

Boys lag behind girls in secondary education

WB report calls for reforms in stipend programme

UNB, Dhaka

Stipend programmes at the secondary level need to be reformed immediately as the spectacular growth in female secondary education has put boys at a distinct disadvantage, making the national goal to achieve gender equality a far cry.

A World Bank report titled 'Whispers to Voices: Gender and Social Transformation in Bangladesh' revealed the findings.

The report, released on

Thursday, said the government needs to be cognizant of this new challenge without any further delay and scholarship programmes at the secondary level should be redesigned to make it more equitable.

It found that boys' enrolment at all levels is lower than that of girls except when they get to grade 11 and the incentives of the Female Secondary School Stipend Programme (FSSSP), which provides cash support to girls from grades 6-10, no longer applies.

The WB report said one of major issues confronting policymakers and practitioners in Bangladesh today is the "boys left behind" phenomenon.

It said some recent studies have addressed this issue and hypothesised that the causes for this lie in the direct and indirect effects of the FSSSP.

"Adolescent boys are less likely to remain in school and more likely to do wage work following the introduction of the stipend scheme. Thus parents may have

decided to send adolescent girls to school and adolescent boys to work in response to the financial incentives created by the stipend programme," the report said.

It said the relative fall in enrolment of boys in coeducational schools suggest that the FSSSP aided the process of closing gender gap not solely by raising female enrolment, but also in an unintended way by cutting back on the participation of boys in secondary schools.

Quoting some other studies, the WB report said discrimination against women in the labour market may also play a part. Thus if a daughter's job prospects are lower than son's and the FSSSP is providing a monetary incentive to families to keep girls in school, families would choose to keep the daughter in school and send the son to work.

Education researchers described such emerging concerns as strong barriers to the path of achieving balanced development of gender equality.

"In such a situation where boys' attendance to schools is decreasing, the government and other agencies concerned should redesign the development programmes without delay," said Sheikh Shahbaz Riad, who is working for the development of secondary education.

He said there are thousands of boys in the country who are too poor to go to school. "Without ensuring their enrolment, we cannot expect a balanced, sustainable development. The government can arrange stipend programmes for such poor boys too," he added.



Maj Gen (ret) KM Shafiullah speaks at a press conference at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. On his right are Air Vice Marshal (ret) AK Khandaker and Lt Gen (ret) Mir Shawkat Ali. Sector Commanders Forum organised the press conference. (Story on Page 16)

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Kuwait keen to invest in Bangladesh

Says Kuwaiti FM

UNB, Dhaka

Kuwait is ready to help Bangladesh in projects of its choice through the Kuwait Development Fund and is pretty much eager to invest in Bangladesh.

Foreign Minister of Kuwait Sheikh Mohammed Al Salem Al Saba expressed the interest during a meeting with Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury on Thursday evening in the Senegalese capital on the sidelines of the OIC Summit.

Sheikh Saba expressed his deep gratitude to the foreign adviser for the support that Kuwait had received from Bangladesh during the 1st Gulf War and also for the assistance that Bangladeshi peacekeepers had accorded to Kuwait thereafter.

"We see Bangladesh as a great friend," Sheikh Mohammed told the foreign adviser.

Iftekhar mentioned the large expatriate Bangladeshi community in Kuwait who are contributing to Kuwait's development and inquired about the possibility of Kuwaiti cooperation in upgrading skills.

The Kuwaiti foreign minister stated that Kuwait was prepared to help Bangladesh in projects of Bangladesh's choice through the Kuwait Development Fund.

He said Kuwait was "eager and willing" to invest in Bangladesh and referred to Bangladesh's "novel contributions with regard to micro-credit".

He recalled his various past meetings with the foreign adviser in different international conferences and extended to him a "very warm personal" invitation to visit Kuwait as soon as possible.

"We hope to continue our dialogue in Kuwait," the Kuwaiti Minister added.

Mosud Mannan, director general of the International Wing of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was also present at the meeting.

Iftekhar welcomes Sudan-Chad peace agreement

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury has welcomed the peace agreement signed between Sudan and Chad in Dakar, Senegal on Thursday night on the sidelines of the 11th OIC Summit.

Iftekhar said Bangladesh favours conflict resolution through dialogue. Sudan and Chad are fellow members of the OIC and their relationship should be brotherly.

"Both also belong to the group of the Least Developed Countries which Bangladesh chairs. So we have particular reason to be pleased. We hope that this peace will be lasting," he said.

The adviser congratulated President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, new chairman of the OIC, for his successful initiative.



Bangladesh Aabritty Samannaya Parishad takes out a colourful procession from the Public Library premises in the city yesterday to mark the Waheedul Haque National Children's Poetry Recitation Festival 2008.

Conserve nature utilising indigenous knowledge

Speakers tell roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The knowledge and experience of indigenous people should be utilised for conserving the nature, said the speakers at a roundtable yesterday.

They said indigenous people, who earn their livelihood from nature and protect it for their existence, are always neglected by the mainstream population.

The roundtable was organised by the Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) at Shilpakala Academy in the city.

The speakers said even medicinal plants are on the verge of extinction due to callousness of the mainstream people who are grabbing the land of indigenous people by cutting the forest.

They said no sustainable development is possible without conserving the nature.

The speakers said the Plant Varieties Protection and Farmers Rights Act 2001 might threaten the

biodiversity of the areas inhabited by indigenous people.

Pavel Partha, a researcher on Ethno Botany and Biodiversity Conservation, said the draft copy of Biodiversity and Community Knowledge Protection Act 1998, which was more nature-friendly, is still getting dust in the ministry.

He urged the government to finalise the Biodiversity and Community Knowledge Protection Act 1998 in consultation with the people.

Dr Noazesh Ahmed talked on 'Destruction of Forests and Nature' leading to cultural erosion while Dwijen Sarma on 'Destruction of Species' affecting forest culture and Zakarias Dumri talked on 'One Nation Two Languages: The Case of Mahali'.

"The mainstream people often cheat indigenous people across the globe. At different times the mainstream people made money by exploiting them. Stealing indigenous knowledge of medicinal

plants, a vested quarter prepared allopathic drugs and did business," said Dwijen Sarma.

"If we want sustainable development, we would have to conserve the nature and should acknowledge the knowledge of indigenous people, which they earned over the years," he added.

Biopiracy took place mostly in Chittagong Hill Tracts, said the speakers adding that many communities, their languages, festivals and cultures are now in extinct.

"Such is the Mahali community with around 21,000 people who have no festivals now. They have lost their traditional dances and their language is now at stake, they added.

The speakers urged the government to recognise their mother tongue.

Prof Rafiqul Islam chaired the discussion which was also addressed by Rambhajan Koiri, Ritesh Chakma, Dayal and Philip Gain.

Administrator of UNDP due today

UNB, Dhaka

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator Kemal Dervis arrives in Dhaka today on a three-day trip to meet high officials and observe voter registration activities in Bangladesh.

During his stay in Bangladesh, Dervis will meet President Iajuddin Ahmed. He will also call on Chief Election Commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda and other government high-ups.

His tour includes a field visit to cyclone Sidr-affected areas where rehabilitation efforts are underway. He will see ongoing voter registration activities and urban poverty reduction initiative.

Dervis is also the chair of the United Nations Development Group, a committee consisting of the heads of all UN funds, programmes and departments working on development issues.

The UNDP, along with eight other development partners, helped Bangladesh pool \$50 million for the voter-registration scheme.

BBC Bangladesh Sanglap today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The third edition of the special series of BBC Bangladesh Sanglap titled 'Rural Economy' will be held at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the city today.

Commerce Adviser Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, President of Bangladesh Economic Association Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, Bangladesh Agro-Processors' Association President Maj Gen (ret) Amzad Khan Chowdhury and Executive Director of Ubiing Farida Akhtar will take part in the programme as panelists.

Shaykh Seraj, director of Channel 1, will moderate the programme.

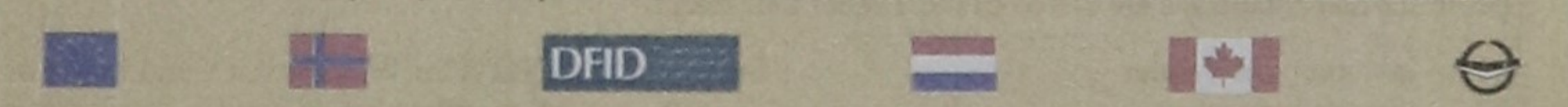


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