

One teacher for 57 students

Bangladesh scores lowest in Southeast Asia

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

Bangladesh has only one teacher for every 57 students, the lowest among 22 South and East Asian countries, according to a Unesco (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) report.

The latest data of the UN body came after the coalition government

in about two and a half years in office appointed 1,009 assistant teachers to secondary schools to minimise the crisis.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue, a civil-society think-tank, linked the high student-teacher ratio to a surge in enrolment over the years.

The number of children enrolling in primary schools in Asia has

jumped over the last decade, but many dropped out before the end of schooling, says the report that covered the 22 countries -- from Afghanistan in the west to the Philippines in the east.

"Even though many children in Asia are enrolled in primary education, very few have a chance to enrol

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Enrol more students from rural areas

President at EWU convocation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

President Iajuddin Ahmed yesterday called on private universities to enrol more students from rural areas to widen the scope of higher education.

The higher tuition cost still keeps the institutions beyond the reach of the children of middle-income groups, he said while addressing the third convocation of East West University (EWU) at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre.

The president said most private universities do not have their own campuses, which contradicts the

concept of university education.

He advised the private university authorities to move their institutions to their own academic buildings.

The president also stressed that private universities should be set up all over the country, not only in Dhaka.

He said most private universities were not using enough of their operating surplus to support the meritorious students.

The president lauded the scholarship programme of East West University (EWU). "The university is doing a commendable job in

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14 dead in Israeli raid on Gaza

REUTERS, Gaza

In their deadliest strike for months, Israeli troops killed at least 14 Palestinians in gunbattles in the Gaza Strip yesterday, in raids Israel said were to root out militants behind attacks on Jewish settlements.

The army assault followed signs of unease in the military over a shock announcement by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon last week that he planned to pull all settlers out of the Gaza Strip.

Palestinian witnesses said soldiers backed by tanks moved near dawn into Shijaia, a militant stronghold in densely packed Gaza

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PHOTO: STAR

The Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge over the Buriganga is one of the many national assets that have long been victims of neglect and pilferage. Like the one in the picture, the bridge is dotted with holes on both sides due to theft of concrete lids of wiring boxes underneath sidewalks holding important electric cables. Metal plate coverings near the bottom of the light poles are also missing, not to speak of the crumbling plaster on the footpaths.

Banks sit on Tk 10,000cr excess money

Bankers blame dip in law and order for low investment demand

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Banks are now sitting with Tk 10,000 crore in excess liquidity with little investment demand, bankers told the central bank yesterday.

A Bankers' Committee meeting with Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday reviewed the impact of reduction in the requirement for banks to stash away funds as statutory liquidity

requirement (SLR).

It viewed that a 4 percent reduction in SLR has increased excess liquidity to Tk 10,353 crore on January 1 from Tk 7,982 crore on November 6 last year.

As the governor wanted to know the reason for such piling of funds, the chief executives of different banks said investors are shying away.

Later, talking to The Daily Star, a number of managing directors said with the free fall in law and order, investment demand has stagnated.

"Businessmen now feel unsafe to begin a new venture. To encourage investment, we have reduced interest rates. But non-economic factors like law and order and corruption

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Pet shop owner, 2 others murdered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three people including the owner of a pet shop were murdered in the city's Tejgaon, Mirpur and Kotwali areas within an hour late Tuesday night.

Tejgaon police recovered the bullet-riddled body of Shahadat Hossain Hiru, 32, owner of pet shop Nil Mayuri at Kataban Market, from Katpotti in Karwan Bazar in the early hours of yesterday.

Police quoting eyewitnesses said Shahadat, president of Kataban Pet Shop Owners' Association, was last seen getting into a car with three others in front of Star Hotel at Karwan Bazar. An hour

later, his killers threw his dead body in front of a garment shop at Katpotti.

"I saw a car stopping in front of Brother Garments at about 11:30pm and someone inside the car pushed the body out on the road," said a local timber trader.

Police sent the body to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) morgue where the body was identified by his relatives.

The motive for the murder could not be known. A case was filed with Tejgaon police yesterday.

In another incident around the same time, a group of armed men

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SHRINE BLAST Probe report due in 2 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

The probe body to investigate bomb blast at the shrine of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) will submit its report within a couple of days, according to an official.

The probe committee was given extension of 20 days in two phases to submit its report. "As the last phase expired Tuesday, it might get another extension, since explosive report from military experts is still due," the official said, preferring anonymity.

A bomb went off at the shrine on January 12, claiming five lives. The probe body, which was formed the following day, is yet to make any headway into the blast.

The superintendent of police (SP) of Sylhet heads the body.



PHOTO: STAR

The Central Shaheed Minar premises get a facelift yesterday ahead of the Amar Ekushey, also the International Mother Language Day, on February 21.

DFP GRAFT

Establishment secy asked to form final probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The information ministry has asked the establishment ministry to appoint an inquiry officer to come up with the final report on graft charges against the director general of the Department of Films and Publications (DFP).

The information secretary requested the establishment secretary to appoint an inquiry officer ranking above a joint secretary who would submit the report in 15 days reviewing a previous probe report and Syed Mahbubur Rahman's reply to a show cause notice.

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JS body for fertiliser build-up to face crisis

Staff recruitment anomalies in agri ministry during Nizami's stint

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary body yesterday advised the government to build up fertiliser stocks in upazilas to contain the 'artificial' crisis and make fertilisers more easily accessible for farmers.

A ruling BNP lawmaker also alleged anomalies in appointment of 25,000 block-supervisors when Matiur Rahman Nizami was agriculture minister.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture Ministry in a meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) Bhaban yesterday said it had come to know that some unscrupulous traders were trying to create an 'artificial' crisis of fertiliser to make extra profits.

Fertiliser prices have been escalating in different districts since the beginning of current Boro season that hit hard the farmers. This may also affect the food production, the meeting observed.

The committee recommended the finance ministry funnel Tk 19.20 crore in agricultural subsidy into

buying fertilisers, seeds and diesel fuel and immediately distribute them among the grassroots farmers.

The JS body also asked the government to keep sharp watch on the fertiliser market and import 50,000 tonnes of triple super phosphate (TSP) immediately.

The committee has decided to hold two meetings a month instead of one until the crisis was over. It will again sit on February 29 to review the situation.

"The prices may have risen due to manipulation by a section of unscrupulous traders, as we are informed. Besides, increased transportation costs and a price-hike on the international market have also contributed to generating the crisis," Abdul Mannan, chairman of the committee, told newsmen.

Agriculture Minister MK Anwar however reiterated his assurance that there would be no fertiliser crisis as the government had already ordered Bangladesh Chemical

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Low response to RPC power project

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Only two companies -- Switzerland's Alstom and Japan's Kawasaki -- participated in the bidding for the Savar 450-megawatt power project of the Rural Power Company (RPC), German consultant of which had fixed terms and conditions to award the contract to a pre-determined party.

German company Siemens had bought the bidding documents but did not submit its proposal in the end.

Insiders meanwhile claimed one 'bhaban' has been asking for hefty commission from the interested bidders in return to its guarantee on the project's go-ahead despite the anomalies in it.

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6 to die for killing ex-UP chairman

UNB, Dhaka

A speedy trial tribunal in Dhaka yesterday awarded death penalty to six people and life imprisonment to two others on charge of killing a former union parishad (UP) chairman in Tangail.

The convicts with death penalty are Sirajul Islam, Shahidul Islam, Haider alias Alek Chand, Abdul Latif, Mukta and Biplab. Of them, Haider, Latif, Mukta and Biplab were tried in absentia.

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Zafar returns home Feb 15

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former prime minister Kazi Zafar Ahmed will end his exile abroad when he returns home on February 15 from Australia.

He is staying in Sydney with his family. Zafar was handed down a 15-year prison term in absentia on corruption charges by a Dhaka court in November 1999.

Before leaving the country, he was active with the Ershad-led Jatiya Party and one of the architects of the ruling four-party alliance. However, he is not with any political party at present.

He returned to Bangladesh in 2001 and was arrested, but released on bail by the High Court. He was also granted bail in four

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