

## 65 million girls kept out of school: Unicef report

AP, Geneva

Some 65 million girls worldwide are kept out of school, increasing the risks that they will suffer from extreme poverty, die in childbirth or from AIDS and passing those dangers from generation to generation, the UN children's fund said yesterday.

"We believe that the failure to invest in girls' education puts in jeopardy more development goals than any other single action that could take place," Unicef Executive Director Carol Bellamy in an interview with the Associated Press.

In its annual State of the World's Children report, Unicef said 121 million children around the world are out of school, of whom the majority are girls.

"When a girl is without the knowledge and life skills that school can provide, there are immediate and long-term effects; she is exposed to many more risks than her educated counterparts and the consequences are bequeathed to the next generation," she said.

The UN's "millennium goals" on poverty reduction commit the world to parity for boys and girls in primary education by 2005, but

most acknowledge that this will be impossible to achieve.

When poor families are forced to make a choice, they decide to pay for the education of their sons, but that doesn't mean they don't want their daughters to be educated as well, Bellamy said.

She gave the example of Kenya, where school attendance has shot up by at least 1.2 million since primary school fees were abolished at the beginning of this year.

Throughout Africa, Unicef said, a push to get girls into school has seen big improvements. In five years, school enrollment rates for girls rose by 15 percent in Guinea, 12 percent in Senegal and 9 percent in Benin.

In the most striking example, the number of girls enrolled in first grade in the central African country of Chad quadrupled in two years, while the dropout rate decreased from 22 percent to 9 percent and the number of female teachers rose from 36 to 787. Despite the successes, however, at the current rate of funding it is estimated that it will take until 2129 to achieve universal primary education in sub-Saharan Africa.



PHOTO: AFP

Bollywood actress and former member of parliament Shabana Azmi speaks during the release of the Unicef's State of the World's Children Report 2004 in New Delhi yesterday. Unicef releases the State of the World's Children report every year, which provides a comprehensive assessment of child survival, health, education and protection.

## Disease threat will worsen as global warming bites: WHO

### Malnutrition likely to hit South Asia hard

AFP, Milan

Diarrhoea, malaria and dengue fever will surge and swathes of Southern Asia are likely to be hit by malnutrition as a result of global warming, the World Health Organisation (WHO) warned yesterday at the UN's climate-change conference here.

Higher temperatures will change rainfall patterns and the length of seasons, and this will have a resounding impact on agriculture and water-borne and insect-borne diseases, it said.

"There is growing evidence that changes in the global climate will have profound effects on the health and wellbeing of citizens in countries throughout the world," Kerstin Leitner, the agency's assistant director-general for sustainable development and healthy environments.

A study launched in Milan by the WHO with the help of three other agencies, garnering the best

available scientific data, said that if global temperatures increase by two or three C (3.6-5.4 F), several hundred million more people a year will be exposed to malaria.

"Further, the seasonal duration of malaria would increase in many currently endemic areas," it added.

In 2030, the estimated risk of diarrhoea will be up to 10 percent higher if emissions of carbon dioxide and other "greenhouse" gases that trap the Sun's heat continue to grow unabated, it said.

As for malnutrition, the study warned of a "significant increase" in India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Vietnam, which are heavily dependent on having a predictable monsoon for rice growing, but there would be a "small decrease" in China and the other nations of Southeast Asia.

But there are also other, currently unquantifiable risks to health, according to the report.

These include deaths from

heatwaves, of the kind that ravaged Western Europe this summer, the region's hottest on record, and mortality from floods, storms and droughts.

Worsening air pollution and allergens, the emergence of new diseases or old diseases that take a new transmission path, and the advent of novel pests that could blight food crops are other potential factors.

The agencies that worked with the WHO on the study, "Climate Change and Human Health - Risks and Responses," are the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The data basis for it includes the landmark 2001 report by the UN's top scientific body on global warming, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The IPCC believes the Earth's

average surface temperature increased by about 0.6 C (1.08 F) during the 20th century, of which two-thirds has occurred since 1975, when the effects of the age of oil began to kick in.

It projects a rise of between 1.4 and 5.8 C (2.5-10.4 F) from 1990-2100, with the variation depending on how much action is taken to curb greenhouse-gas emissions.

At the top end of the IPCC's estimates, sea levels could rise by 88 centimetres (55 inches), drowning many small island states and delta regions.

The report was unveiled on the final day of a two-meeting of world environment ministers, attending the December 1-12 gathering of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

A summary of the document can be downloaded at the WHO website at (<http://www.who.int/globalchange>).

## China appreciates Bush comments on Taiwan

REUTERS, Beijing

China thanked President Bush yesterday for his comments on diplomatic rival Taiwan and said Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to the United States had been a complete success.

"We think the remarks made by President Bush when he met... Wen were positive, and the Chinese side expresses its appreciation," Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao told reporters.

China considers Taiwan a breakaway province and has vowed to reunify Taiwan with the mainland, by force if necessary.

Bush, in a meeting with Wen Tuesday, said the United States opposed any unilateral decision by either China or Taiwan to change the status quo, adding that the "comments and actions made by the leader of Taiwan indicate that he may be willing to make decisions unilaterally to change the status quo."

Wednesday, Wen wrapped up a four-day visit to the United States -

- the first by a Chinese leader since a sweeping leadership transition that was finalized in March.

Asked for an overall assessment of the trip, Liu said it had "achieved complete success, and it will certainly become an important and positive influence in the continued development of the Sino-US constructive cooperation partnership." Tensions rose last month when lawmakers in Taiwan debated, and passed the referendum bill, and Chen said he would push for a referendum to be held in March.

Chen also announced Thursday had had nominated his pro-independence vice president, Annette Lu, as his running mate in the March election.

Liu declined to comment on Chen's choice, but in the past Chinese state media has called Lu a traitor and "scum of the nation."

Analysts say Bush's comments marked a subtle shift for the United States which had previously said it did not support Taiwan independence and were a warning to Chen not to hold the referendum.

## 2 Pak nuclear scientists detained

AFP, Islamabad

Two Pakistani nuclear scientists have been detained amid reports they had been involved in transferring technology to Iran, opposition politicians and local media said Thursday.

Farooq Muhammad, director of Pakistan's key uranium enrichment facility Kahuta Research Laboratories (KRL), and KRL laboratory director Yasin Chohan, were arrested between one and two weeks ago, the reports said.

"They have been arrested and are under detention," opposition senator Ishaq Dar, of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz party, told AFP.

"I say this with full responsibility on the basis of credible information."

A government spokesman refused to confirm whether or not the two men were in detention, saying only that nuclear scientists routinely undergo "personnel dependability and debriefing programs."

## Benazir to visit Ajmer

PTI, Ajmer

Former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto will arrive in Ajmer on December 14 for a pilgrimage to Dargah of Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti, Dargah sources said yesterday.

Benazir, who is coming to Ajmer for the third time to seek blessings of Khwaja Saheb will offer a "chadar" and prayers at the tomb of the Sufi saint inside the world famous Dargah, sources said.

Benazir had earlier visited the Dargah in 1991 and 2001, the sources said adding that "Anjuman" an organisation of Khadims of the Dargah would perform religious rites for her.

A dupatta (scarf) would be put on her head as a mark of honour on this occasion by the Anjuman.

## Japan, Asean summit to mark 30 years of ties

AFP, Tokyo

Japan and 10 Southeast Asian nations began a two-day summit yesterday marking three decades of relations, vowing to enhance economic ties and examining ways to strengthen security cooperation.

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi showed his readiness to promote economic relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), agreeing to start talks on free trade agreements with Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines.

"(I am) not just launching the negotiations, I want to make them succeed," a Japanese official quoted Koizumi as telling Philippine President Gloria Arroyo in a meeting before the main session began.

Japan's agreements with the three major Asean nations set no deadlines for the negotiations and similarly noted the both sides should pay "due consideration" to sensitive areas.

The talks could be difficult given Japan's highly protected farming, forestry and fisheries industries as well as its reluctance to accept nurses and other foreign workers, precisely the sectors where the three have something to offer Japan.

Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda emphasised the importance of the special summit with Asean leaders, their first-ever get-together hosted by a non-member

country.

"It is an important meeting where we discuss not only the economy and the environment but also how we can work together to counter terrorism," he told reporters.

Japanese and Asean foreign ministers met on the sidelines of the summit, agreeing to push for an East Asian Community - grouping Asean and the countries of Northeast Asia, according to a Japanese official.

Japanese Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi mentioned the importance of speedily establishing economic partnerships which are the basis of regional cooperation in the one-hour meeting but the Asean ministers wanted to go even further.

While agreeing to the importance of working towards a common community, "Asean foreign ministers said Japan-Asean relations, given their maturity, should expand into political and security areas from the economy and development," the Japanese official said.

The Tokyo summit, widely seen as Japan's bid to catch up with China and India in exerting regional influence, is due to issue a "basic document" defining the direction of future cooperation between Japan and Asean.

The document will be released after a final, half-day session on Friday and is expected to include a proposal for the creation of an East Asian Community.



PHOTO: AFP

Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (R) speaks as Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong listens at the start of a plenary session of a two-day Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) summit plus Japan meeting at Tokyo's State Guesthouse yesterday.

## 13 die in fresh Kashmir violence despite border truce

AFP, Srinagar

Thirteen more people have been killed in continuing separatist-related violence in Indian Kashmir despite a two-week truce by the Indian and Pakistani armies on the borders of the disputed region, police said yesterday.

The truce, which came into effect on November 26, continued to hold going into a third week, police said.

A police spokesman said Indian troops shot dead two suspected militants during a night-long encounter in Ratsan village in central Budgam district.

"A few houses also suffered some damage," the spokesman said.

Another two militants were shot dead in a gunbattle with troops near Bijbehara town, 40 km south of Srinagar, the summer capital of Indian Kashmir, police said.

In another incident, a senior rebel named by police as Farooq Ahmed was shot dead in the southern Doda district Thursday in a joint operation by police and the Indian army.

Police said Ahmed was a divisional commander for the region's dominant rebel group Hizbul

Mujahedin.

In two other incidents, Indian troops shot dead three rebels in the northwestern districts of Kupwara and Baramulla overnight, police said.

Two more militants were shot dead in the districts of Udhampur and Rajouri overnight by the Indian troops, police said.

Police said suspected militants shot dead a Muslim civilian in the Wachi village of southern Pulwama district overnight, while a Muslim couple was killed by suspected rebels in Poonch district, further south.



PHOTO: AFP

Two Afghan soldiers guard outside the loya jirga (national assembly) compound in Kabul yesterday ahead of a session which will start today to debate the draft constitution. Opening with speeches by President Hamid Karzai and former King Mohammad Zahir Shah, the loya jirga is expected to last between one week and 10 days. Hundreds of delegates were preparing to debate and ratify Afghanistan's new constitution, paving the way for the war-ravaged country's final transition to democracy.