



Tablig Jamaat devotees erect pandal for Bishwa Ijtema along Turag river in Tongi yesterday. The three-day Bishwa Ijtema, one of the largest religious congregations, will begin on February 2.

World falling behind on 2015 education goal

REUTERS, Washington

Access to education increased dramatically over the past century but 323 million children worldwide are still not in school and efforts to achieve universal primary education by 2015 are likely to fail, according to a new study.

Despite the findings, the study by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences said the goal of providing a high-quality education to all children could be achieved at a reasonable cost with more support and funding from governments worldwide.

"There's no question that it's possible," said David Bloom, one of the authors of the study. "It's a question of financial resources and

it's a question of political will."

"We have cost estimates, for example, of what it would take and we're looking at numbers that are less than what the US is spending on an annual basis in Iraq and Afghanistan," he said. The United States is currently spending about \$8 billion a month on the Iraq war.

In the past century, the number of primary children enrolled in school has grown from around 40 percent in all regions to about 86 percent, but many areas are lagging behind, especially sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and South Asia.

Universal primary education has been the goal of several international initiatives. A 1990 global conference in Thailand set the year 2000 as the target date for universal primary

education. When that goal was not met, a global forum in Senegal in 2000 set a new target date of 2015.

Bloom, an economist and demographer at Harvard, and co-author Joel Cohen, a professor of populations at Rockefeller and Columbia universities, said the study found the new target date was unlikely to be met and the goal needed to be expanded to include secondary education.

NOT EVEN CLOSE

"If we actually look at an extrapolation ... we're not going to come close to making 'education for all' by 2015," Bloom said. At current rates of progress, nearly 300 million children would not be enrolled in 2015, 114 million of them of primary school age.

Bloom said the goal of universal primary education for all was "not nearly ambitious enough" and that students who spend less than 10 years in school do not achieve many of the benefits of education.

"We ... need to pay much more attention to education access at the secondary level and we need to pay attention to educational quality," Bloom said. "It's not just a question of getting kids into schools, it's also a question of what you do with them once they're in school."

Cohen said the researchers

calculated universal primary and secondary education would cost as much as \$70 billion more per year worldwide, \$7 billion of that for primary education and between \$27 billion and \$62 billion for secondary education.

He said \$70 billion would be less than three-tenths of a percent of the gross national income of rich countries.

"So the amounts of money we are talking about are not large compared to the resources available," he said.

Bloom said the study attempted to lay out a vision of what the world would look like, "how much better the world would be if instead of using our resources for military purposes we used them to ... get every kid in the world into school and provide them with quality education."

He acknowledged it was "an ideal vision" but said it was justified, not only because education is acknowledged as a human right and recognised as a contributor to strong societies, but also because it was good economics.

"Education provides considerable economic benefits, which is truly one of the best established ideas in the whole field of economics," Bloom said.

Warming could cut China crop yields by over a third

REUTERS, Beijing

Rising temperatures in China could slash grain production in the world's most populous country by over a third in the second half of this century, imperilling food security, the official Xinhua agency reported.

China will be 2 to 3 degrees Celsius hotter on average within the next 50 to 80 years, it said, citing a report on changing weather conditions produced by six government departments.

"If we do not take any measures, by the second half of the 21st

century production of key agricultural products like wheat, rice and corn could fall by up to 37 percent," Xinhua quoted the report as saying.

Warmer temperatures could also increase pressure on China's already scarce water resources, change its forestry industry, cause flooding along the coastline and massive melting of glaciers, and extend the range of diseases like malaria.

"These impacts will mostly be negative, and some of them cannot be reversed," the report added.

The full text of the report is expected to be released in the first half of 2007.

It was put together mainly by the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Chinese Meteorological Administration and Chinese Academy of Sciences.

The report is likely to stir debate about whether and how China can balance its ambitious goals for economic growth with steps to rein in rising greenhouse gas emissions from industry and cars, which keep heat in the atmosphere and threaten to dramatically increase the planet's average temperatures.

Myanmar villagers flee conflict raging far from world's eyes

AFP, Karen State, Myanmar

Even as fighting raged all around them, Pi Lu never thought she would have to uproot her eight children and flee their small village in eastern Myanmar.

She stayed even after her husband was killed in 2003, when he stepped on a landmine that had been planted in one of their rice paddies.

But over the last year, an offensive by Myanmar's military government to clear out villages in Pi Lu's ethnic Karen homeland escalated to a point where she could bear it no more.

Seven people in her village were killed in the shelling, and their animal herds were slowly decimated by landmines that littered the grazing areas around her village, she said.

"When the children went to sleep by artillery instead of lullabies, it was time to leave," she said.

So like thousands of others in Myanmar's impoverished and battle-scarred Karen state, Pi Lu fled with her family, trekking through the jungle for weeks until they found refuge in a camp hidden in the mountains near the Thai

border.

Two of her children are sick with malaria in the camp's dirt-floored clinic, which has no properly trained medical personnel and little equipment other than bandages and antiseptic.

Most of the patients are suffering from malaria, chronic diarrhoea or landmine injuries in a conflict largely forgotten by the rest of the world.

"Along the road, they have no health care so they got many sickness. And so when they arrive here at the same time, at our hospital, every bed is full," said a camp medic who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of his safety.

The camp, which didn't exist a year ago, now shelters some 2,500 people. Like Pi Lu, most journeyed by foot for weeks or even months before finding the relative safety of the camp's bamboo huts along a thin stream.

Human Rights Watch estimates that 27,000 Karen have fled since the offensive began nearly one year ago, joining an estimated 100,000 already hiding near the Thai border.

The brutality of Myanmar's offensive against the rebel Karen National Union was one of the main

concerns raised in the US-backed resolution at the UN Security Council, which was vetoed Friday by China and Russia.

The Karen are just one of many ethnic groups targeted in the largest attempt to pacify minorities, many of whom have long struggled for self-determination in this country, formerly known as Burma.

The Karen's 57-year struggle for autonomy makes them one of the longest-running insurgencies in the world.

"Now the Burmese government has planted landmines on the farms on the routes back to the village, so these people cannot return safely back to their home or farm," said Sunai Phasuk, a Human Rights Watch representative in Thailand.

"They are pushing further and further away into the jungle, and some of them have reported being hunted like animals after they ran away," Sunai said.

And they continue to run.

Myanmar's ruling junta has pushed many villagers from their homes to create a security cordon around their new administrative capital Naypyidaw, where the government began operating nearly one year ago, according to

rights groups.

But those who are relocated say the rape of women and forced labour for both sexes is common.

"They forced villagers to clear landmines and to rebuild roads on frontline areas," one Karen aid worker at the camp said.

Government workers on bulldozers also use Karen as human shields against landmines, making villagers walk in front of the bulldozers to clear a path through the jungle, he said.

"The conflicts and military offensives in ethnic areas, in Karen State, Karenni State, Shan State further north, we can confidently call it crimes against humanity already," Sunai said.

Those who have made it to the camp do not know where they will go next but say they cannot stay here.

Myanmar has signed deals with China and Thailand to build hydroelectric dams along this border, and some time soon this camp will be submerged deep beneath the nearby Salween River.

In the meantime, people living in this camp struggle along with little help and little concern from the outside world.



Anxious guardians wait outside Chittagong Women's Association Girls' High School at Dampara in the port city while their wards sit for admission test yesterday.

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Bush renews freeze on Laden assets

AFP, Washington

US President George W. Bush on Thursday renewed for one year an asset freeze on terrorist chief Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network as well as groups like Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad.

In a letter to key US lawmakers explaining the move, Bush cited "grave acts of violence committed by foreign terrorists that disrupt the Middle East peace process."

"Terrorist groups continue to engage in activities that have the purpose or effect of threatening the Middle East peace process and that are hostile to United States interests in the region," he said.

"Such actions constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States," said the president.