

New books, big smiles

FROM PAGE 1

government in 2009 decided to distribute textbooks to students at free of cost. Since then, it has distributed more than 189.21 crore copies of textbooks to primary and secondary students.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid inaugurated the festival at Government Laboratory School in the capital around 9:30am yesterday. He handed over the books to visually impaired student Tasneem Binte Rashed and 13 other students of class VI to IX from different institutions. He also released balloons along with the officials of his ministry and the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB).

The school premises wore a colourful atmosphere with several thousand students of six education institutions attending the programme. Sitting before a podium wrapped with red and green clothes, they held festoons and colourful balloons in one hand and textbooks on the other.

A cultural programme was also held to mark the occasion.

Greeting the students, the education minister said there was no instance in the world where the government printed and dispatched such a huge volume of books to the students of all education institutions in rural areas on time.

"We are pleased to see the students happily returning home with a set of new books each," Nahid added.

He also said when the government had started free distribution of books in 2010, the number of students was around

2.5 crore. Now the number had jumped up to more than 4.44 crore and the number of books had also risen by this time, he added.

Each of the books cost Tk 19.24, he mentioned.

The minister urged the students to concentrate on their studies to get the best possible education and take the country to its desired height.

After the speeches of the minister and other officials, the books were handed over to the students.

All the children were jubilant after getting books from a minister. They played drums and waved placards and balloons. Parents and teachers too joined the ceremony.

Meanwhile, Primary and Mass Education Minister Mostafizur Rahman inaugurated the distribution of primary books at Mirpur National Government Primary School by releasing colourful balloons and pigeons.

"Our children will be able to make a country based on knowledge," he said.

After the inauguration, he talked to students and wanted to know their aspirations about the books.

Asked about the standard of printing, Mostafizur Rahman told reporters that a high-powered committee with his ministry was working on the issue.

Students of more than a dozen primary schools in Mirpur area joined the festival.

"I will flip through the pages of my books when I reach home," said Abrar Hossain, a class-V student of Mirpur National Government Primary School.



Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid in the midst of cheering students after inaugurating the textbook festival on the premises of Government Laboratory High School in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Hamid misses his days beyond Bangabhaban

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Being the president he enjoys all-out security protocol everywhere and lives in comfort that many would envy.

But, President Abdul Hamid gets bored living in this luxury.

"I don't feel comfortable because it seems I'm living here without freedom," said Hamid.

In a recent interview with BBC Bangla, Hamid, who holds the highest office of the country, shared how he was passing his days in Bangabhaban.

The President lives in a palatial home - Bangabhaban - full of officials and staffs. Wherever he goes, he gets extensive security.

He was elected Member of Parliament seven-times and had been involved in politics for about 55 years. Hamid has passed most of his life in the Haor area of Kishoreganj.

He does not deny that his days are comfortable but despite that Hamid feels he has lost the freedom to move about freely.

The President said, "I'm living in such a big mansion. It seems like a place fit for a king. I live in luxury and comfort, which is true."

But, the President could not go anywhere he wished and that is something he found most problematic.

Hamid said, "I feel there has been a huge disruption in the rhythm of my life. That is, if I wanted to go somewhere or meet someone or do something, I cannot."

He finds there is a big difference



between asking people to see him at the Bangabhaban and going out to meet them.

The President also feels uncomfortable when traffic is blocked off for his journey.

Expressing frustration over the security protocol he has to go through, he said a critical patient can die in an ambulance while the traffic is held for him to pass.

On the other hand, the President believes he has fully carried out his constitutional role in the last three years.

During several political crises earlier, members of the civil society have asked the president to do something to resolve the problems.

Hamid said the constitution defined the role of president and he could not do anything beyond that. The parliament has to decide what the president's role should be.

"If anything needs to be added in the constitution, lawmakers will do it on the basis of the discussion with the people irrespective of party and view. The President then will have to follow it," he said.

He said during the 2014 election, he had discussions with the then opposition leader Khaleda Zia and members of the civil society.

He later informed the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of their views.

"That is, if I didn't shy away from carrying out my duty set by the constitution. I have performed it with honesty," he added.

Education turned into business

Says chief justice

DU CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha yesterday said education had been turned into business.

Addressing a programme at Dhaka University, he said, "We have 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."

Stressing the declining standard of education, he said a moral degradation "is visible among teachers, students and officials in recent times".

The chief justice came up with the remarks while speaking as the chief guest at a programme marking the reunion of Jagannath Hall Alumni Association at the Teachers Students Centre auditorium of Dhaka University.

He urged teachers to teach students thoroughly and intensively. Recalling the mass killing of DU students by the Pakistani forces in 1971, he said students of no other dormitory were massacred so bloodily as Jagannath Hall in 1971.

Veteran Awami League leader Suranjit Sengupta MP, DU VC AAMS Arefin Siddique, Prof Ajoy Roy, lawmaker Pankaj Devnath, Jagannath Hall Provost Asim Sarker, among others, also spoke at the programme.

Alumni members of several batches of the hall attended the programme along with their families.

50 percent books yet to reach Pirojpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

Although the government yesterday started distributing textbooks across the country, around 50 percent books of primary level have not yet reached Pirojpur.

The district has so far got 3,44,956 copies of new textbooks against the demand for 6,63,750 copies for around 1,58,242 students of 1,221 primary schools, according to district primary education office.

It means that around 48 percent textbooks are yet to arrive in the district, causing anxiety among the teachers.

In Pirojpur Sadar upazila, primary school teachers have complained of receiving books only for class-III and class-V.

"We don't know how we will manage the students as we have got books only for two classes," said a headmaster of a government primary school, wishing not to be named.

The teachers also alleged that the quality of the textbooks they have got is substandard.

Sikder Atikur Rahman Jewel, Pirojpur Sadar upazila primary education officer, admitted an inadequate supply of new textbooks to his upazila.

"We've got books only for class-III and class-V and distributed them among the teachers," he said.

"After receiving the rest of the books, we will send them to the schools immediately," said the education officer.

Development up, democracy down

FROM PAGE 1

Electoral democracy has been roughshod over in the last two years, reducing people's right to choose their representatives in free and fair elections.

Crucial political institutions including the parliament, anti-corruption commission and human rights commission have been hobbled.

Police and bureaucracy have been politicised extensively and in many cases their partisan handling of issues have made things worse.

There is a severe deficiency of democracy in the major political parties, particularly the AL and BNP - the two archrivals that have been governing the country in turns since 1991.

Therefore, rule of law that ensures human rights and fundamental freedoms necessary for real democracy is getting weaker day by day.

Accountability of the government is absent to a large extent which is contradictory to democratic norms.

The overall situation also raises crucial questions over the transparency of the huge expenditures for major development works and apprehension about the sustainability of economic progress.

Yet, the economy is doing well. Bangladesh has become a lower middle income country through higher Gross National Income. This has made citizens optimistic. It makes them firmly believe that the country will soon be elevated to the status of a middle income country.

In spite of that, political uncertainty still remains a major obstacle to the restoration of investors' confidence discouraging fresh investment despite huge liquidity lying idle in the banks.

The just concluded year began with political turmoil. The BNP-led alliance enforced countrywide non-stop blockade from January 6 protesting the government's move to foil their programme to observe the first anniversary of the one-sided parliamentary election as a day of "democracy killing."

Widespread violence erupted around the country lasting for around three months during the blockade coupled with frequent hartals. More than one hundred people were killed; most of them were innocent and burnt alive due to fire-bombing of vehicles.

The law enforcement agencies took stern actions on the opposition alliance's leaders and activists. The movement failed to oust the government. The political arena remained calm for the rest of the year after the failure when the opposition called off the agitation program and did not wage any further movement.

But the law enforcement agencies

were tough against dissenting voices.

Take some examples. In October, police attacked the Democratic Left Alliance leaders and activists who launched a three-day road march from the National Press Club towards Sundarbans protesting the construction of a coal-based power plant in the Sundarbans area. Police clubbed the marchers twice at Manikganj and at Magura city.

Last May cops used brute force to drive away demonstrators trying to encircle the Dhaka police headquarters over the police's failure to arrest suspects for molesting women at the Dhaka University campus on April 14. Police freely used clubs, rifle butts, water cannon, and teargas as protesters gathered near the DMP office.

In September, police attacked students who took to the streets protesting an alleged leak of question papers for medical college admission tests. They were demanding a fresh admission test. Police broke up their human chain and detained some students.

Private universities' students who waged a successful and peaceful protest last year against the government's decision to impose VAT on their tuition fees, faced police attacks at the beginning of their action.

One of the most important safeguards to democracy, freedom of the press, has faced very serious challenges this year.

Journalists came under attack and faced obstruction while on duty during the elections to three city corporations and municipalities.

The government has moved to control media by making registration mandatory for online newspapers in addition to the previous National Broadcasting Policy of 2014 which was designed to supervise and regulate programs and news of private television channels.

Free thinkers came under brutal attacks last year. Four bloggers and one publisher were brutally murdered, creating a chilling effect on free expression of opinions.

Many in the media as well as free thinkers now say they are working under self-censorship. Freedom of press and expression are facing new challenges due to the absence of a functional democracy.

Incidents of forced disappearance, extra-judicial killing and culture of impunity have also severely damaged human rights and good governance in the country.

BACKGROUND OF PRESENT SITUATION

A long period of collective failure to build institutions for a functional democracy has brought the country to this unhappy state.

The birth of Bangladesh was deeply rooted in the democratic aspirations of the Bangalis but the people have never experienced the essence of democracy.

In the past, most of the efforts were focused on only electoral democracy; meaning holding free and fair elections only. But holding only free and fair election is just one of the elements in democracy that make it functional.

A true democracy empowers ordinary citizens as according to political scientists, whether a democracy is effective or not is based on not only the extent to which civil and political rights exist on paper but also the degree to which those rights are respected.

After a devastating war, Bangladesh began its journey as a new nation. But within only three years, parliamentary democracy was discarded and one-party rule was introduced in January 1975.

Within a few months after that the country was put under martial law. Military and autocratic rulers were at the helm of the country until 1990. During this long period free elections were also completely absent. Institutions like the parliament, EC and professional bureaucracy and police that play significant roles in consolidating democracy were not allowed to grow. There were however many infrastructure development works under these regimes.

After the fall of the autocratic regime in December 1990, electoral democracy was restored with a free and fair parliamentary election in February 1991. But absence of democratic institutions and lack of efforts to build them afresh appeared as major obstacles to have a functional democracy in the country. Within five years, therefore, the electoral democracy collapsed resulting in a controversial election in February 1996.

The caretaker government was introduced in March 1996 following violent street agitations that sent a severe blow to the country's economy for months. Free and fair parliamentary elections were held in June 1996, 2001 and 2008.

But again electoral democracy took a hit with the holding of a one-sided election in January 2014. It was further damaged in subsequent elections in upazila parishads in 2014 and three city corporation polls in 2015 and in the latest municipality polls.

History shows it is easy to establish an electoral democracy and it has been proved in many countries. But in the absence of other democratic institutions to support and sustain the best form of government invented so far, electoral democracy cannot last long. Bangladesh has become an example of it.

Post-polls violence kills 1 in Trishal

16 hurt in Chandpur as two factions of ruling Awami League clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

In an apparent post-election violence, a Jubo League man was hacked to death in the district's Trishal municipality last night.

The victim, Md Parvez, was a member of Jubo League unit in ward-3, party sources said.

The 23-year-old was loyal to defeated AL mayor candidate Jahidul Islam Sarker and was allegedly attacked by supporters of the winning AL rebel candidate in the municipality.

Two other Jubo League activists -- Asar Ali, 22, and Delwar Hossain Delu, 22 -- were injured in the attack. They were taken to Trishal Upazila Health Complex for treatment.

A group of 15-20 miscreants attacked Parvez on his way home around 10:20pm, killing him instantly, said Moniruzzaman, officer-in-charge of Trishal Police Station.

But the OC could not confirm whether it was the result of an intra-party feud.

As the news spread, Sarker's men blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway for about one hour, creating a long tailback.

Sarker alleged that supporters of

ABM Anisuzzaman -- the AL rebel who own the mayor election -- attacked Parvez with Chinese axe and hacked him indiscriminately when he and four other Jubo League men were returning home.

Earlier in the evening, Anisuzzaman's men ransacked the Jubo League office in ward-3 and took away a television from there, he alleged.

Contacted, Anisuzzaman said the allegations against him and his men were "baseless, false and fabricated". He claimed the victim was a BNP activist.

Meanwhile in Chandpur, at least 16 people were injured and several shops and vehicles were vandalised in a clash between two Chhatra League factions early yesterday.

To bring the situation under control, cops fired 40 blank shots and arrested 18 people, police said.

On the election day (December 30), followers of Chandpur BCL President Abdul Motaleb beat up some supporters of unit General Secretary Obaidur Rahman.

To avenge the attack, armed men of Obaidur swooped on the house and shops of Motaleb, leading to the clash, sources said.

Voting rights snatched using admin

FROM PAGE 1

Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), marking its 37th founding anniversary.

"I don't blame the officers in the administration, as the government has spread a rumour that all of them will be fired from their posts if the BNP comes to power," said Khaleda.

"But I want to assure you that you will be at your own post no matter who comes to power."

Bringing allegation of gross rigging in the recently concluded municipal polls, Khaleda said the polls have proved again that no free and fair election is possible under the "Hasina-Rakib administration".

She said the BNP rejected the results of the "Hasina-Rakib style" polls, as the polls had no credibility.

"It has been exposed to the media how voting was rigged under the Hasina-Rakib administration. Nobody can accept it."

Khaleda also lashed out at the Election Commission, as it did not deploy army during the polls even after repeated pleas from the party. She said the BNP demanded deployment of the army so that agents of the party could stay in polling centres and people could cast their votes without fear.

She asked her party men not to be disappointed over the polls results, saying free and fair elections would be held in future.

"Free and fair polls will be held on time in this country," she said, adding that the sacrifices of her party's leaders and activists who had been killed or

made to disappear would not go in vain. BNP mayor candidates won in only 19 municipalities out of 234 municipalities.

Pointing to the ruling party winners, she said there is no reason to be happy and that they would have to pay for what they did to the people during the polls.

Mentioning that the country was going through a very critical time, Khaleda said, "There is no democracy in the country. It's not only autocracy. Monarchy has also been established now in the country and everything is happening as per one person's will."

She also demanded immediate release of all arrested leaders and activists of her party and withdrawal of fake cases against them.