

VAB Volunteers Association *for* BANGLADESH

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VAB Celebrates Fourth Anniversary and Announces Programs for 2003

Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB) held its fourth annual meeting on 25 January, 2003. Wrapping up its fourth year of operations, VAB boasts a number of important accomplishments. With successful fund raising during 2001, the organization was able to award 247 secondary school scholarships in 2002 to impoverished students in rural Bangladesh. This includes tutorial support for 44 SSC examinees and 203 full year scholarships covering tuition and fees, books and supplies, and school dress for students in twenty high schools located in seven thanas. VAB received 805 applications for its scholarships and chose 203 students (one from almost every four applicants), based on factors such as the students' capacity and interest in studies, parental commitment to education, and each family's level of poverty. SSC examinees supported by VAB scored a 95% pass rate against the national average of 35% (42 passed out of 44 with 16 obtaining A and 23 B). The performance record of our 203 scholarship holders shows very encouraging results. All the students were promoted and many improved their class standings. For 2003, VAB will provide over 300 scholarships, make provisions for coaching SSC examinees, and undertake various school improvement activities including laboratory equipment and library books in at least four schools in order to help them provide better education to all students.

The poverty of awardees can be gauged from the reality that for 40% of all students' families, the average monthly household income is between \$17 and 35 and the median family size is between 6 and 7 members. Another 25% have 5 or fewer members while the remaining 35% had 8 or more members. Thus, each family member has to get by from about \$2 to \$4 per month. Most of these poor families earn their livelihood from agriculture, either from small farming or day laborer (63%). Another (30%) earn from non-agricultural activities—small business, service or self-employed and about 7% are totally jobless, living on charity and very occasional work

During 2002, VAB supported the organization of seven computer- training centers: four located in high schools in Parashuram, Fulgazi, Bancharampur and Nabinagar thanas and three in community donated premises in Jessore and Khulna towns and Nabinagar Bazaar. Centers located in school have two Pentium III computers each and the others have four, all with one printer and all other accessories. Four-month course in Computer Operator with Fundamentals of Computer, MS Word, MS Excel, MS Excess, and Power Point was introduced in all seven centers. Out of a total enrollment of 401, 192 passed, 178 dropped out after completing MS Word and 31 failed. There was great enthusiasm and support for these centers both in the community and schools. Initial problems in the areas of high dropouts and good instructors are being dealt. Twelve more communities have offered free facilities and utilities for locating new centers and VAB's preference during 2003 is to add more computers in the existing centers and if funds available, to provide support for a few new centers. For all these centers, VAB provides full equipment costs and onetime grant for trainer support; and Prakritajan, VAB's implementing partner, provides training, managerial and overhead support, recovered from the modest fees trainees pay for the course.

VAB is registered with the IRS as a tax-exempt, charitable organization. VAB's mission is to improve the educational, employment, and ultimately, the economic conditions in Bangladesh through a number of programs that work at the grassroots level. Working in conjunction with non-governmental organizations within Bangladesh, VAB has successfully implemented scholarship and vocational programs in order to fulfill its mission. VAB receives its funding through donations from individuals and institutions.

VAB supported high schools in seven thanas: BANCHARAMPUR: Daria Daulat; Salimabad; HK Asmatunnessa; Ayubpur. NABINAGAR: Bitghar; Shibpur; Salimganj. SAPAHAR: Dangapara; Koch Kurulia; Veoil; Mohjid Para; Zaman Nagar. PARASHURAM: Mirza Nagar Towhid Academy; Fulgazi. GAZARIA: Dr. A. Gaffar; DA Mannan. RAIPURA: RM; Alhaz Bazlul Hoq; DHAKA; Nabakumar Institute; Islamia. (name of thanas are noted in Caps and the name of high schools are noted after each thana)

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