

Bangladesh ranks least innovative country in Asia

Singapore, South Korea and Japan are the most innovative

DATELEADS, New Delhi

Bangladesh has been ranked the least innovative country and Singapore the most innovative in Asia.

The lower ranking innovative countries -- Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan -- will benefit from more innovation in the future, according to the Global Innovation Index 2018 report.

Bangladesh along with Myanmar and Pakistan sustained growth foreseen to 5 per cent in 2018 and 2019, the report said.

Published in July, the report analyses the energy innovation landscape of the next decade and identifies possible breakthroughs in fields such as energy production, storage, distribution, and consumption. It also looks at how breakthrough innovation occurs at the grassroots level and describes how small-scale renewable systems are on the rise.

Meanwhile, Singapore, South Korea and Japan are the most innovative countries in Asia.

South East Asia is at the third place globally in terms of innovation. Singapore leads the region with a high score in most of the indicators. Globally it has moved two positions up since last year.

South Korea is also among the high

income countries that has increased investment in innovation and is ranked second in Asia. The country has not only increased the investment but also "improved its performance in the quality of its scientific publications and the quality of its universities." It is followed by Japan that is ranked third in Asia.

China is ranked fourth in Asia. The country has been on a dynamic innovation trajectory. China's innovation prowess has been evident in its global R&D companies, hightech imports, the quality of its publications, and tertiary enrolment.

It is followed by Malaysia which is ranked fifth in Asia and is one of the middle income countries that is edging closer. This year it moved ahead in the rankings with strengths in Tertiary education, Knowledge diffusion, and Creative goods and services.

Thailand ranked sixth has outperformed on innovation relative of its development, according to the report. It is followed by Vietnam and Mongolia ranked seventh and eighth in Asia respectively.

India ranked ninth is Asia is also seen as an overachiever in relation to its development. As per the report India is one such country that make a significant change in the innovation landscape.

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From left, Chief of Party for Democracy International (DI) in Bangladesh Katie Croake, Prime Minister's Political Adviser HT Imam, US Ambassador Marcia Bernicat and BNP Standing Committee Member Abdul Moyeen Khan attend a campaign titled "Shantite Bijoy or Win with Peace" at the capital's Bangabandhu International Conference Centre yesterday. DI organised the programme where over 400 leaders from the Awami League and its archrival BNP vowed to work for holding a free, fair and peaceful national election slated for December. Below, a group of children and the audience reciting the pledge.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

JS body submits report

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to Information Act, 2009.

The JS body also recommended renaming the offence of "computer or digital spying" "violating state secrecy" under section 32 and incorporating Official Secrets Act, 1923.

At a meeting on Sunday, Sampadak Parishad, a platform of the editors of the country's dailies, expressed its surprise, disappointment and shock at the committee's final report on the proposed Digital Security Act-2018.

In a statement, the Council said they were "forced to reject the report" as it suggested no fundamental changes to sections 8, 21, 25, 28, 29, 31, 32, and 43 of the draft act that poses serious threats to freedom of expression and media operation.

The Parishad also called upon the authorities not to pass the draft act saying it would gravely affect journalistic freedom and seriously curtail democracy in Bangladesh.

The platform welcomed the inclusion of the RTI but expressed concern at the insertion of the colonial era Official Secrets Act saying that this was a clear contradiction with the RTI.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman also said the inclusion of the Official Secrets Act "clearly contradicts" the RTI act.

He also expressed disappointment over the finalisation of the report without amending some of the sections that curb freedom of speech and independent journalism and also without considering most of the recommendations from the stakeholders.

"A sense of insecurity will be created among people if the Digital Security Bill is passed without bringing necessary amendments," he said.

While submitting the report in parliament, Imran Ahmed, chief of the parliamentary body, suggested inclusion of a definition of the "Spirit of the Liberation War" in section 21.

The definition of the Spirit of the Liberation War as proposed by the Jatiya Sangshad committee is: "The high ideals of nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism, which inspired our heroic people to dedicate themselves to, and our brave martyrs to sacrifice their lives in, the national liberation struggle."

The parliamentary committee has ignored journalists' concerns on sections 8, 28, 29 and 31 that deal with hurting religious values, disrupting public order, dishing out defaming information and causing law and order deterioration through publishing anything in website or electronic form.

However, Imran, in his written statement, attached to the report, claimed that several changes were made to the bill incorporating the statements of "the ministers and invited guests to make the bill more effective and timely".

"I hope the bill will play a great role in forming digital Bangladesh if parliament passes it after bringing the amendments," he said.

On July 4, the committee at a meeting with Editors' Council, Bangladesh Federation of Journalists (BFJ) and Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO) placed an 11-point change to the proposed Digital Security Act for their consideration.

Representatives of the three organisations told the committee that they will share their opinions on the

changes later, following discussions in respective forums.

The committee set July 16 for further discussion with the organisations on the bill. But the meeting was postponed and no fresh date was announced afterwards.

Earlier on May 22, the committee had invited presidents and general secretaries of the Editors' Council and BFJ and president and senior vice president of ATCO to a meeting to hear their views.

At the meeting, the three organisations voiced concerns over sections 8, 21, 25, 28, 29, 31, 32, and 43, saying these would greatly hamper the freedom of speech and independent journalism.

Law Minister Anisul Huq and Posts, Telecommunications and IT Minister Mustafa Jabbar earlier on several occasions assured journalists of taking measures to mitigate their concerns.

On April 9, the Digital Security Bill, 2018 was placed in parliament amid growing concerns among journalists and rights activists that freedom of the press and expression would be seriously jeopardised if the bill was passed as it was.

The parliamentary committee in its final report yesterday recommended some minor changes to sections 21, 25, 32 and 43, among others.

THE CHANGES

The committee recommended replacing the title of section 32 -- "crime and punishment for computer and digital spying" -- with "crime and punishment for violating state secrecy".

As per the recommendation, section 32 says if a person commits any crime or assists anyone in committing crimes under Official Secrets Act, 1923 through computer, digital device, computer network, digital network or any other electronic medium, s/he may face a maximum 14 years in jail or a fine of Tk 25 lakh or both.

The committee suggested reducing the jail term and the amount of fine under sections 18, 21 and 28 that deal with illegal entry to computer and digital device, propaganda against the Liberation War and hurting religious sentiment.

Regarding the concerns of journalists about section 43 that says a police official can search or arrest anyone without any warrant issued by a court, the committee suggested that police carry out the job following the proposed digital security agency director general's approval.

However, the committee didn't address journalists' concern regarding section 28 that says a person may face up to five years imprisonment or Tk 10 lakh in fine or both if he or she is found to have deliberately published or broadcast something in a website or in electronic form or gets it done to hurt one's religious sentiment and values.

The committee also didn't say anything about sections 29 and 31.

Section 29 says a person may face up to three years in jail or a fine of Tk 5 lakh or both if he or she commits the offences stipulated in section 499 of the Penal Code through a website or in electronic form.

Section 31 says a person may face up to seven years in prison or Tk 5 lakh in fine or both if he or she is found to have deliberately published or broadcast something on a website or in electronic form which can spread hatred and create enmity among different groups and communities, and can cause deterioration in law and order.

AL, BNP grassroots

FROM PAGE 16

want any violence before, during and after the election and called for ensuring peaceful electioneering.

A group of children administered an oath to the political leaders.

Speaking on the occasion, HT Imam said, "It's our firm commitment to holding a free, fair and transparent election, which will be acceptable to all."

He also hoped that the upcoming general election would be held in a peaceful manner and festive mood.

He urged all to refrain from spreading all kinds of propaganda.

Moyeen Khan put emphasis on transparency and accountability, saying these are absolutely important for democracy.

The BNP leader sought a peaceful political environment where everyone

would be able to express their views and have their right to vote. There must be social and political justice. "Let's us work together and together, we can make it happen."

In her speech, US Ambassador Bernicat said a free, fair, credible and inclusive election is important for a democracy, especially for one which is on the track to become a middle-income country.

She said political parties must accept their rivals as legitimate participants in the political process and as potential leaders of the next government, even when they disagree on issues or policies.

"Individuals from different political parties must be free to express their political views, campaign throughout the country and hold peaceful rallies and meetings without intimidation,

reprisal or arbitrary restrictions," Bernicat added.

British High Commissioner Alison Blake said the people of Bangladesh believe that peaceful elections and politics will lead to a brighter future for everyone in Bangladesh.

She said the UK strongly reaffirms its commitment to supporting democracy globally, working with their partners.

Blake said she is delighted to be able to join such a wonderful event, bringing together people from across the political spectrum and the country to pledge their support for inclusive politics and to help deliver Bangladeshis' vision for free, fair, participatory elections in Bangladesh.

"All of us want peace. If peace wins, the world wins; if peace wins, Bangladesh wins."

Scrap quota in govt jobs

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Apart from a gazette on quota reforms, they want withdrawal of all cases against the students who took part in demonstrations over quota or road safety and punishment to those who attacked the protesters.

The committee, formed to "review, reform or cancel" the quota system, unveiled the recommendation six days after quota reformists announced their decision to launch fresh agitations for the gazette.

Bangladesh Sadharan Chhatra Odhikar Sangrakkhan Parishad, the platform spearheading the quota movement since February, will stage demonstrations today at all universities demanding immediate publication of the gazette.

"We will continue our movement as we are still doubtful about the implementation of quota reform recommendation which has been sent to the prime minister," Nurul Haque Nur, a joint convener of the platform, told The Daily Star.

"Our prime minister in parliament declared that there would be no quota in public service, but we did not see its implementation. We will stop our movement once the gazette is published," he said.

At present, about 56 percent of government jobs are reserved for

candidates from various quotas. Of the 56 percent, 30 percent are for freedom fighters' children and grandchildren, 10 percent for women, 10 percent for people of underdeveloped districts, five percent for members of indigenous communities and one percent for physically challenged people.

The cabinet secretary said it's a big report but with brief findings.

The appointment system for the positions from 14th to grade 20th will remain unchanged. It was, in fact, not in the committee's terms of reference, he added.

Class-III and class-IV employees are appointed to the 14th to 20th grade positions. However, the government documents now mention "grade" instead of "class" while referring to the tiers in the public service.

About the next step, Shafiu said the prime minister will formally approve the committee's recommendation through the public administration ministry. Later, it will be placed before the next cabinet meeting.

Once the cabinet gives its approval, the government will issue a gazette, he added.

Asked whether the recommendation will have any influence on the 40th BCS exams advertised by the

Public Service Commission recently, he said the circular of the BCS exam mentioned that the quota will be fixed accordingly if the government takes a "different" decision.

Replying to a query on the court's observation about quota for freedom fighters' children and grandchildren, he said the committee took opinions from legal experts.

"They [the legal experts] said the judgment would have no effect on the proposal as this is a policy decision of the government," Shafiu said.

In a verdict in 2015, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court said, "The High Court Division observed that the reservation of 30 percent quota for the children of freedom fighters shall be followed strictly."

The cabinet secretary further said the committee has examined the needs of small ethnic groups and the physically challenged people and found that they can do without the quota system.

In February this year, a large number of students of public universities and jobseekers, launched the movement demanding reforms in the quota system.

The movement intensified in April when students across the country took to the streets. They blocked key points in the capital and roads and highways

EROSION IN NARIA

PM 'irked' over lack of action from ministers, lawmakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed anger as ministers and lawmakers did not visit Shariatpur's Naria upazila, which has been hit hard by the Padma erosion.

At yesterday's cabinet meeting, the PM said the ministers and the MPs did not take the matter seriously.

She then asked them to take an all-out effort to save Naria from the erosion and stand beside the victims, said sources in the meeting.

After the meeting, a senior minister told The Daily Star that Hasina was unhappy over the way the ministries concerned performed to tackle the situation.

Over the last few months alone, more than 4,000 families have lost their homes in five unions of the upazila due to the erosion. A recent Nasa report showed that the mighty Padma has devoured more than 66,000 hectares of land since 1967.

Speaking on another issue, the prime minister asked the education ministry to visit schools before bringing them under government's monthly pay order (MPO) facilities.

"Only scrutinising through online is not enough, you should visit the spot before taking a decision," Hasina was quoted by the minister as saying.

After a suspension of seven years, the government has recently decided to bring new private educational institutions under its MPO scheme following teachers' demonstrations in the capital.

Sri Lanka

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Sri Lanka did not help their cause with two run outs while skipper Angelo Mathews played a reckless shot off Nabi and was caught near the boundary for 22.

Sri Lankan's batters failed miserably with only Upul Tharanga (36) and Thisara Perera (28) offering some fight.

Afghanistan were helped to 249 all out in their 50 overs with Rahmat Shah scoring 72 and Ihsanullah Janat chipping in with 45.

Shah struck five boundaries during his 90-ball knock and added 50 for the second wicket with Janat (45) after Afghanistan won the toss and opted to bat on a flat pitch.

Sri Lanka's seamer Thisara Perera took five for 55 while spinner Akila Dananjaya finished with two for 39.

elsewhere.

In the wake of mass protests, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on April 11 announced in parliament that the quota system would be scrapped.

But as no gazette notification was issued in this regard, the protesters began boycotting classes and examinations in all universities and colleges later on.

On June 30 and July 1, alleged BCL activists attacked protesters at Dhaka University and Rajshahi University, leaving a number of students injured. Law enforcers in the following days arrested and remanded a number of leaders of the movement.

The quota reform movement lost momentum following attacks on demonstrators and arrests of some of its leaders.

The government formed the review committee on July 2 with secretaries to the public administration ministry, finance ministry, Liberation War affairs ministry, law ministry (legislative division), PSC, and the acting secretary to the Prime Minister's Office.

The committee was asked to submit a report within 15 workings days. On July 19, it was given 90 working days as it could not finish gathering information about the system.

Dhaka to let Delhi use Ctg, Mongla ports

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ports. Only Bangladeshi vehicles will be used for transportation of goods within its territory.

The deal will be signed for five years, but it can be extended for another five years automatically. However, any side can cancel the agreement after giving six month's notice and can suspend the deal if a necessity arises.

Should any problem arise in implementing the agreement, several committees of both the countries would resolve it.

Shafiu said the agreement was aimed at strengthening the relations between Bangladesh and India.

As per the deal, Indian goods can be transported through four entry points - Akhaura in Bangladesh and Agartala in India; Tamabil in Sylhet and Dauki

in India's Meghalaya; Sheola in Sylhet and Sutarkandi in Assam; and Bibirbazar in Cumilla and Srimantapur in Tripura.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, a top shipping ministry official said the two countries would fix a date for signing the agreement through talks.

He said a Standard Operational Procedure (SOP) would have to be prepared for implementing the deal. The SOP would be prepared after consulting with various stakeholders.

Chances were slim that the agreement would be implemented this year, he added.

Yesterday, the cabinet also gave the go-ahead to formation of a China-Bangladesh joint venture company (JVC) to manufacture smart electric

meter cards.

The state-owned West Zone Power Distribution Company and Chinese Hexing Electrical Company will form the JVC, with an approved capital of Tk 50cr and a paid up capital of Tk 28.60cr.

Shafiu said they have a target to produce 5 lakh smart electric meter cards annually.

The cabinet meeting also approved the draft of National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) Act, 2018 to replace two related ordinances promulgated in 1984 and 1983 respectively by the then military regime, reports BSS.

The cabinet secretary said the NCTB bill seeks to bring some changes to the previous ordinance, recognising the Textbook Board as a statutory body

under the Secondary and Higher Education Division.

"The Board will follow the government's directives and instructions to be issued by it from time to time."

According to the bill, the NCTB will be comprised of nine members, instead of existing five, including its chairman. It will have specific responsibilities, including printing and publication of textbooks for primary, secondary, higher secondary, madrasa and vocational education.

Under a provision of the bill, the NCTB will submit its annual report to the government on March 31 every year.

The NCTB will also be tasked with publishing books for students from small ethnic groups in their mother tongues.