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"It was not an election, why evaluate it?" I am rejecting the results of the municipal elections.
BNP SECRETARY GENERAL MIRZA FAKHRUL ISLAM ALAMGIR



"We need to get ready for something that may even be more severe in the future."
WHO EMERGENCIES CHIEF MICHAEL RYAN WARNS OF WORSE PANDEMICS



"I will serve the people in whatever ways I can, without entering electoral politics."
INDIAN FILM STAR RAJINIKANTH ON ENDING POLITICAL CAREER OVER HEALTH FEARS



NEXT YEAR'S PUBLIC EXAMS PLAN

SSC in June, HSC in July-August

Candidates can attend on-campus classes from Feb; 2020 HSC results after govt circular next week

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The government may defer next year's Secondary School Certificate and Higher Secondary School Certificate examinations by three to four months due to the coronavirus pandemic.

It plans to hold the SSC exams in June and the HSC exams in July or August, given that the Covid situation doesn't worsen. Usually, the SSC exams start on February 1 and the HSC on April 1 every year.

The exams will be held based on curtailed syllabuses, and the candidates will be informed about it by January, Education Minister Dipu Moni said yesterday.

She said they are considering resumption of classes on a limited scale in February for the SSC and HSC candidates to help them with their exam preparation.

The results of this year's HSC and equivalent exams will be published following the issuance of an ordinance in the first week of January.

Besides, all primary and secondary students will get their new textbooks by

- KEY POINTS**
- Curtailed syllabus for next year's SSC, HSC exams
 - Short syllabus for SSC by Jan 15, for HSC by Jan 31
 - All textbooks will be distributed by mid-January
 - Primary textbooks will be handed over to guardians
 - Secondary textbooks will be distributed in phases

mid-January, she added.

SSC, HSC EXAMS

The government will try to hold next year's SSC exams in June and HSC exams in July or August if the situation remains favourable, Dipu Moni said at a virtual press briefing.

"The NCTB [National Curriculum and Textbook Board] will prepare customised syllabuses for the SSC and HSC students."

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SHAIKH ABDUL AZIZ



RAFIQUL ISLAM ROWLY



SYED MAMNUN QUADER



ASIF ZAHR



RASHAD KABIR



TASHFIN DELWAR



TANVIR TABASSUM



SEE PROFILES OF THE AWARDEES ON PAGE 2

2020: THE YEAR OF PANDEMIC

COVID-TIME EDUCATION

New approach, old disparity

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and WASIM BIN HABIB

When the Covid-19 outbreak led to a closure of educational institutions in late March, students, guardians and teachers alike speculated that the disruption would last a few months.

But with a continuous surge in infections and deaths, the pandemic is now likely to keep many students out of the classrooms until well into 2021.

It has changed how students are being taught, and left the education system scrambling to meet the needs of schools, families and over four crore students over the last year.

With traditional classroom learning coming to a complete halt, the pandemic compelled the government to take measures like promoting students to the next class without having them sit for final exams -- a move not seen in recent memory. It also caused many private schools, especially kindergartens, to close down for good.

But the pandemic has also become a catalyst for educational institutions worldwide to search for innovative solutions in a relatively short period. In Bangladesh too, online learning and recorded lessons were adopted to make up for educational losses.

Such efforts to reach students staying home seem to have been successful to a greater extent in urban areas, but a lack of digital devices and poor internet connections disrupted the learning process of many rural students.

Amid such a reality, educationists say it is high time the government introduced "blended learning", combining online education and traditional face-to-face classroom teaching.

The institutions should also continue airing recorded lessons and other remote learning methods alongside in-person classes because this shift can keep students away from private tuitions, coaching centres and guidebooks, they said.

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Tech heroes triumph in the time of pandemic

2 entrepreneurs, 5 firms honoured with The Daily Star ICT Awards 2020

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five firms and two individuals were awarded at the 5th The Daily Star ICT Awards yesterday for elevating the industry to a new height defying all odds and even distressing times like the coronavirus pandemic, creating a solid footing and establishing a footprint in global markets.

The country's leading English language newspaper and the Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS) handed the prestigious awards to the winners at a virtual ceremony in the presence of Planning Minister MA Mannan and VEON Group Co-Chief Executive Sergi Herrero.

The winners are Sindabad.com, Dream71 Bangladesh Ltd, Southtech Ltd, Kotha Apps & Technologies Ltd, Sigmind.ai, Rafiqul Islam Rowly, owner and managing director of CSL Software Resources Ltd, and Shaikh Abdul Aziz, founder of Leads Corporation.

Sindabad.com, Bangladesh's first business-to-business e-commerce site, won the award in the digital commerce category.



MA Mannan
Planning Minister



Sergi Herrero
Group Co-CEO, VEON

A venture by Ananta Group, it was formally launched in June 2016 with dreams to become a top one-stop online shop, catering to offices and businesses for their regular purchase needs.

Since then, it has grown exponentially, serving more than 500 institutions and 300 SMEs.

The winner in the ICT Solution Provider - International Market Focus category was Dream71 Bangladesh Ltd.

Apart from serving the local market, Dream71 Bangladesh is now providing software solutions to a number of countries, including Japan, South Korea, the UAE, Nigeria and Kenya.

Southtech Ltd scooped the award in the ICT Solution Provider - Local Market Focus category.

Set up in 1996, the globally certified software company has more than 240 regular customers and more than 4,890 successful implementations all across the world.

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Ex-DSCC mayor Khokon sued for embezzlement

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka South City Corporation former mayor Sayeed Khokon and six others have been sued on charges of embezzlement of Tk 34.89 crore.

Delwar Hossain, president of Traders-Owners Association of Fulbaria City Supermarket-2 in the capital's Gulistan, filed the case with the court of Metropolitan Magistrate Ashek Imam yesterday, Atiqur Rahman, bench assistant of the court, told The Daily Star.

The six other accused are: Yusuf Ali Sardar, former chief revenue officer of the city corporation, Md Mazed, former deputy assistant engineer of the city corporation, and their assistants Kamrul Hasan, Helena Akter, Atiqur Rahman Swapan and Md Walid.

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ROHINGYA RELOCATION

New home for landmine victim Saiful

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA
from Bhasan Char

Seven-year-old Saiful Islam had to seek refuge in Bangladesh along with his parents in late 2017, during the military crackdown in Myanmar against the Rohingya community.

While crossing the border, his left leg was suddenly blown up after he stepped on a land mine. Before he knew what happened, he lost consciousness.

After rushing to cross the border, his parents Md Rafique and Ayesha Begum were finally able to admit their son to a hospital.

Saiful, now ten years old, on his first day on Bhasan Char yesterday walked out of the naval ship and took a long breath of joy.

"Now I can walk freely and even play," he said with a smile on his face, while walking with a crutch and a severed leg.

The Cox's Bazar Rohingya camps, where he and his family lived before, were made on hilly areas.

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A little girl plays with her pet chicken as she disembarks a naval ship and arrives at her new home on Bhasan Char. Inset, some of the Rohingya refugees getting off a ship at Bhasan Char yesterday. They are part of the second batch of Rohingyas to reach the island.



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Tk 89,500cr in GDP lost to pandemic

Says five-year plan report

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused Bangladesh Tk 89,500 crore in GDP losses at current prices in the last fiscal year, according to a summary report of the government.

Before the pandemic, the planning ministry had projected that the country's gross domestic product would stand at Tk 28,85,900 crore at current prices (no adjustment made for inflation) in the 2019-2020 fiscal year.

But due to the highly transmissible virus that struck the country in early March, the GDP stood at Tk 27,96,400 crore, said the summary report prepared on the 8th Five-Year Plan placed at the National Economic Council meeting at the planning ministry in the capital yesterday.

"We have made the projections on the basis of several studies and by using economic models," Shamsul Alam, member of the ministry, told The Daily Star.

The NEC approved the 8th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) at the meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair. In the five-year plan, targets were set to attain 8.51 percent GDP growth and reduce the poverty rate to 15.6 percent at the end of the period.

The report painted a grim picture on losses in export earnings due to the pandemic and said the export earnings declined to \$33.67 billion in the last fiscal year from the projected \$45.5 billion.

It said the poverty rate would rise to 23 percent in the current fiscal year from 20.5 percent in pre-Covid times. The number of ultra-poor would rise by 12 percent from 10.5 percent in the current fiscal year, it added.

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