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Textbook crisis again!

With the academic year of the secondary level students already in progress from this month, more than 50 percent of the students will have to wait for the books prescribed by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) due to an artificial crisis alleged to have been created by NCTB itself and syndicates of textbook publisher and sellers. The situation, however, prevailing now is not new at all as the failure and indifference of the authority concerned have been reflected time and again.

But this year the crisis seems to be more acute than before. In the past, less number of books than the actual demand used to be published since about 30 percent of old books were recycled every year. But recently the syllabi of the secondary level students have been modified with the introduction of a new system, known as 'creative question method', which requires every student to buy a new set of books. This has caused the demand to rise.

Being fully aware of the new syllabus,

the NCTB's decision to print around two and a half crore books is puzzling; the actual demand is estimated to be over five crore. Interestingly, the textbook publishers and NCTB are blaming each other for the situation!

Teachers, students and guardians are facing a great problem in getting the required number of books to continue the academic activities. On top of that, many teachers are still unaware of the new teaching method as necessary training has not been imparted to them. If this situation goes on, the standard of education will suffer.

As a citizen of the country I express my deep concern and dissatisfaction over the situation. The government should tackle the issue of syndication with an iron hand, and the concerned authority must ensure availability of textbooks in the market without further delay.

Sarwar Hussain

Dept. of Computer Science & Engineering
University of Chittagong

any of this. I urge our education minister and the concerned authority to take immediate action in this regard.
Mawduda Hasnin Rajshahi

Rangpur University

After more than 30 years of politics of erection and uprooting of foundation stones of Rangpur University, it finally came into being in November, 2008. It not only met the dream of the people of Rangpur but also fulfilled a long cherished demand for higher education of this less developed region of northern Bangladesh. Within the shortest possible time, the university authority successfully completed the admission test, processed results and completed enrolment formalities with the help of college teachers hired for the purpose (as it had no teaching staff of its own). That is, the whole process took about a month, so that classes could start from 28 January as declared.

Meanwhile, the syndicate had finalised the selection committees for recruitment of teacher for six departments which was scheduled from 14 January so that the classes could commence as planned. But unfortunately, the Ministry of Education has asked the VC to stop the recruitment process of teachers, on the same day. Such an embargo may be logical for other universities, and for quite genuine reasons, but it is damaging for the newly established university.

As the situation stands now, without teachers the Rangpur University cannot start its academic activities, i.e. conduct of classes, formation of departmental courses committees, academic council etc., as per schedule. In short, this university cannot function properly and is likely to begin its journey with session jam in the coming years! This situation is now creating frustration among the students and the guardians. Meanwhile, there is lot of speculations, fuelled by vested quarters, circulating among the people about the directive of the Ministry of Education that evidently goes against the image of government. Under this circumstance, we would request the government to lift the bar on recruitment of teachers for this newly established university immediately.

Dr. K. Maudood Elahi

Former Pro-VC
National University
Pro-Vice Chancellor
Stamford University
Bangladesh
Dhaka

Seating row

Yes, the outgoing speaker has left behind his legacy while making the seating arrangements for the MPs. Thanks to the government party for accepting the situation peacefully and perhaps temporarily; otherwise, this could lead to a very unpleasant scene in the parliament. The thing which has drawn my attention is regarding the seating arrangement of Sheikh Selim. He has been allocated a seat in the same row of the PM keeping a number of senior members of the AL behind. I guess the outgoing speaker did not intend to embarrass the PM by putting her relative in the front row. The Minister for foreign affairs is a lady and at the same time holding one of the most important portfolios. I think injustice has been done to her including countless others. I think the outgoing speaker might feel shame for his action which betrays his attempt to spoil the atmosphere in the parliament from the very first session.

I hope the present speaker

will listen to both sides and make necessary rearrangements of the seating arrangement in the parliament, keeping the principle of justice and rationality, which the outgoing speaker failed to observe. The AL must maintain a cool head to deal with the issue, giving no chance for the BNP cohorts to fabricate stories and mislead the people.

Reader
One-mail

Child welfare via 2009 calendar

The concept, the planning, the production, the distribution, the anticipated outcome and other aspects associated with 2009 UNICEF calendar, focusing on certain core aspects of child welfare, facilitated by a set of children's photographs can, among other things, be considered as a product of meaningful, intelligent and laudable effort on the part of UNICEF, Bangladesh, towards promoting the relevant dimensions of child welfare in the country - predominantly against the backdrop of the organization's present day vision and mission - unite for children. Congratulations!

It will not be out of place to mention here - the future success of UNICEF will depend on how best and quickest it could enhance its share in the development paradigm of Bangladesh - attracting and creating opportunities plus converting challenges into opportunities for the children of Bangladesh.

The last word: let us do more for the hungry, disadvantaged and poverty stricken children and the poor orphans of Bangladesh. Let us help Bangladesh to help Bangladeshi children. UNICEF - keep up the good work in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the world!

Dr. M.S. Haq
One-mail

A freedom fighter as the second Deputy Speaker

The ninth parliament has unanimously elected (Awami League-led alliance nominee) two freedom fighters - Advocate Abdul Hamid and Colonel (Retd) Shawkat Ali, as the Speaker and Deputy Speaker respectively, in its first sitting. Both are veteran parliamentarians. Colonel (Retd) Shawkat Ali - then a Captain of Pakistan Army and an accused in the 'Agartala Conspiracy' case (officially called 'State vs. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and others') of 1968 - is a historical figure of Bangladesh freedom struggle. Advocate Abdul Hamid was the youngest ever member of Pakistan National Assembly in 1970, at the age of 25. In fact, freedom fighter heroes have presented Bangladeshi people the right to vote and the parliament.

One hopes that the BNP-Jamaat-led opposition will also nominate a reputed freedom fighter as the proposed second Deputy Speaker should they wish to take up that post.

M. Emad
Oxford, UK

Humongous bureaucracy

The bureaucracy that Bangladesh has today was the brainchild of the British colonial masters. It was known as the 'Steel Frame' of British Raj. Rightly so, because it served the real purpose of the British, which was to extract taxes from the natives and plunder their wealth by all coercive means. Unfortunately, sixty years after their departure, this country is yet to get an efficient and effective civil service. The colonial footprint on the functioning of the administrative machinery is still very visible.

Politicisation, nepotism and unethical expansion are matters of grave concern too. According to a newspaper report, the authority has promoted 72 JS to the rank of Additional Secretary against 20 vacant posts. Bangladesh needs a development-oriented civil service, which will cater to the real need of the people. The public servants have to work with the people not above the people.

An overall reorganization of the bureaucracy should take place sooner rather than later.
AK Shamsuddin
Mississauga
Canada

Sadek Hossain Khoka Sarak?

Recently I noticed a plaque in Gobibagh area mentioning "Sadek Hossain Khoka Sarak". The road is just behind the Sonali Bank quarters and near the ancestral house of our mayor. It is difficult to believe that it is a road. After 9am it becomes very difficult to cross the road as it turns into a workshop/garage. They repair different types of vehicles in the middle of the road forgetting the sufferings of the people. Nobody dares protest.

Our Honourable Mayor occasionally visits this area, perhaps both as a mayor and as a permanent resident of this area, but he does not take any step to remove this public nuisance. It seems he does not notice the sufferings of the people. After 1/11 we heard these garages would be demolished by the city corporation and most of the unauthorised garage owners were ready to remove their garages from this locality. But due to unknown reasons finally this area has remained untouched although RAJUK has demolished many unauthorised constructions after 1/11. The caretaker government did not hesitate to demolish a beautiful building like the Rangs Bhaban, but they did not demolish the unauthorised garage from this locality.

I request the Honourable Mayor to look into the matter and remove the garages from this area.
N.A. Chowdhury
Gopibagh, Dhaka

Diabetes

The number of diabetics in our country is rising day by day. But all of us are not aware of this disease. The term 'diabetes' refers to a medical condition caused by a lack of

insulin, and insulin is a very essential chemical substance produced in the human body, which controls the amount of sugar in the blood. Diabetes deteriorates the injured part of the body, causes serious kidney problems and affects the eyesight. The primary symptoms are: producing lots of urine, feeling very thirsty, hungry and weak. The most important thing is that, a person may get this disease at any age of his life. So, it is high time we went for a medical check-up and kept a good discipline in life, especially by taking a diabetic diet and doing enough exercise every day.

S.M. Rumen

Naya Bazar, West Nasirabad
Pahartali, Chittagong

Slumdog Millionaire

What a shocking experience! I just watched Slumdog Millionaire, the movie that won 4 Golden Globe awards this year and also got 10 Academy Award nominations. Obviously my expectation was pretty high before I got in to the theatre. But after watching the movie I now doubt the nomination process of these Hollywood awards.

The original story of the movie by Vikas Swarup is unique and highly commendable. In my opinion, that unique story was murdered by the two directors, Danny Boyle and Loveleen Tandan. The Western viewers may be thrilled by the naked picturisation of Mumbai's dirty slums, gang wars, starvation, child prostitution, using children for begging. But the way they projected the whole thing was very unrealistic.

Most part of the movie is in Hindi and I noticed shockingly that they didn't put enough English sub-title as

required. I really don't know how a Westerner is going to enjoy this movie without having proper and accurate subtitle. The worst part of the movie was at the end when the main actor and the actress perform a pretty cheap group dance on the railway platform. We have seen better group dances in other Hindi movies. Overall, music was not bad but we got lot better creations from A.R. Rahman.

After watching the movie, I really felt bad for Amir Khan who has made marvellous movies like 'Lagan' and 'Tare Zamin Par'. Both the movies failed to get any Hollywood award. These movies are way better than Slumdog Millionaire and deserved better recognition. The famous South Indian director, Mani Ratnam's 'Bombay' or 'Roja' are also better choices in my opinion. Unfortunately, Amir Khan and Mani Ratnam have serious race issues. They are not white.

Imon Hussain
Maryland, USA

Missing mug shots

I have tried to get used to not seeing the photos of your esteemed journalists on top of their articles. I have reminded myself how much I respect the editorial board and sternly told myself that such authoritative figures MUST know best - but it is no good, I don't like it.

I have tried to analyse why I find the absence of the 'mug shots' so disturbing and I think it is a mixture of the depersonalisation of the views and the help it was to remember a name and a face together rather than separately. Besides, I cannot identify quickly enough the ones I want to read first, like Nury Vittachi!

Please put them back!
Angela Robinson
One-mail

Ekushey Book Fair

Ekushey Book Fair is the largest book fair in Bangladesh. With February comes the book fair. We wait for it the whole year. This fair reminds us of our language movement and the language martyrs - Salam, Barkat, Rafiq, Zabbar and many more - who sacrificed their

lives for our mother tongue Bangla in 1952. Ekushey Book Fair introduces us to the new and the old writers. We take vow standing here to save our language Bangla and to serve the nation.

Mahfuzur Rahman Manik
IER, University of Dhaka



PHOTO: DRINKNEWS

Street children

Children are the potential foundation for the future development of any country. Unfortunately, in Dhaka we find a lot of street children living or working on the street, although they are supposed to be at school for their own future as well for their nation. These children could be teachers, doctors, engineers, lawyers, police officers, judges...but they are killing their and the country's future only for their survival due to poverty, family disintegration, abandonment, neglect and social unrest.

There is no exact number of street children in Dhaka city. A Civil Society Forum for South Asia on Promoting and Protecting the Rights of the Street Children has estimated the number of street children in Bangladesh to be 4,45,226 (of which 75% are in Dhaka city); 53% boys, 47% girls (September, 2001). A survey conducted by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies in the year 2005 reveals that there are at least 6,70,000 homeless children in Bangladesh, and average daily income of street children is approx. USD\$0.55.

I suggest the following measures to reduce this problem:

- Bangladesh Govt. may take up projects for raising the awareness of the civil society and foreign donors so that they can participate in solving the problem.
- Govt./NGO/foreign donors may establish more shelter for their food, education, health.
- Govt./NGO/foreign donors may establish a bank for development of street children.

The number of the street children of Dhaka city is

increasing day by day. We should take proper initiatives to reduce this problem otherwise these street children will be burden for our nation.

Mohammad Abu Bashir
Advocate and human rights worker

Power base

The first free, fair and credible election, held in the country on December 29, has amply proved that the ultimate power is the "people", the days of election engineering, through various party fronts, and methods like using muscle power for capturing of polling centres, snatching of ballot boxes, creating panic among the voters, is out of date. The students' fronts, namely Student League, Jatiyotabadi Chhatra Dal, Shibir, could not do much to bring their sponsor parties to power, because the people, this time, could vote freely and express their individual opinions freely. I hope the political parties have realised where their power base is. It is the people and not a few student fronts of the AL that have brought the party to power.

The AL should handle the unruly students as the way they were handled by the CTG for the last 2 years. No matter what, the present government should deal with the present situation in the campuses and restore a peaceful atmosphere for study. A few should not be allowed to damage careers of the many in the name of student politics.

I urge upon the government to invite all parties, including the opposition, to sit together and find ways to bring peace in the educational institutions. We want the government to deal with this

problem with an iron hand by restricting the hands of those who are behind the unrest and are trying to undermine the process of change that people are waiting for so many years.

Shafiqul Islam, NY

Rohingya issue

According to an AFP report, 'Thailand says 126 asylum-seekers from the Burmese Rohingya minority, who were detained by the military a week ago, have been sent back out to sea.' The report also added, 'Last month almost 1,000 Rohingyas were detained and then towed out to sea by Thai security forces in boats with little food and no motors.' We want the Rohingya sufferings to come to an end. Such oppression on them must be stopped.

Habibur Rashid Ismail
Chittagong

Quality education

Once upon a time cheating was a common phenomenon in all public examinations. Students did not study in the class, rather they found out institutions where they could get facilities for copying and they made necessary arrangements regarding attending public examinations. Now the situation has changed tremendously. Guardians are interested to admit their kids in good institutions in Dhaka as well as all over the country. The new government should work in this regard so that all secondary schools could be centre of excellence and can catch the attention of the guardians.

I have visited a few countries in the world and found that it is the secondary schools which particularly attract foreign students, but in our country we haven't seen

Rickshaws



I would like to call upon the new government to take a decision on the fate of rickshaws. Rickshaws are not only environment-friendly, no fuel consumed, and cheap means of transportation, it is also a source of employment. Previously it was proposed on a number of occasions to construct a separate lane for rickshaws on different main roads of the metropolis. It is expected that the government would take necessary action to implement the above proposal.

Pushing rickshaws out of the main roads, on the plea of keeping the 'VIP roads' free, is not fair.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Chairman, Dept of Agricultural Extension & Information System, SAU, Dhaka