

33pc drop out at pry schools in eight northern dists

Posts of DPEO in 5 districts and of 144 teachers vacant for long

RAFIQUE SARKER, Rangpur

Students' dropout rate in primary schools in eight northern districts in greater Rangpur and Dinajpur is around 33 percent, according to statistics available from district primary education offices. This is due to insufficient number of teachers, their negligence in duty and lack of monitoring by the authorities, sources said. Many guardians and local elite in these districts while talking to this correspondent deplored that the concerned departments do not feel the urge to take effective measures to check the dropout and ensure good primary education. Because of the degrading quality of primary education in government primary schools, kindergartens are mushrooming in towns, which is creating discrimination in education at primary level. Such schools are

also coming up in rural areas. Officials at district education offices (DPEOs) said the dropout rate will increase if this trend is not checked right now. They said posts of District Primary Education Officer is vacant in Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamri, Gibandha, and Panchagoar districts for several years. Upzila Primary Education Officers are in charge of DPEO in these districts. Teacher shortage in these districts is also acute. Sources at Divisional Education Office in Rajshahi said posts of 144 primary school teachers out of 680 are vacant for long. Sixty percent of these vacant posts are in greater Rangpur and Dinajpur. According to a record with Rangpur District Primary Education Office, there are 1882 primary

schools, ebtadaee madras, and kindergartens in the district. Of these, the number of government primary schools is 701, registered primary schools 579, community schools 41, primary schools attached to high schools 29, kindergartens 35, and ebtadaee madrasahs 245. A total of 3,37,507 students -- 1,59,262 girls and 1,78,245 boys-- were enrolled in these institutions last year. Md Nobuat Hossen, Director of Primary Education in Rangpur, said the dropout percentage was 27 in 2003. Last year's percentage is yet to be ascertained, he said. Many of the upzila education officers seeking anonymity told this correspondent that the percentage would be over 33. A teacher at Carmichael Collegiate Primary School said a large number of students in failed in

annual examinations last year and they left school. The poor result in examinations was due to negligence by teachers, he claimed. Records with the Directorate of Primary Education in Rajshahi shows that 38 posts of Upzila Primary Education Officer out of 125 and 73 posts of Assistant UPEO out of 506 are vacant in 16 districts under Rajshahi division. In remote shoal areas, many teachers of government primary schools seldom come to school, guardians alleged. At places, government teachers hire educated youths to take classes while they remain absent, they alleged. But the alleged irregularities can not be monitored due to insufficient manpower at district education offices, the sources said.

Alleged robber lynched in Chittagong

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

An alleged robber was beaten to death by mob at Samadiapurparr of Sadaha union in Satkania upazila on Thursday. Sensing attack of about 20 robbers at approximately 3 am at a market here, a patrol of community police alerted local people of by raising a hue and cry, according to police and witnesses. People came forward and helped the community police catch a robber red-handed while others fled away. The robber died on the spot after a good beating by the mob.

Freed on bail, rearrested at jail gate Family alleges 'political vengeance'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Bazlul Huq Chisti Koyes, former Barisal municipal ward commissioner, released on bail in a three-year old murder case, was arrested from Barisal Jail gate on Thursday in another case for lynching two alleged criminals last year.

Koyes is the younger brother of Ebauidul Huq Chan, president of Barisal Chamber of Commerce and Industries and former district secretary of BNP. Talking to newsmen, his family alleged that his arrest was an "act of political vengeance and harassment by some ruling party leaders". Koyes was earlier arrested by Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on January 27 from his Amanatganj residence in the city. He was injured during interrogation at Barisal Rab camp and handed over to police after four hours. After first aid at Barisal Sadar Hospital, police sent him to court under Section 54. His name was included in a three-year old murder case. Injured Koyes was sent to Barisal Jail and admitted to jail hospital.

District Judge Md. Saiful Alam granted him bail on Thursday as doctors suggested that he should be sent to Orthopaedic Hospital (Pongu Hospital) in Dhaka for treatment. As he came out of jail on bail Thursday evening, police arrested him from the jail gate in a murder case filed on November 15 last year in connection with lynching of two alleged criminals in the city.

PROF YUNUS MURDER 3 accused placed on fresh remand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Police on Thursday took on a fresh three-day remand three of the four persons arrested in connection with the murder of Rajshahi University professor Muhammad Yunus. They are Rummon, leaders of Jubo Maitree, youth front of Workers Party and Monirul and Bachchu, leaders of its student front Chhatra Maitree. The court did not place the other accused-- Islami Chhatra Shibir leader Sirajus Salekeen-- on a fresh remand because of a writ petition filed him with the High Court challenging fresh remand. Sixty-three year-old Prof Yunus, also RU Bangabandhu Parishad p. resident was killed by masked assailants during morning walk on December 24 last year.

Crops on 350 hectares of Teesta project flooded

'Callous' handling of sluice gate alleged

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

IRRI-boro on 200 hectares of land including potato and tobacco on 150 hectares of land in Gangachhara and Rangpur Sadar upazilas have gone under water due to 'callous' handling of a sluice gate under Teesta Irrigation Project on Tuesday, according to local people. Affected villages are Thakurda and Pakurkuri of Borobil union in Gangachhara and Jangirdola of Uttam union in Sadar upazila. Farmers held the project authorities responsible for the crop damage. Uttam union chairman Nurul Amin and Borobil union chairman Zahangir Chowdhury told The Daily Star the Teesta barrage authorities should inform the farmers before opening of the main sluice gate. But, the Executive Engineer of the Teesta barrage held the farmers responsible for the damage.

Union BNP leaders resent price hike of rice, fertiliser, fuel

Real situation not told in JS as MPs seldom visit areas, allege many at Rajshahi meet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

The Tk 600 crore government subsidy on agriculture virtually did not benefit farmers as the gains were marred by high prices of fertiliser, seed and fuel. Coupled with fuel price hike, load-shedding is hampering irrigation in the peak IRRRI-Boro cultivation season now, many of the grass-roots BNP leaders told the party's union representatives' conference. Some 2000 BNP leaders from 215 unions in Rajshahi, Naogaon and Chapainawabganj districts attended the day-long conference, held at Rajshahi stadium on Thursday.

They also resented rising prices of essentials including rice and complained that problems at villages were not rightly reflected in the parliament as many of the lawmakers did not go to their areas after the election. First Joint Secretary of BNP Tarique Rahman chaired the meeting while Finance Minister Saifur Rahman was the chief guest. A number of ministers and MPs were also present. Bisnopor union BNP Organising Secretary Subol Chandra said, "Our

crops on vast lands are being damaged in absence of proper irrigation in the peak season due to load shedding and high price of fuel. Farmers now need fresh agriculture loans as the Tk 600 crore subsidy did not actually benefit them. Badalgachhi union BNP leader Abdul Hamid said fertilisers were being sold at higher rates due to hoarding by a section of dealers to create an artificial crisis. Tarique Zia interrupted Hamid and asked him to disclose names of unscrupulous dealers and to suggest remedies. "I know everything, but it should not be made it public", Hamid replied. Jhilimpur union BNP President from Chapainawabganj demanded government steps to control price hike of essentials including rice and of fuel for irrigation. "We face criticism from people for price hike of rice and fuel". "During Awami League regime, no development took place, but prices of essentials were lower", he said. Kismotgrampur union BNP president Rafique Sarkar said, "When BNP rules, development works take place but prices go up". Several union leaders including

Babor Uddin, Shariful Islam, Himadri Sarkar ventilated farmers' problems and said many MPs do not visit their respective areas even once a month. Shubhodanga union BNP President Mozaffar Hossain said people and conscious and they do not believe the state owned media. These should be reorganised, he said. Tarique Rahman asked party men to keep vigil on fertiliser and seed dealers and to cooperate with local administrations so that government facilities reach the farmers. "You should not depend solely on the government, you have to find out ways for your and your country's development", he said. He also requested BNP MPs to visit their areas regularly and pay heed to good suggestions, even from opposition parties. Addressing the conference, Finance Minister Saifur Rahman said Awami League is an old party but 'it does follow the grammar of politics'. "They harbour politics of violence. They are not connected with people".

Tk 13 CR FOR 7 FLOOD-HIT SW DISTS Affected poor farmers deprived of aid

AMANUR AMAN, back from Chuadanga and Meherpur

A large number of small and marginal farmers in seven southwestern districts were deprived of government assistance under its flood rehabilitation programme due to irregularities and anomaly in preparing lists. The districts are Kushtia, Khulna, Jessore, Jhenidah, Bagerhat, Magura and Chuadanga. The issue was also raised in the Jatiya Sangsad by ruling BNP lawmakers Shahidul Islam, Monjur kader and Rustom Ali Faraji on Thursday.

Local Union Pariashads in cooperation with Block Supervisors of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) had prepared lists of 2,14,500 farmers in the seven districts for assistance under the government's Tk 13 crore programme. The UNOs distributed the money among the so-called affected farmers. It was gathered from local DAE sources that most of the lists did not include the affected people. Local influential who were not affected by the flood got the lion share of the assistance. "I have not heard of any list and got no assistance", Abdul Jabbar, a marginal farmer in Kazipur village in Gangni upazila in Meherpur told this correspondent during a recent visit. Many of the flood affected poor and marginal small farmers in

Chuadanga, Kushtia and Meherpur expressed the same view. "I heard of government assistance but did not see any poor man getting any thing", Altaf Hossain and Hossain Malitah, two poor farmers in Gokulkhali village in Alamdanga upazila in Chuadanga said. The same view was shared by Samsuddin Mollah and Montaz Ali of Ramanathpur village in Khoksa upazila in Kushtia district. When contacted Khondokar Hasibur Rahman, regional DAE officer in Kushtia said DAE officials had nothing to do as grants were distributed according to lists prepared by UP chairman and members. Local UP representatives made the lists on political consideration, he said quoting affected poor farmers. DAE Khulna sources said the government had sanctioned Tk 82,55,000 for 13, 800 flood affected marginal farmers in Khulna district, Tk 56,27,000 for 25,600 in Jessore, Tk 32,58, 000 for 54,600 farmers in Jhenidah, Tk 1,70,61000 for 28,500 in Magura, Tk 32,51000 for 5,700 in Kushtia and Tk 52,27000 for 22,200 farmers in Chuadanga. They said crops on 50, 740 hectares were damaged in Jessore district, 29168 hectares in in Jhenidah, 25327 in Magura, 4315 in Khulna, 14220 Bagerhat, 13350 in Kushtia and 4615 in Chuadanga.

Token hunger strike by RU new recruits

RU CORRESPONDENT

Newly-recruited employees of Rajshahi University (RU) on Thursday staged a one hour token hunger strike in front of the administrative building demanding confirmation of their jobs. The Newly Recruited Employees' Interest Preservation Committee Convener Rafiqul Islam Sarder at a meeting on the day threatened an indefinite strike if their demands are not fulfilled by February 12. They threatened to cut off electricity, telephone and water line of the university officials. Earlier, the employees brought out a protest procession and paraded the main streets of the university. When asked to comment, pro-VC and appointment committee chairman Prof KAM Shahadat Hossain Mondol said their demands are under consideration. The High Court stayed their controversial recruitment following a case filed by Abu Aslam, a lawyer, last year. The university authorities recruited 546 employees sparking controversy.

3 jailed for acid attack in Dinajpur

A CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A special tribunal here on Wednesday sentenced three acid throwers to 10 years rigorous imprisonment (RI) each. The convicts are Harikanta Singh, son of late Abiram Singh, Fenchul Singh, son of Ramesh Chandra Singh and Achir Uddin, son of Wazid Ali, all of Rangamat village in Pulbari upazila. Each of them was also fined Tk 50,000. Following a past enmity, the convicts threw acid on Promoth Singh, son-in-law of Khagendra Nath Singh of Aladipur village on September 1, 2003. Special tribunal judge AKM Anwar Hossain pronounced the judgement.

Barisal T & T functional again

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A new 1000-line telephone exchange has started functioning at Barisal digital telephone exchange. Another 2000-line exchange will be operative in two weeks. With functioning of the two new exchanges, Barisal divisional digital telephone exchange will fully overcome the breakdown caused by a technical glitche on December 15 last year. On that day, about 4700 lines abruptly went out of order as the hard disc drive (HDD) of the central processing unit (CPU) at the exchange crashed. The exchange was installed by an Italian company-Ital Tel--in 1996. Jagadish Chandra Mandol, Divisional Executive Engineer (DET), Barisal T & T said, the two new exchanges are installed by ZT Company of China and have in-built technical facilities like Caller ID, meter reading, secure locking and improved voice quality. He said renovation work was delayed by hartals. After completion of the two new exchanges, another 7000-line exchange will be installed, which will fully meet subscribers' demand.

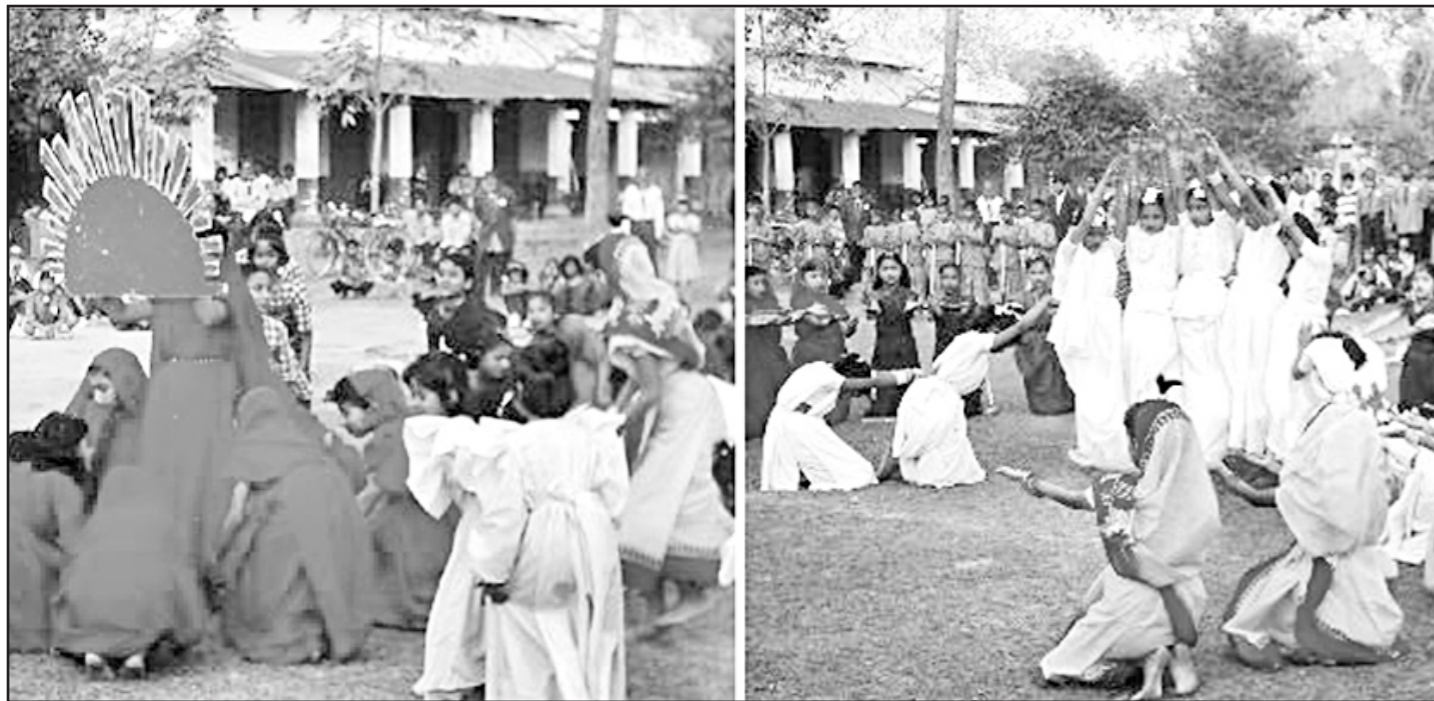


PHOTO: STAR

Cubs presenting choreography at Nilphamari district Cub Campuri that began at Domar High School on Thursday. Fifty Cub groups from different schools are participating in the programme.

Fuel crisis in Sylhet

Short supply from Chittagong, Koilashtila: 20 filling stations stop sale in city and outskirts, dealers say

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Fuel crisis is prevailing in Sylhet as there has been no supply from Chittagong and Koilashtila gas field. About 20 filling stations in the city and areas nearby stopped sale of fuel in last two days, sources in Petrol Pump Owners Association said here yesterday. The crisis has been created as 25 railway wagons with fuel from Chittagong, scheduled to reach Sylhet on February 8, are yet to reach, they told this correspondent. Moreover, oil companies are not getting any fuel from the Kailashtila Gas Field since December, they said. Officials of oil companies supplying fuel in the region also corroborated the statements by the dealers. The dealers said the

increased demand for irrigation has accentuated the crisis as the higher consumption was not replenished as there was also no supply from Chittagong through lorries in last two months. Leaders of Sylhet Division Petroleum Dealers Association and Petrol Pump Owners Association at a joint meeting on Thursday discussed the situation. It was presided over by Petroleum Dealers Association General secretary Jobayer Ahmed Chowdhury in the chair. The dealers said they have exhausted the buffer stock also, and the administration has been informed of the situation, but to no effect. Taking the advantage, many filling stations are realising higher prices from buyers, they said. Daily demand for fuel is around 6 lakh litres now. An official of Jamuna oil com-

pany which markets fuel of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation, when contacted, said the authorities are fully aware of the situation. "It is difficult to cope with the increased demand during the irrigation season. "Moreover, oil companies are not getting any fuel from the Kailashtila Gas Field since December as production in two wells there are stopped. Diesel and other kinds of fuel are available from the gas field as a byproduct. The depot of Padma Oil at Srimangal is now supplying only 70,000 to 80,000 litres a day against three lakh liters earlier, it was learnt. An official of Meghna Petroleum said, railway authorities could not transport fuel from Chittagong due to shortage of wagons. "This is why we can not build up a stock in Sylhet region. We are trying to keep the supply normal", he said.

Reopening of SSC centre demanded

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Several hundred former students of Government Jubilee High School and guardians on Thursday brought out a procession and held a meeting here demanding reinstatement of the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination centre and removal of six guilty teachers. Among others, GM Zafar, Jahangir Sikder, Rezaul Karim, Saiful Islam, Mahfuzul Islam, Tanvir Rahman, Kibiria Mahmud and Ruhul Amin Rasel addressed the meeting. Following a complaint filed with the Barisal board chairman by the father of an examinee, Maksudur Rahman last year, the board disciplinary committee cancelled the examination centre for five years. The complainant alleged forgery in his son's SSC mark sheet involving six schoolteachers in the crime.

SNAPS

Female SSC examinee kidnapped

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinee was kidnapped by a gang of miscreants on Thursday. The victim is Asma, an examinee of Gabua Janata High School in Sadar upazila, according to police and villagers. She was kidnapped when she was going to school at about 9 in the morning. Asma's father filed a case with the Sadar Police Station but police could not arrest anybody.

Health camp on diabetes held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

About 350 diabetics were treated at a day-long health camp at the local diabetes hospital in exchange of a token amount of money on Thursday, according to the district unit General Secretary of Diabetes Association, Jahangir Sikder. Eight of the physicians came from BIRDEM, Dhaka. They are Prof A K Azad Khan, Dr Mohsin Kabir, Dr AKM Musa, Dr Laila Arjumand Banu, Dr Faruq Pathan, Dr Reza bin Zaid, Dr Subrata, Prof Dr Sirajul Haq and Prof Dr GM Faruq.

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