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Govt cancels cash incentive to 25 schools

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

The education ministry has cancelled monthly pay order (MPO) of 25 non-government schools in Rangpur, Kurigram and Lalmonirhat for poor results of their students in this year's SSC examinations.

The government may stop MPO incentives if a non-government school fails to have at least five of its students passed in the SSC exams, according to a government circular.

The ministry also asked the Rajshahi Education Board to discontinue academic affiliation to the disgraced schools, nine of which are in Rangpur, 15 in Kurigram and one is in Lalmonirhat district.

The schools denied MPO in Rangpur are Bagpur Masum High School, Pathak Sangkar High School, Satgara Girls' High School, Mominpur High School, Nankar High School, Zankipur High School, Zarullahpur High School, Zarullahpur Girls' High School and Thakurbari High School.

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Post office hassle awaits car tax payers

SHARIFUL ISLAM

Vehicle owners going to post offices to deposit tax renewal fees for their motor vehicles face untold sufferings as the post offices are failing to cope with the huge number of people queuing up.

This is likely to continue for at least two and a half months more till booths are installed nationwide for easing this suffering.

Vehicle owners have to stand in long queues for several hours to deposit their money and have the copy of the receipt. However, if one pays brokers there, his or her sufferings are gone in a jiffy as the agents maintain an unholy nexus with dishonest post office staff to do the job quickly.

Director General of Bangladesh Post Office M Mobasher Rahman admitted that vehicle owners are facing problems while depositing fees and taxes at post offices. Since it takes about 30 minutes to process a single deposit at most post

offices, people often take the illegal help of brokers to avoid standing in queue for a long time, he said.

Brokers in collusion with post office staff earn money by getting the process done with the vehicle owner not having to stand in queue.

He, however, said the post office at Mirpur has installed computers recently to provide faster service to vehicle owners and the practice of brokers at the post office would die out within days since it takes very little time to process a deposit now.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) officials also admit this harassment and said they have already initiated a move to introduce online banking by appointing a vendor so that motor vehicles owners can deposit tax fees from certain booths to be set up at different districts in the country.

Presently people have to queue at the post office counters where the disposal rate is very slow

because the man behind the counter has to receive the money, make a number of entries, issue token and perform other work in connection with the deposit. Thereafter, the staffs pass the papers to the post master concerned for his signature.

While this process goes on, people in the queue keep waiting for their turn and at the end of the day quite a good number of people fail to deposit the money as the counters close at a fixed time.

Car owner Anisur Rahman came all the way from Satkhira to deposit tax and fitness fees of his vehicle a few days ago. He thought he would return home completing his work in one day but the staff of the post office at Mirpur told him that motor vehicle receipts were exhausted.

Like Anisur, around 50 others were also waiting in queue for their money receipt that the post office staff said would come from the General Post Office (GPO).

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Quader wonders why parties oppose UZ polls

UNB, Dhaka

Communications Adviser Maj Gen (Retd) Ghulam Quader yesterday wondered why political parties deny holding of upazila parishad polls notwithstanding the fact that it is a nonparty election.

Talking to reporters at the Secretariat, he, however, hoped that the parties would finally go for the elections.

Quader also hoped that honest people would be elected in the local-body elections as 'general people now hate the corrupt people'.

On the politicians' plea for lifting the state of emergency, Quader noted that the emergency has been eased for four city corporation and nine municipality elections slated for August 4 as a 'test case'.

"The caretaker government," he said, "is examining where and how the emergency could be eased in future."

LGRD Adviser Anwarul Iqbal said the caretaker government has nothing to do with upazila elections. The Election Commission will hold the upazila elections.



Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed speaks at a programme at Radisson Hotel in Dhaka marking the successful completion of voter registration. CEC ATM Shamsul Huda and army chief Gen Moeen U Ahmed are seen on the dais.

Agriculture reforms must to transfer resources to poor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Comprehensive reforms in agriculture and markets are imperative to create opportunities for people deprived of resources and thereby alleviate poverty, eminent economist Prof Rehman Sobhan said yesterday.

Asset deprivation is a major reason for poverty, he said, expressing concern over emerging gap in education and health opportunities for the poor, and suggesting equal access to land, education and health for all.

Prof Sobhan, also chairman of Center for Policy Dialogue, was speaking as the chief guest at the launch of Brac Development Institute (BDI) under Brac University that will serve as a resource centre for issues on poverty and the poor and marginalized people.

Primary and Mass Education Adviser Rasheda K Chowdhury, Brac founder Fazle Hasan Abed,

University Grants Commission Chairman Prof Nazrul Islam, Dhaka University Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud, Ain o Salish Kendra co-founder Hameeda Hossain and Workers Party of Bangladesh President Rashed Khan Menon and BDI Director Syed M Hashemi also spoke at the programme chaired by Brac University Vice-Chancellor Jamilur Reza Choudhury and held at Brac Centre Inn in the capital.

"We need to revisit our agrarian reform. Millions of acres of khas land is there in the country, but that is illegally occupied," Rehman Sobhan said, adding that a major research should be conducted on who actually occupied the khas land and how it could be used in productive manners.

He suggested forming cooperative societies to connect producers with the markets and creating opportunities to establish ownership of common people in commercial ventures.

Women buy cows taking loans from micro-finance institutions and sell milk to the milkmen, who actually add value and get the profit, he said, raising a question: "Why don't you investigate how these women could get together, pasteurise milk and then sell?"

There are troubles in procuring paddy where most rice is being procured from the millers, Prof Sobhan said, adding that bringing the paddy producers together and making them capable of processing paddy can directly connect them to the market.

He said BDI could conduct researches how the members of Grameen Bank and Brac could be turned into shareholders of their commercial ventures. Once these members could establish their ownership, say of Brac Bank, such a model could be replicated in other commercial ventures.

He said Brac University could

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Lack of monitoring of the Dhaka Zoo authorities leads to a child getting dangerously close to a lion yesterday. The photo shows the child poking the lion with a stick after scaling the protective barrier around the cage.

Only Khaleda can validate CG activities

Says Delwar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain yesterday said there is no possibility of legitimising the activities of the present government in future unless it is done by a genuinely elected parliament.

As for the BNP, its Chairperson Khaleda Zia can only validate the activities of the present government since she is the icon of the country's democracy and independence. Therefore, "it (the government) has got to approach

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AUG 21 ATTACK Salam Pintu, 2 Huji cadres denied bail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday rejected the bail petitions of detained former deputy minister Abdus Salam Pintu and two other Harkatul Jihad (Huji) members in connection with the August 21 grenade attack case.

A third Huji cadre Shahadat Ullah Jewel, however, obtained bail from the same court following a High Court (HC) order.

Meanwhile, Huji chief Mufti Abdul Hannan has submitted a petition for retraction of his earlier

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ADB to lend \$170m to face food crisis

AFP, Manila

The Asian Development Bank will lend Bangladesh \$170 million to help cope with a rapid rise in food prices.

The loan, part of a package with other multilateral aid donors, "will ensure access to food supply for those hardest hit by recent natural disasters in Bangladesh and the rapid increase in food prices," the ADB said in a statement yesterday.

ADB funding will provide support to Bangladesh government "safety net programmes" intended to ensure that some five million

poor people get access to food. This will include providing food supplies for sale in the open market, assistance programmes such as "food-for-work" schemes and the feeding of vulnerable groups, the ADB statement said.

Bangladesh, a net importer of food grains, was severely affected by two floods and a devastating cyclone in the second half of 2007.

They caused a sharp shortfall in rice production that adversely affected the food security of an estimated 25 million people," the ADB said.

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Bahrain lifts ban on work visas for Bangladeshis

AFP, Manama

Bahrain has lifted a ban on work visas for Bangladeshis, two months after suspending the permits when a mechanic from Bangladesh was accused of a gruesome murder, a diplomat said yesterday.

"Yesterday we received an official memo from the interior ministry notifying us that they lifted the ban" on granting work visas to Bangladeshis, charge d'affaires in the Bangladesh embassy Manama Saifal-Islam told AFP.

But the granting of visas was made conditional on applicants being over 25 years of age and providing a good conduct certificate from their country's interior ministry, he said.

Saif al-Islam said he expected Bahraini businessmen to resume importing labour from Bangladesh.

There are currently 90,000

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1.2 lakh MT rice arrive from India since July 10

BSS, Chittagong

Twelve ships carrying around 1.20 lakh tonnes of Indian rice have arrived at Chittagong seaport since July 10, officials yesterday said.

Six of the vessels are waiting at the outer anchorage of the port while the rest are berthed at port jetties for unloading, they said.

The rice is part of the five lakh tonnes of rice India had agreed to export to Bangladesh. With the latest consignments, Bangladesh has so far received half of the rice. Around one lakh tonne was imported earlier through land routes.

Additional Regional Controller of Food for Chittagong division SM Kaiser Ali said more ships from India are likely to arrive shortly after the unloading of the current consignments.

The controller of movement and storage (CMS Food).

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ACC to quiz Huda, Sigma in bribery case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday allowed the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to interrogate detained former communications minister Nazmul Huda and his wife Sigma Huda at jail gate in connection with a case filed against them for taking Tk 6 lakh in bribe from a construction firm.

Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Golam Rabbani passed the order after ACC Assistant Director Belal Hossain, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case, submitted a petition seeking permission to interrogate the couple at jail gate.

Five witnesses--Syed Ahmed Faruk, RA Howlader, SM Abdul Mannan, Anwarul Haq and Mobarak Hossain--yesterday gave their statements before a magistrate against the couple. They all are high officials of Marganet One

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LTTE declares truce for Saarc Summit

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels announced yesterday they would observe a unilateral ceasefire coinciding with a South Asian leaders' summit that starts on the island this week.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said they had nothing against the meeting of the eight-member South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, and pledged to only take defensive action if attacked.

But the Sri Lankan government brushed off the offer, signalling its daily attacks against the rebels' northern mini-state would continue.

"Our movement will observe a unilateral ceasefire... during the period of the Saarc conference from 26th July to 4th August and give our cooperation for the success of the conference," the Tamil Tigers said in a statement.

Sri Lanka is hosting the 15th Saarc summit, which also includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Pakistan.

However the rebels said they would be forced to take "defensive

action" if Colombo failed to respect the gesture and the military conducted operations.

"If the occupying Sinhala forces (military) disrespects our goodwill gesture of our people and our nation, (or) carry out any offensives, our movement will be forced to take defensive action," said Balasingham Nadesan, the head of the LTTE's political wing.

Fighting between Tigers and the military is currently centred around the north, but the rebels also carry out attacks against military, economic and civilian targets elsewhere on the island, including in and around the capital.

The LTTE have been fighting for an independent homeland for minority Tamils since 1972, and the conflict has left tens of thousands dead.

Sri Lanka pulled out of a Norwegian-backed truce with the LTTE in January, and says it has the upper hand in the long-running conflict.

The government was also dismissive of the truce offer.

"We will not respond to it," Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogolleagama told parliament

Tuesday. "It has no binding on us."

At least two similar truce offers were made by the rebels between 1994 and 2001, which were rejected by the then Sri Lankan government.

The LTTE's Nadesan, however, also ruled out peace talks with the government, saying Colombo appeared determined to push ahead with a military solution.

"The chauvinistic Sinhala regime (government) is putting its trust in a military solution, the war is spreading and is turning more and more intense."

Sri Lanka's army chief said last week his forces had wiped out two-thirds of the rebels' military capability in the latest episode of the conflict, and that the war was at its tail-end.

Fighting continued to rage in the north on Tuesday, with the defence ministry saying its troops had bombed a rebel training base, killing 22 suicide bombers, and sunk one of their boats.

The government's claims cannot be independently verified because the ministry prevents journalists from travelling to the front lines or crossing into the rebel-held north.



A number of the accused in the case filed in connection with the August 21, 2004 grenade attack on an Awami League rally cover their faces as they are being taken to jail from a Dhaka court yesterday.