

Headmaster assaulted 'by AL men'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Mymensingh*

Headmaster of a high school was beaten up allegedly by some ruling Awami League activists in Mymensingh's Gafargaon on Thursday.

SM Badrul Haque, headmaster of Shibganj B Das High School, alleged that Saiful Islam, organising secretary of Jashara union unit AL, led the attack as he failed to become the school managing committee president.

Badrul, who was being treated at Gafargaon Upazila Health Complex, said Saiful, also a member of the union, had tried to persuade him and other teachers and local elites to include the AL leader in the school managing committee.

But no one supported the AL leader as he had a bad reputation in the area. Joyal Abedin, the convener of Rauna union unit AL, had already been selected as the committee president, said the headmaster.

Failing to get the school committee post, Saiful became angry and he was behaving rudely with the teacher for the last three months. He used to visit the school now and then along with his followers, Badrul said.

Saiful also forced them to pay him extortion payment on every programme organised by the school, the teacher alleged.

The headmaster said he never informed police about the matter in fear of attacks.

On Thursday morning, some four-five people on Saiful's instruction entered the school and took away his motorcycle when he was in class, alleged the headmaster.

Hearing the news, students brought out a protest procession in the school compound.

Abdus Salam, assistant headmaster of the school, said they then along with the headmaster and school managing committee members went to nearby Shibganj Bazar and found the motorcycle in a bush adjacent to Saiful's shop.

They were locked in an altercation with the followers of Saiful when they were asked why they took away the motorcycle, he said.

At one stage, Saiful's supporters started beating up the headmaster with bamboo sticks, Salam said, claiming that Saiful was present on the spot at that time.

The headmaster, whose left leg got fractured in the beating, was rushed to the Gafargaon Upazila Health Complex.

Contacted, Saiful said he was not involved in the attack.

He also termed the allegations of rude behaviour and demanding money false and baseless and said he rather protested "corruption of the headmaster on various occasions in the interest of the school".

Shamim Rahman, Gafargaon upazila nirbahii officer, said legal action would be taken against the culprits.

AKM Mahub Alam, officer-in-charge of Gafargaon Police Station, said the victim yesterday filed a case against seven people, including Saiful.

First test flight of stratospheric solar plane

AFP, *Payerne*

The first solar plane aimed at reaching the stratosphere made an initial low-altitude test flight over Switzerland yesterday.

The SolarStratos, a super-light, sleek, white two-seater aircraft with long wings covered with solar panels, took off from Payerne at 8:00 am (0600 GMT), according to an AFP photographer at the airbase in western Switzerland.

"The maiden flight of the prototype ... went off without a hitch," the SolarStratos team said in a statement.

Pilot Damian Hischier took the craft for a seven-minute test flight, reaching an altitude of 300 metres (nearly 1,000 feet), it said.

"The group will now study the test flight results before scheduling a longer flight at higher altitude," the statement added.

Eventually, the plane is expected to be able to fly at an altitude of 25,000 metres (82,000 feet), an impossible feat using a propulsion-driven aircraft.

Swiss adventurer Raphael Domjan, who is behind the project, aims to take the plane on its first stratospheric flight next year.

"We must continue to work hard to learn how to harness the potential of this solar-powered treasure," he said yesterday.

"We want to demonstrate that with current technology, it is possible to go beyond what fossil fuels offer."

The SolarStratos is 8.5 metres long, with long wings covered with 22 square metres (237 square feet) of solar panels, which are meant to provide it with 24 hours of autonomous flying time.

Greenpeace study

FROM PAGE 1

power plant in Rampal of Bagerhat. The UN too urged Bangladesh to halt its construction near the Sundarbans, which acts as a natural barrier against cyclones.

The government, however, has been going ahead with the project, saying it was using the best technologies available to prevent any possible damage.

Contacted, Nasrul Hamid, state minister for power and energy, disagreed with the Greenpeace findings.

The plant would surely emit pollutants, but not as much as that could lead to the damage claimed by Greenpeace, he said.

"They [green activists] are not experts. They make claims as they wish. They don't study based on exactly what we are doing and how," Nasrul told The Daily Star over phone.

He said the government could not avoid coal-fired power plants. "We don't have options. We have to have mixed sources of power to make it affordable to people," he said, calling upon green activists to sit with the relevant government officials to get the "real picture".

Greenpeace said it conducted the study using the modelling systems recommended by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and World Health Organisation (WHO) in assessing long range transport of pollutants and results of their exposures. The methodology was not explained in details at the press conference yesterday. ([visit thedailystar.net](http://visit.thedailystar.net) for details on Greenpeace study methodology.)

Greenpeace expert Myllyvirta said the Rampal plant would increase the 24-hour average ambient levels of nitrogen dioxide in nearby localities up to 25 percent over the current national urban average, and sulphur oxide levels up to 50 percent over the urban average.

"Emission limits for sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, dust and mercury, as specified in the tender documents, are five to 10 times higher than best regulatory practice and technical state-of-the-art emission levels," Greenpeace added.

The study said due to the high population density in the impact area and weak emission limits applied for the project, the estimated health impacts were 150 premature deaths and births of 600 low-weight babies per year.

Greenpeace said the predicted number of premature deaths would drop to 50 a year if the much stricter new Indian standards were followed. In the state-of-the-art emission scenario, the premature death would further fall to 20 cases a year.

The plant could emit high levels of mercury, a potent neurotoxin that damages children's brains and nervous systems, and it could be sufficient to render fish unsafe to eat over an area of approximately 70 sqkm around the power plant.

Additionally, 10,000kg of mercury discharged over the life of the plant could end up in the coal ash pond, which is subject to flooding and poses further risks to aquatic food chain of

the Sundarbans and Bay of Bengal. This could impact millions of people who eat those fish.

NCPS Convener and rights activist Sultana Kamal said the Greenpeace study speaks of a grim future of biodiversity and human health.

"Implementing the Rampal power project means pushing our future generation towards disabilities and premature death. This can't happen," she told journalists, and demanded cancellation of the plant project.

The former adviser to a caretaker government said they had repeatedly presented scientific data, but the authorities had been neglecting those saying green activists were not experts.

"This is not true. There are experts among us," she said.

"They [government] are not providing us with correct information. They are trying to justify the project through false propaganda," said Sultana, adding that the government was buying machinery based on quite old technology.

DHE President Nazmun Nahar said if mercury enters the eco-system and the food chain, it would cause mental disabilities in future generations.

The paediatrician said 48 percent children in Bangladesh were born with low weight, and they run higher risks of diabetes and heart diseases in their adulthood.

"If the Rampal plant causes birth of more low-weight babies, it would worsen public health," she said.

NCPS Member Secretary Abdul Matin, Joint Secretary Sharif Jamil of Bapa, and Prof Abu Sayeed also spoke at the press conference.

India passes new law to tackle bad debt

AFP, *New Delhi*

India yesterday gave greater powers to the central bank to intervene in cases of bad loans, seeking to tackle a mountain of debt that experts say is holding back the economy.

The move authorises the Reserve Bank of India to order banks to take specific measures to deal with bad debts under the provisions of the existing bankruptcy laws.

In its executive order, it said the "stressed assets in the banking system have reached unacceptably high levels and urgent measures are required for their resolution."

India remains the world's fastest-growing major economy, but its banks are saddled with some of the highest levels of bad debt in the emerging markets according to the International Monetary Fund.

That means banks are stretched too thin to lend for fresh investments.

The problem received national attention last year in March when beer and airline tycoon Vijay Mallya fled to the UK to avoid paying nearly \$1 billion in loans that he owed banks.

S Asia Satellite

FROM PAGE 1

part of the project. However, Pakistan opted out stating that it has its own space programme.

The satellite will also provide services in the areas of banking, telecommunications, broadcasting, telemedicine, education and mapping natural resources.

It is equipped with 12 top-of-the-line Ku transponders and the six countries will be given access to at least two.

The participating countries can use the transponders provided they have adequate ground infrastructure like earth stations to receive signals from the satellite.

The launch of the satellite is also seen by South Asia observers as a move to counter China's space diplomacy in the region. China helped its long-time ally Pakistan and Sri Lanka launch communication satellites in 2011 and 2012.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday stressed the need for a fruitful engagement in various fields between the South Asian countries for the betterment of the people in the region.

"We want to cooperate with all countries for creating an area of peace in South Asia where we can live as good neighbours and pursue constructive policies for the benefit of our people, as envisioned by our Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman," she said.

The PM was taking part in a videoconference with the top leaders of the six other South Asian nations from the Gono Bhaban on the occasion of the launch, reports BSS.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena, Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom, Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay and Nepalese Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal joined the video conference from their respective countries.

Hasina said Bangladesh and India jointly achieved many successes in connecting the regional countries. She

hoped launching of South Asia Satellite would change the face of South Asia.

With the launching of the satellite, Bangladesh and India expanded connectivity from land, water and air to space, she said.

"I'm sure that cooperation in space will definitely lead us to the ambitious technological enhancement for the benefit of the region."

She expressed optimism that the satellite would open a new horizon of cooperation in the region.

Hasina congratulated Modi and his government for the successful launch of the satellite.

She wished the South Asian leaders good health and long life, and the friendly people of the region peace, progress and prosperity.

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, PM's Adviser HT Imam, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam, State Minister for Post and Telecommunications Tarana Halim were present at the Gono Bhaban.

Speaking on the occasion, Modi said the launch of the South Asia Satellite marked the fulfilment of India's commitment and also the beginning of the journey to build the most advanced frontier of the seven countries' partnership.

He thanked the leaders of the participating countries for their strong and valuable support that "translated a vision into reality".

Addressing the programme by video conference, heads of state and governments of the participating countries thanked India for implementing the project.

The South Asia Satellite is India's most significant space project since February's record-breaking launch of 104 mini satellites with a single rocket.

A satellite focusing on disaster communications could be particularly beneficial to South Asia, home to about a quarter of the world's population and prone to tropical cyclones, heat waves, earthquakes, tsunamis, landslides and floods.

Somalia sacks top official over minister's shooting

AFP, *Mogadishu*

The Somali government sacked the country's auditor-general yesterday, after his bodyguards were accused of shooting dead the minister of public works, apparently by accident.

Abbas Abdullahi Siraji, the 31-year-old public works minister, was killed on Wednesday when government security guards shot at his vehicle outside the presidential palace.

After an emergency cabinet meeting, the prime minister's office issued a statement announcing auditor-general Nur Jimale Farah's dismissal.

"After hearing a report about the killing of minister Abas Siraji, the minister for public works, the cabinet members have unanimously agreed to discharge the National Auditor General. The position will be temporarily filled by his deputy", the statement said.

The attorney-general and police chief told cabinet that three people had been arrested over the killing and the investigation is ongoing, the statement said.

Farah rejected the sacking, telling reporters the cabinet could not dismiss him without parliament's approval. He said the three suspects who had been arrested were members of his security team.

The circumstances of the shooting are not yet entirely clear. Shortly afterwards Farah said it was "gunfire involving soldiers who had become suspicious of each other".

But this scenario has not yet been confirmed and several security officials have suggested Farah's security guards opened fire on the minister's vehicle fearing it could be a car bomb attack by Shabaab jihadists.

First Chinese

FROM PAGE 20

The narrow-body C919 jet -- white with green and blue stripes -- disappeared into the clouds after taking off from Pudong international airport in the commercial hub Shanghai as a crowd of thousands cheered. It successfully landed some eighty minutes later.

Built by state-owned aerospace manufacturer Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC), the plane represents nearly a decade of effort in a government-mandated drive to reduce dependence on European consortium Airbus and US aerospace giant Boeing.

The flight is the latest sign of China's growing ambition and technical skill, coming one week after the country launched its first domestically made aircraft carrier and docked a cargo spacecraft with an orbiting space lab.

Before takeoff, CCTV state television said the plane would be tested at an altitude of 3,000 metres (9,800 feet), some 7,000 metres lower than a regular trip, and at a speed of around 300 kilometres (186 miles) per hour.

Top officials, COMAC staff and company partners attended the inaugural flight, which was shown live on state television.

China has dreamt of building its own civil aircraft since the 1970s, when it began work on the narrow-body Y-10, which was eventually deemed unviable and never entered service.

President Xi Jinping himself has endorsed the new project, visiting COMAC even before he took office in 2013. The first flight was supposed to take place last year, but it was delayed until now.

His call to arms is emblazoned on the wall of the jet's production facility: "Accelerate the construction of the world's top aviation company and continue to make new contributions to develop a strong aviation industry."

China is a massive battleground for Boeing and Airbus, with the country's travel market expected to surpass the United States by 2024, according to the International Air Transport Association.

Norwegian

FROM PAGE 20

Norway, which manages the wealth fund.

Some 65 senior executives at PetroChina, a listed entity of the Chinese oil giant CNPC, are being investigated on suspicion of bribery in China, Canada and Indonesia.

Leonardo is also under observation due to its involvement in several cases of alleged or proven corruption in India, South Korea, Panama and Algeria between 2009 and 2014.

The fund which has shares in some 9,000 companies around the world, must follow ethical rules which prohibit it from investing in companies that produce nuclear arms, tobacco, risk environmental damage, violate human rights, and enterprises deriving a large part of their business from coal.

More than 100 groups, including giants like Airbus, Boeing, British American Tobacco and Wal Mart, have been blacklisted and a dozen others are under observation.

Govt to seek more time

FROM PAGE 20

rules. But we may seek 10 to 15 days from the Supreme Court as we need the honorable president's approval in this regard."

About the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) president's claim that the government sought 67 time extensions from the apex court, the law minister said, "Let them count the number of occasions the government sought time from the Supreme Court. We don't count it."

SCBA President Zainul Abedin, also a BNP leader, on May 2 told a press conference that the apex court gave many orders to issue the gazette notification, but the government already sought 67 extensions of time from the apex court.

"Taking time proves that the government doesn't want the judiciary to work independently," he said.

About the SCBA president's remark, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam told this correspondent that the recent activities of pro-BNP lawyers were "damaging the judiciary".

During a hearing on the case, the SC

on April 4 expressed dissatisfaction at the non-issuance of the gazette notification.

Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha on that day said they [judges] get hurt when the government refers to the president, who is respected and acceptable.

On March 28, the SC expressed discontent at the government for seeking more time for issuing the gazette notification.

The same day, the attorney general submitted an application to the SC, saying: "The ministry of law, justice and parliamentary affairs expects that necessary steps will be taken by the honourable president in respect of the proposed rules within four weeks."

On December 12 last year, the SC said the president was misinformed about the issuance of the gazette notification.

It came up with the observation a day after the law ministry issued a notification saying that the president decided not to issue a separate gazette notification on the conduct rules.

Disbursement rate

FROM PAGE 20

Talking to reporters about the report findings, Muhith said Bangladesh has been a "star performer" in terms of utilising funds from the ADB and the World Bank, reports UNB.

"Our utilisation capacity has definitely improved, but we aren't satisfied yet as there is still so much fund in the pipeline and the pipeline is very big," he said.

According to the report, ADB's loan disbursements posted a new high of \$12.48 billion in 2016 surpassing marginally the previous record of \$12.34 billion in 2015.

In terms of loan disbursement ratio, Bangladesh is followed by China (19.7 percent), Pakistan (19.6 percent), India (18.2 percent) and Vietnam (13.8 percent).

However, in terms of loan amount, India accounted for a record \$1.38 billion, followed by China (\$1.31 billion), Pakistan (\$838 million), Bangladesh (\$823 million), and Vietnam (\$707 million).

Together these five countries accounted for 66 percent of all sovereign projects and result based loan (RBL) disbursements in 2016, the ADB report added.

The report attributed the highest disbursement ratio in Bangladesh to a concerted effort by the staff of ADB's South Asia Department, including the Bangladesh Resident Mission, to pursue potential disbursements and advance actions, realise additional disbursements from 2016 contract awards through timely mobilisation of advances, and execute loan savings effectively.

In another report, "Partnering for Development: Donor Report 2016", also released at the ADB annual meet in Yokohama yesterday, the bank said

Results prove

FROM PAGE 1

were no such instructions to increase marks and that the answer scripts were checked properly.

However, every year a huge number of examinees apply for reviewing their scripts as they were dissatisfied with their grades, and such applications have been on the rise for the last couple of years.

In last year alone, results of around 15,000 SSC examinees under the 10 education boards were revised in the review, indicating the extent of mistakes by teachers in evaluating the scripts.

The country's leading academics and educationists too have raised questions over the quality of education, saying the dazzling pass rate does not mean the educational standards have improved.

On several occasions, they have recommended reforming the examination system, arguing that the system is flawed and riddled with questions.

Even the High Court in January this year issued a rule asking the authorities concerned to explain in four weeks as to why they should not be directed to evaluate the answer sheets of SSC and HSC examinations by competent and experienced teachers.

This year, the government took an initiative to reform the system of evaluating answer scripts. The method is called "standardisation of answer scripts".

And thanks to that method, the pass percentage of the SSC exams under the eight education boards has come down to 81.21 percent, dipping 7.49 percentage points from last year's.

In a year-on-year comparison, this year has seen the deepest drop in the pass rate since the grading system was introduced in 2001. In the last 16 years, the rates slipped only four times.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid attributed the fall in the pass rate to the introduction of the new method of checking answer scripts.

Disclosing the results at a press conference on Thursday, he himself admitted that the previous evaluation system was "very faulty" and said the scripts were not checked properly previously as "many of the teachers used to give away marks taking the number of pages [of answers] into consideration".

He said there was no monitoring mechanism or any specific rule on checking the scripts.

As part of the new evaluation method, the government has trained the chief examiners, who later trained other examiners following a guideline.

The chief examiners along with other teachers set model answers to the SSC questions and forwarded those to the examiners. The examiners checked the answer scripts, keeping in mind that the model answers were standard, said officials of the education boards.

Hailing the government's move, academicians emphasised the need for bringing reforms to the evaluation system intensely.

"It's just the beginning, the first step; there is a lot of room for improvement. We hope the government would continue their efforts to reform the evaluation system intensely," noted educationist Rasheda K Choudhury told The Daily Star.

Rasheda, also the executive director of Campaign for Popular Education, said it was clear that the previous evaluation system was faulty to some extent and the government, realising it, had brought reforms to the basis of research and suggestions made by educationists.

She, however, said results of the exams under Comilla Board indicated that there was a lack of teachers in basic subjects like English and mathematics.

Many of the existing teachers did not teach well, Rasheda observed. "We need qualified and trained teachers as well as examiners and question setters to bring qualitative changes," she added.