



WITH TODAY'S ISSUE
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POWER, MORE POWER

Turkey's Erdogan cites Hitler's Germany as example of effective government

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'INAPPROPRIATE ANALOGY'

George Lucas apologises for referring to Disney as "white slavers"

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New books, big smiles

4.4cr schoolkids start getting free textbooks on first day of New Year

WASIM BIN HABIB

For schoolchildren all over the country, the first morning of the New Year came with the refreshing smell of fresh textbooks.

As they went to their respective schools braving the morning chill yesterday, they each were handed over a new set of textbooks at all primary and secondary schools.

Beaming with joy, some students held the books up in the air, while some were flipping through the pages after receiving them with a feeling of sheer happiness written on their faces.

"I am very happy to get my new textbooks. I will read the Bangla book first as I love poetry and stories most," said Ipshta Naznin, a class VI student at Dhanmondi Government Girls' High School in Dhaka.

Ishan Ahmed, student of Mirpur National Government Primary School, could hardly contain his excitement. "We got our results [of primary terminal exams] yesterday [Thursday], and are getting new books today. We did not have to wait for a single day."

The exuberance of students turned every school ground into a veritable carnival yesterday, the first day of the new academic session and the much-awaited "Textbook Festival Day" as the government started distributing free textbooks among the students like the last six years.

This year, the government will provide 33.38 crore copies of textbooks to 4.44 crore students of pre-primary, primary, secondary and technical education schools and ebtedai and dakhil madrasas.


In order to solve the textbook crisis that had persisted for many years, the

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Jubilant students of different government schools holding up fresh textbooks on the first day of the New Year during the textbook festival at the capital's Government Laboratory High School yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



TOP QUOTE

"We've turned education into business. This institution [Dhaka University] is a revered educational institution. But the esteemed teachers of this institution are more interested in giving classes in private universities."

CHIEF JUSTICE **SK SINHA**
ABOUT THE DECLINING QUALITY OF EDUCATION AT A PROGRAMME AT DU YESTERDAY

Development up, democracy down

SHAKHAWAT LITON

It is nothing but an air of optimism for the present and the future if the major development activities --both at planning stage and under implementation by the Awami League-led government are considered. But the state of democracy in the country tells of another tale, not so happy or bright.

One of the most courageous moves by the government has been the kicking off the construction of the long cherished Padma Bridge, the largest ever project to be implemented with the country's own resources.

The bridge will be connecting 21 Southern and Western districts with the capital, changing the lives of the people in those areas and boosting the national economy as well.

Three major power projects, the Rooppur nuclear power, and two conventional ones, one at Rampal and the other at Matarbari will contribute to new industrialisation and reduce people's suffering

from load shedding.

The terrible traffic congestions should ease up following the implementation of the other mega projects like the Metro rail, the Maghbazar-Mouchak flyover, the Elevated Expressway, the Shantinagar to Keraniganj flyover in the city, expansion of Dhaka-Chittagong and Dhaka-Mymensingh highways, conversion of Dhaka-Chittagong rail line to double track and construction of the Karanaphuli tunnel in Chittagong.

The government deserves credit for these mega projects in addition to routine development activities-- both at planning stage and under implementation.

However, the other side—the state of democracy that largely determines people's satisfaction and happiness—does not look bright for various reasons. The government has taken little effort to put the wheels of democracy on the right track and to improve the quality of governance.

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Voting rights snatched using admin

Says Khaleda on municipal polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday alleged that the government snatched people's votes in Wednesday's municipal polls by using the administration, law enforcers, and presiding officers.

"The government has used the administration, law enforcers, and presiding officers like its party men by threatening them in different ways to work for them," said Khaleda.

The BNP chief made the remarks while addressing a meeting at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, in the capital. The programme was organised by BNP's student wing

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2015: Bad time for civic, political rights

Improvements in social, economic indicators, says ASK report on state of human rights

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Human rights situation in Bangladesh worsened on civic and political fronts last year despite improvement in some socio-economic indicators, according to a report of Ain o Salish Kendra.

"The overall human rights situation in 2015 was alarming," ASK Executive Director advocate Sultana Kamal told reporters at Dhaka Reporters Unity while presenting the Review of Bangladesh's Human Rights Situation, 2015.

The ASK prepared it based on media reports, dividing the human rights situation in two categories -- civic and political rights,

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN BANGLADESH 2015

AREA	2014	2015
Deaths in political violence	147	151
Extra-judicial killings, deaths in custody	128	192
Deaths in mass beating	123	135
Sexual harassment against women	146	224
Rape of women and children	707	846
Killing of children	90	133

and economic, social and cultural rights.

It mentions that the UN Food and Agriculture Organization termed Bangladesh the most successful country in South Asia in the areas of agriculture and food security. Bangladesh has also been recognised as a lower-middle income country due to an increase in per capita income.

Besides, implementation of the land boundary agreement with India is a notable progress, says the report.

Some positive developments on civic and political fronts include the progress in

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Dried up Teesta hits livelihood

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

"We used to have bumper crops here," says farmer Mahir Uddin of Char Kalmati village in Lalmonirhat. "The Teesta River used to flow year-round but nowadays there's not enough water in winter for optimal agriculture."

Across the villages situated on Teesta river shoals in Lalmonirhat, the outlook is similarly gloomy. Rachima Begum, a farmer of Gobordhan village located on a shoal in Aditmari upazila says because they need to access underground irrigation water by machine, farming has become less profitable.

"The people of the shoals need never face poverty if the river had water year-round," she says.

The Teesta, which can be up to 2.5 kilometres wide, is currently reduced to a width of about 70 metres, with water only knee-deep.

"The river is all shoal and no water," locals complain, as they describe how they can walk for miles along sand deposit stretches which now connect many island communities to the mainland.

It's bad news for boatmen like Noor Hossain of Char Parulia village in Hatibandha upazila who finds himself unemployed entirely. "It was unthinkable only a few years ago," he says, "that people could easily cross the River Teesta by foot here."

His colleague Abdul Gony, of the same village, blames the unilateral construction of the river barrage across the Teesta at India's Gazaldoba, around 100 kilometres upstream of the Teesta Barrage Irrigation project at Dalia in Lalmonirhat's Hatibandha upazila, for the poor river condition.

Over one lakh people live on 95 shoals in five upazilas in the district and with boats impractical they are often compelled to walk several kilometres across sand stretches to

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

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People carrying loads on rickshaw vans or on their shoulders, inset, through the dry river bed of the Teesta in Lalmonirhat. A dried-up Teesta in winter not only affects fishing and farming but also makes communications difficult for people. The photos were taken recently.