

Technical school to be set up in each upazila

Says education minister

UNB, Khulna

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid yesterday said one technical school would be set up in each upazila to convert the country's huge population into resources.

"We need to work together to build an illiteracy- and poverty-free Bangladesh, as we've got a huge population," he told a reception accorded to talented citizens at Shaheed Hadith Park in the afternoon.

He said: "No nation can make progress unless her talented citizens are honoured," he

said

The minister said the next generation of the country would be inspired by the personalities honoured today.

Khulna City Corporation (KCC) has honoured 20 talented personalities with Mayor Awards in recognition of their outstanding contributions in their respective fields.

State Minister for Labour and Employment Begum Munnun Sufian and former Speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali attended the function with Mayor Talukder Abdul Khaleq in the chair.



Awami League leader Col (ret) Zahid Farooque Shamim inaugurates the 7th International Trade Fair-2009 on the premises of Marine Workshop in Barisal yesterday.

BDR KILLINGS

Special prayers held in Rangpur

BSS, Rangpur

Special prayers were offered at the mosques of Rangpur after the Juma prayers yesterday seeking divine blessings for the souls of the martyred Army officials.

The Imams and musallies sought divine blessings of the Almighty for eternal peace of the departed souls of martyred Army officers, who were brutally killed at BDR headquarters by the disgruntled BDR jawans. They also prayed for the family members of the martyred Army officials.

Tk 15 lakh Aussie grant for 2 NGOs

METRO DESK

Australia has donated Tk 15 lakh to two NGOs working for ensuring healthcare and safe drinking water.

Australian High Commissioner Dr Justin Lee yesterday handed over the cheques to Sujit Areng, executive director of ABMS Christian Hospital, and Md Mizanur Rahman, executive director of the Integrated Development Organisation (IDO), at his residence on Thursday, says a press release.

The ABMS Christian Hospital has been working with the Garoes since 1964 at Halaughat. From the donation, Tk 8 lakh will be used to build a multipurpose hall for the hospital's nursing department to conduct training and other activities. The nursing department is currently conducting its activities on the hospital premises.

IDO is a Jessore-based NGO that will use Australian assistance to install 52 rain-water tanks at poor households of Gopsena village at Sagardari union.

The area located in southern Bangladesh is highly arsenic contaminated. IDO will also raise awareness among the community about the benefits of harvesting rainwater for safe drinking and cooking purposes.

The funding was provided under the Australian High Commissioner's Direct Aid Programme (DAP). DAP is used to support small projects in Bangladesh with a particular focus on human rights and poverty alleviation.

Dr Lee said he was very glad to support these two NGOs.

He noted DAP projects this year would total Tk 4.29 million. Overall, Australia's development cooperation with Bangladesh totals AS\$2 million in 2008-09.

Shibir demands judicial probe into massacre at BDR HQ

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Islami Chhatra Shibir, student organisation of Jamaat-e-Islami, yesterday demanded formation of an all-party parliamentary inquiry committee and a judicial inquiry committee to probe the massacre of army officers during the mutiny at the BDR headquarters.

At a press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity auditorium, the Shibir leaders also protested attacks on Shibir workers allegedly by the activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL).



Members of Bulbul Lalitakala Academy place wreaths in front of a gate of the BDR headquarters at Pilkhana in the city yesterday in memory of the army officers who were brutally killed during the BDR mutiny.

Artists flee Pakistan's Swat valley to escape fanatics' threats

AFP, Karachi

Mohammad Shahid scrapes together a living in a city slum by painting birds, flowers, animals and celebrity portraits onto minibuses -- and vows never to return to the horrors of Swat valley.

After pro-Taliban vigilantes beat and threatened him at gunpoint, he swapped the green pastures and sweeping mountains of his birthplace for the concrete jungle of Pakistan's smoggy metropolis of Karachi on the Gulf.

It was heart-breaking to leave the idyll of his youth, he said, but there was no choice.

"I had to come here because there was no other chance for me or my family to survive," said 45-year-old Shahid.

The memories of the terrifying campaign waged by Islamist hardliners to enforce sharia law are still fresh for Shahid, and no fledgling truce between the government and those who chased him out will persuade him to return.

"I'm a painter, an artist. I can't do anything else to earn a living. The Taliban won't allow people like us to do our work, which saw my family suffer."

"What would I do if return in these conditions? They will remain in control of the region and no one will have freedom to work at will."

The one-time ski resort became a battlefield. Rotar blades from helicopter gunships sliced through the once-clear skies. Warplanes roared overhead.

Anything deemed "un-Islamic" was banned. Opponents were beheaded.

more than 120 girls' schools were bombed, entertainment was outlawed.

Shahid said he used to make a good living painting landscapes, birds, Pakistani and Indian film stars, pavement caricatures and portraits, which were popular with tourists who flocked to the once-friendly and tolerant valley.

But then the fanatics came, the tourists left and life changed for those who made a living from the arts.

Suspected Taliban militants kidnapped and murdered a dancer, Shabana, who ignored warnings to quit her profession. Her bullet-riddled body was dumped on the main roundabout of Green Chowk in the main town of Mingora last December.

One after another, artists, dancers and singers renounced their profession or fled to more liberal cities such as Karachi, Lahore or Islamabad.

Those who flee are haunted by beatings and bombings --

One day, Shahid said, gun-toting vigilantes walked into his studio.

"They beat and insulted me for doing something that they said was forbidden by religion," Shahid said.

"From now on, don't paint creatures," Shahid quoted one of them as saying, "otherwise you'll suffer an unprecedented punishment."

Shahid rang his brother, a construction worker in Karachi. "He asked me to leave immediately. I took my wife and four children, caught a bus from Mingora and came here."

He rented a place in Karachi's western Baldia Colony slum, found a job painting trucks and buses, and put his children in school.

Shahid said the humidity and pollution of Karachi frequently make his children ill, but he insists he will never again put himself at the mercy of the "unpredictable" Islamists in Swat -- where the government has agreed to enforce sharia, or religious law.

"One's life will still be in danger no matter what guarantee they give," Shahid said. "I don't want to disturb my daughter's studies. She's in school here. The militants could reverse their pledge any moment."

The United States, which puts South Asia on the frontline of the "war on terror," has branded extremists who make their base in northwest Pakistan a direct threat to the country, to neighbouring Afghanistan, and to the security of the US and other nations.

Yet the net of Islamist extremism is spreading across the northwest, where Taliban and Al-Qaeda extremists have infiltrated the border with Afghanistan to create de facto fiefdoms in semi-autonomous tribal areas.

US drones have rained dozens of missiles on areas they believe to be extremist strongholds, and Pakistan's military has spent months fighting the Taliban.

Even in Peshawar, the bustling northwestern trading city close to the Afghan border, artists have come under threat from the extremists.

Nishtar Hall, the only theatre in Peshawar, has been closed for six years.

Militants kidnapped Alam Zeb Mujahid, a famous Pashto comedian, from the upscale Hayatabad neighbourhood in January, held him for five days and let him go only after he renounced all drama and film work.

Haroon Bacha, a renowned Pashto singer, left the northwestern town of Swabi for the United States when militants demanded he stop singing.

"I started getting threats from the Taliban about a year ago. I

was told to stop singing. There were letters, there were phone calls and there were text messages," he wrote to AFP in an email message from Washington.

"They used to come to my home very frequently, telling me to stop music or I would be killed."

CD and music shops, Internet cafes and barbers who shave beards -- all have been targeted and many shut down. Some of those brave enough to stay open have hired private security.

And for many of those who have left, the bombings and beatings stay with them.

"My little children still scream when they see planes flying. Children run for shelter in Swat when they see planes or helicopters," says Hashim Khan, a 37-year-old labourer who lives near Karachi airport.

"They saw planes bombing in Swat. It still haunts their dreams. I saw bodies lying near Green Chowk, the roundabout where Shabana was dumped."

"The area once symbolised our city's beauty but now it has become 'khooni' (bloody) Chowk," he said.

South Korea, Indonesia to boost cooperation

AFP, Jakarta

South Korea and Indonesia agreed yesterday to cooperate more closely on a range of issues including defence, the global financial crisis and alternative sources of energy.

South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak and Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono signed several agreements after talks at the state palace here on the last stop of Lee's three-nation tour, which included Australia and New Zealand.

"This meeting will make a big contribution to bilateral and international cooperation," Lee told reporters after the talks, speaking in Korean.

"We are facing a world economic crisis. Both countries have had economic difficulties but we will work hand-in-hand in the future," he added.

The two leaders signed a memorandum of understanding to "cooperate more actively" in security and defence issues, Lee said.

Both countries are eager to build economic and defence ties and boost cooperation through the Asean+3 forum -- the Association of Southeast Asian Nations as well as China, Japan and

South Korea.

Indonesia's trade with South Korea has been soaring in recent years, almost doubling in value in 2008 to 20 billion dollars, Yudhoyono said.

"We are committed to maintaining investment cooperation between both countries despite the current global economic crisis," he said.

"Apart from trade and investment cooperation, we also discussed cooperation in other sectors including information technology,

alternative energy, defence and security, Indonesian workers (in South Korea) and tourism."

Indonesia is the second-largest supplier of liquefied natural gas to South Korea, which is the seventh-biggest country of destination for Indonesian non-oil and gas exports.

Yudhoyono said the countries had a long history of cooperation in energy, oil and gas but "we agreed that investment and trade in this sector should be improved."

Jeweller found dead in Joypurhat hotel

UNB, Joypurhat

A jeweller was found dead in a hotel in the town on Thursday night.

The deceased was identified as Farid Uddin, owner of a jewellery shop and a resident of Biswaspara area of the town.

Sources said Farid's friend Shipon called him out of his shop on Wednesday noon. Later,

Shipon came to the shop alone and asked Shamsul, an employee of the jewellery shop, to give him the cash and jewellery.

Shipon also gave his mobile phone to Shamsul to talk with Farid to verify his instruction about money and jewellery.

The employee later gave him cash Tk 4 lakh and six tolas of gold. But Farid went missing since then. A case was filed in this connection.

Later, his body was found in a room of Hotel Purobi in the town at 10:00pm on Thursday.

Police detained hotel manager Komol Kumer for questioning. Shipon went into hiding.

Two commit suicide in Nilphamari

UNB, Nilphamari

Two people, including a housewife, allegedly committed suicide in separate incidents in Domar upazila in the district yesterday.

Police said Mina Rani, 22, daughter of Kampan Nath, hanged herself at Harinchara village at about 10:00am.

Locals said Mina was married off with Ramonikanta Barman of the village barely a year ago. But Ramonikanta deserted her one month ago, prompting her to commit suicide.

In another incident, Abu Taleb, 25, a deranged youth and also father of two sons, took poison at Uttar Gonnati village at about 9:00am.

He was rushed to the Upazila Health Complex where he died soon after admission.

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