said many JP leaders still believe that Ershad may again join hands with the AL to get out of jail.

However, JP Presidium member Kazi Firoz Rashid ruled out any negotiation or understanding with the government regarding the release of Ershad. He questioned had the two parties been close to reaching an understanding then why the government detained Ershad.

He said party leaders and activists were annoyed with BNP over its silence over Ershad's fresh detention, but are now happy, as Khaleda formally demanded immediate release of the former president.

Texan blonde Miss USA

AFP, Washington

Kandace Krueger, a 24-year-old green-eyed blonde currently studying journalism, swapped her Miss Texas title for that of Miss USA 2001, in a contest held in Gary, Indiana.

In the final of the nationwide competition late Friday, Krueger, a poised green-eyed blonde, said she believes "everything happens for a reason" -- an echo of the words of fellow-Texan, President George W. Bush, who used the same phrase on December 13 when he was confirmed as president-elect.

Krueger believes that in the 21st century, "the family as a single unit is going to be more important than ever before, and it will be the women's role as a mother and wife to serve as the foundation of the family," according to the website of the competition's organizers.

Krueger describes herself as a "sports fanatic." She also enjoys watching football and baseball. She aims to build a career in sports journalism.

The contest is now in its 50th year. Viewers nationwide were able to watch as the winner was crowned by another southern belle, outgoing Miss USA, Lynnette Cole of Tennessee.

The jury included actor Daniel Baldwin, home-making guru Martha Stewart and model Karen Duffy.

Krueger will now go forward to compete for the Miss Universe title in Puerto Rico on May 11.

The goods worth 270,000 US dollars would be sent to India via China Airlines, EVA Airways, and Evergreen Marine Corp., they said.

The relief goods were donated by Taiwanese people in response to Vice President Annette Lu's appeal to help quake-stricken India.

Lu's campaign had also raised 570,000 dollars of relief fund which was given to the Indian representative office here on Friday, her office said.

India suffered its worst earthquake for 50 years last month, when a quake measuring 7.9 on the Richter scale devastated the western state of Gujarat, killing an estimated 25,000 people.

India does not recognise Taiwan, which China regards as part of its territory awaiting reunification.



Safar Ali Bhuiyan, a businessman from Narayanganj, presenting bouquet to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia while joining the BNP.

Ershad being used

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wanted Ershad to go for any 'understanding' with the government through him (Manzur) and not bypassing him.

Manzur warned Ershad that if he broke away from the four-party alliance on his own, JP would face another split and he (Manzur) would lead a faction having liaison with the Opposition.

Later, at a party high command meeting at the NICVD, Ershad asked Manzur to work for his release from jail by depositing the fine.

The government applied the SPA to confine Ershad in the jail as there was no other way to keep him in confinement.

During the next one month, the government would have a series of talks on different issues including JP's joining the coming parliament session under the leadership of Ershad, ignoring the decision of the opposition alliance.

Ershad's family members may play a vital role in this process, sources said.

But Manzur, when contacted, ruled out the possibility of any split in the alliance.

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the ruling party. "So what's wrong in AL's trying to use Ershad to create a rift in the Opposition fold," the AL leaders said.

However another camp in the ruling party opposed the move on the ground that it gave more importance to Ershad than he deserved. "He is not a significant factor in the national politics any more -- why make him important now?" commented an AL leader.

One source told The Daily Star that Ershad had advised his party Secretary General Nazim Rahman Manzur in January last to return to the parliament. He gave the advice from jail through a note addressed to Manzur. Ershad later withdrew that advice following some conditions for joining parliament session, put forwarded by Manzur.

To reach a 'negotiated settlement', Ershad was shifted on February 1 to the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD) but Manzur's opposition to that 'settlement' ultimately stalled that process.

JP insiders said that Manzur

Asian sex workers demand social recognition

AFP, Kolkata

More than 5,000 sex workers from across Asia gathered in the eastern Indian city of Kolkata Saturday to demand social recognition and legal sanction for their profession.

The three-day "Millennium meet" was inaugurated by the sheriff of Kolkata, Suchitra Mitra, who said she supported the right of sex workers "to live like other people in the society."

"I am with them in their struggle for social respectability and legal sanction for their profession," she said during a colourful opening ceremony at the city's sprawling Salt

Lake Stadium.

Among those participating at the meeting are sex workers from Malaysia, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Nepal and India.

"We are here to express our solidarity with the demands for legalisation of our profession and stopping sexual abuse and torture of sex workers," said Neil Sharun, a member of Cambodian sex worker welfare group Nith Sopha.

Sharmila Shrestha of Nepal said she came to the meeting to study how a Kolkata organisation for sex workers had helped reduce the incidence of HIV, the virus which causes AIDS, and curb criminal

activity.

The meeting also attracted a number of HIV activists and doctors.

"The purpose of my visit here is to share my experiences with those helping sex workers to live a meaningful life," said Damien Morgan, a doctor representing Australia's Community Health Promotion and Training Unit.

The meet will also feature exhibitions of handicrafts made by sex workers and another showing the history of their profession, including documents detailing the superstitions and myths surrounding sex workers.

President

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He said this graduation ceremony should not be the end of something. Instead, it should be the beginning of a process of using the graduates' skills as widely as possible.

"We can involve them in appropriate financial policy discussions, get their technical advice, attach them to important financial development areas, and use them to train others."

The president said, "the coming years, our nation will meet increasing challenges and competition for the resources at our disposal."

"We must ensure that we have civil servants, who are not only forward-looking, energetic and determined, but have the skills to deliver the quality standards in public service which the people of Bangladesh expect."

Meaningless bypolls

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said preferring not to be named.

Chief Election Commissioner M A Syed had also expressed his annoyance with the by-polls he witnessed because of massive irregularities. Seeing rigging while visiting Pabna-5 by-polls in early February, the CEC had commented that it was "rehearsal for the big elections". Syed assumed office in May last year.

The latest by-polls in Sathkira-1 showed a frustrating picture with a minimum turn out. According to unofficial results, ruling party candidate B M Nazrul Islam won the race bagging 95,995 votes. His nearest rival Sheikh Sirazul Islam who is also a local Awami League leader

contested the polls as an independent candidate.

Six other candidates who "contested" for the Sathkira-1 seat got a total of 9,112 votes.

With these gloomy pictures, the EC is busy preparing for Kishoreganj-2 by-election, scheduled for April 8. The officials are also considering announcement of the schedule for by-polls in Rangpur-3 constituency which fell vacant following Ershad's conviction in a graft case.

EC feels uncomfortable with its expenditure of Tk 35 lakh on an average for conducting a by-election, particularly when the election goes virtually uncontested, according to an official.

Annan: South Asia tour

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General.

"Of course, there would be lot of parleys at bilateral levels before a consensus is reached", he said.

Diplomats of Bangladesh involved in preparations for Annan's trip would not like to comment "right now" on his candidature.

Many Asian nations feel that it is the region's turn to have its own candidate for the top post in the United Nations. The UN now has 188 members with a large number of them Asian countries. The only Asian who was Secretary General of the world body was U Thant from Myanmar.

Annan hails from the African country of Ghana, formerly known

as Gold Coast. His predecessor Boutros Boutros Ghali was from Egypt.

During his visit to Bangladesh, Kofi Annan will meet President Shahabuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad.

He is likely to deliver a speech on protection of the environment in Dhaka.

Bangladesh is one of the major contributors to UN peace keeping missions and is a sitting non-permanent member of the Security Council. UN funds several projects in the country.

In the past, two UN Secretary Generals visited Bangladesh. They are Kurt Waldheim and Perez de Cuellar.