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PRIMARY EDUCATION IN A SHAMBLES- 2

One teacher for 55 students

**SURANJITH DEABNATH and RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN**

Lack of contact hours behind students and teachers at primary level is one of the main reasons behind poor quality education imparted at primary schools across the country.

Lack of enough -- and trained -- teachers and insufficient space at schools lead to the poor performance of children.

The government survey 'National Assessment of Pupils of Grades three and five-2006' published recently has revealed that around 70 percent of children who complete primary school cannot read, write or calculate properly.

According to international standards, contact hours between teachers and

pupils at primary level should be at least 900 hours annually. However, in Bangladesh children in classes I and II get only 500 hours annually to interact with their teachers while students from classes III to V get about 700 hours, according to statistics of the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE).

One of the main reasons behind lesser contact hours is double shifts run at 90 per cent of the government primary schools and a low teacher to student ratio. DPE statistics show that the average teacher-student ratio is 1:55.

Private research organisations claim an even lower ratio of 1:85.

These factors all pull down the standard of education imparted at primary level.

The Second Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP-II) recommends that at least 90,000 new teachers are recruited while 60,000 new classrooms are built to enable the existing schools to accommodate all students in a single shift by the year 2010.

Renowned academician Prof Dr Zillur Rahman Siddique said, "The future of the nation is dark because primary students lack adequate academic knowledge."

He identified unnecessary holidays at primary schools as another factor lowering contact hours.

Other experts also suggest that the government curtail these "unnecessary" holidays at schools to increase the contact hours between students and teachers.

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Students of Beelkajuli Pechibari High School in Dhunat upazila of Bogra get their lessons on the porch as the school does not have enough classrooms.

PHOTO: HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU

3 Chinese crew found dead in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Three Chinese crew members of a tanker laden with crude palm oil were killed Friday after they fell into an air-tight tank in their ship near the Myanmar coast in the Bay of Bengal.

The Panama flag carrier MT Zhong YE-6 was heading towards Chittagong Port with 6,750 tonnes of crude palm oil from Indonesia.

The bodies of chief officer Tan Weifeng, 37, third engineer Zhoo Ling Sheng, 41, and

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Noble initiative from Nanok

He meets people to solve problem

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It was a good sign reflected in the behaviour of state minister for LGRD Jahangir Kabir Nanok yesterday as he listened to various city problems and gave directives instantly to resolve those issues for ensuring his accountability before the people as a lawmaker.

Such a striking event took place at Suchona Community Centre at the city's Mohammadpur area where the lawmaker replied to various queries on his poll pledges and resolved several local problems instantly and gave assurance of resolving others immediately.

Officials from government's service providers, including WASA, PDB, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and local police, at

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4 Gaza tunnels bombed

AP, AFP, Gaza City

The Israeli military says its warplanes have attacked four smuggling tunnels and a weapons depot in Gaza.

The military says the strikes late Friday came in response to rocket fire from Gaza at southern Israel. Gaza militants fired two rockets earlier Friday, but caused no damage or injuries.

The latest cross-border exchange came just days before Israel's general election

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Thousands of civilians trapped in Lanka war

Govt media, aid groups for siding with Tigers

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka yesterday accused international media and aid groups of siding with the Tamil Tigers, a day after an angry mob stoned the offices of the international Red Cross in the capital Colombo.

Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse said the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were infiltrating relief agencies and news organisations and disseminating false information.

"There is a well-orchestrated campaign to discredit the government and the security

forces and bring pressure on it to declare a ceasefire by LITE agents who have infiltrated international organisations and media institutions," Rajapakse told the state-run Daily News.

Rajapakse said people allegedly in the pay of the Tigers were "fabricating stories to invent a scenario of a human catastrophe and are disseminating false information."

The defence secretary's comments came as the military captured more bases from the rebels and said it had bombed the main hide-out of the top Sea Tiger leader, Soosai.

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Bangladeshi businessman killed in SA

A CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

Robbers killed a Bangladeshi stationary shop owner in Johannesburg, South Africa, Thursday and looted valuables from the shop.

The robbers swooped on Iqbal Haji's Iqbal Stationery in the suburbs of Johannesburg around 10:30pm (local time). They stabbed Iqbal to death, his elder brother Jasim Uddin Bhuiyan said.

Iqbal, son of Shamsul Haque of 98, Uttar Kajalpar of

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Road blocked over death of student

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several hundreds agitating students of Mirpur Bangla College yesterday put up a barricade on Mirpur road in front of it in the city's Darussalam area for one hour demanding compensation for a fellow student who was killed in a road accident on Friday.

They also demanded immediate arrest and trial of the driver of the CNG-run auto rickshaw, which crushed Mithu, an HSC examinee of the college, to death on the road in the area.

The students blocked the road at about 1.30 am and later started demonstrations on it, causing severe traffic congestion on the busy road.

On information, local MP Aslamul Haq along with police rushed in and assured the

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Bats hang on to the branches of a tree in Ramna Park in the capital. Trees are vanishing fast in the city.

PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

RU tense over Shibir showdown

RU CORRESPONDENT

Islami Chhatra Shibir activists along with outsiders staged a big showdown on the Rajshahi University (RU) campus yesterday to celebrate the 32nd founding anniversary of the student organisation, creating panic among general students and teachers.

Witnesses said RU Shibir activists and outsiders, including students from schools, colleges and madrasas, brought out a procession at about 10:30am and chanted slogans against Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), student wing of ruling Awami League.

The showdown created panic as Shibir activists on around 100 motorbikes paraded different streets on the campus to show their might. Shibir men also used truck and loud speakers in their procession, which they brought out violating the 22-point action policy.

Earlier on January 17 this year, leaders of different political parties, heads of educational institutions and student organisations of Rajshahi at a meeting agreed to abide by the 22-point action policy to keep the educational institutions in Rajshahi city free from student unrest and criminal activities.

The 22-point action policy has made it obligatory to take permission from the institution head before holding procession and meeting.

Speaking at a rally near administrative building, Shibir leaders later threatened to resist BCL if the BCL tries to attack Shibir men across the country.

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4 mortar shells seized

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

The Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) members seized four mortar shells from a hilly area under Thanchi upazila in Bandarban on Friday evening.

Acting on a tip-off, BDR personnel raided the hilltop, thickly covered with trees, near Boro Modak BDR camp and seized the ammunition, security force sources said.

The mortar shells were taken to the BDR zonal headquarters at Boli Para under

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Housewife succumbs to burn injuries

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A teenage housewife succumbed to burn injuries yesterday after fighting for life for seven days at the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

The victim, Sadia Yeasmin Tania, 18, was shifted to the DMCH from Rangpur Medical College Hospital on February 4 with severe burns on more

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DETAINED POLITICIANS Rights body may inquire into specific complaints

UNB, Dhaka

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Chairman Justice Amirul Kabir Chowdhury yesterday said enquiries would be held if there are specific complaints of human rights violation against former ministers, MPs and others while under detention during the immediate past caretaker government's rule.

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National Poetry Festival starts on Feb 18

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 23rd National Poetry Festival will be held on February 18, 19 and 20 with the slogan 'joy jonotar, joy kobitar,' meaning 'victory to the people, victory to poetry'.

Jatiya Kabita Parishad (JKP) will organise the festival on Dhaka University Central Library premises, said the organisers yesterday in a media conference in the university's Teachers Students Centre.

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Prayer Timing		
February 8		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-05
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-15	4-30
Maghrib	5-52	5-56
Esha	7-15	7-45
Source: Islamic Foundation		

Govt asked to make Sangsad effective

Ashrafu tells roundtable govt sincere to fulfil people's desire; opposition to be judged by performance, not where it sits

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government should take steps to make parliament effective, increase quality of education, establish rule of law and prevent corruption to fulfil its pledge to build a "digital Bangladesh", speakers said at a roundtable yesterday.

They also demanded actions for rooting out terrorism and vandalism, restraining bureaucracy, developing agriculture and culture, decentralising the administration and strengthening the local government system.

The daily Prothom Alo organised the roundtable styled "Expectations to the New Government" at its conference room yesterday.

In response to the speakers' demands, Awami League (AL) spokesman and Local

Government and Rural Development (LGRD) Minister Syed Ashrafu Islam said the government is sincere to work hard to fulfil the people's desires and change Bangladesh.

He said the government will prioritise establishment of the rule of law and justice, strengthening of the local government system and improvement of the sectors of education, agriculture, energy, health, culture and environment.

Syed Ashraf said he has no objection if all 29 lawmakers of the BNP sit in the first row in parliament. "The opposition will be judged by its performance, not where it sits in parliament."

He said good governance and the big change will not come until war criminals, the killers of

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Weekend sees high book sale

NAJMU ALAM NOBIN

The Amar Ekushey Boi Mela drew a large number of youths and children on the weekly holiday yesterday and saw a high sale of books in last two days.

On an average, six out of every ten visitors in the queue were young and children. The long queue of book-lovers reached Shahbagh from the Bangla Academy gate yesterday.

Publishers and writers said an increasing number of youths and children are visiting the fair this year.

Bangla Academy Director General (DG) Syed Muhammad Shahed told reporters at a press briefing that sales of books increased in the stalls in last two days due to visit by a large number

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A senior citizen checks out books showcased at a stall at the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela yesterday.

PHOTO: SHAWKAT JAMIL