

3,000 KG pupils may have to repeat year

MORE than 3,000 existing kindergarten pupils in Bahrain will have to spend an extra year in class before being eligible to proceed to grade one, it has emerged.

According to new age requirements introduced by the Education Ministry, only children born before August 31, 2011 will be eligible to start school in September this year.

The Education Ministry will announce the dates for students born after August 31, 2011 and until December 31, 2011 on a month-by-month basis, and in exceptional cases depending on

By MOHAMMED AL A'ALI

vacancies.

However, the new rule means that children born after January 1, 2012, who would have been treated for school admission purposes as those born in 2011 and promoted to grade one, have now been dealt a blow.

They would have to either repeat the year despite graduating, sit at home or wait to be included as part of exceptional cases.

The rule was only applied last year on children enrolling in government schools but was later extended to in-

clude those in private schools starting the new academic year this September.

The ministry has defended the decision saying that existing legislations oblige it to accept only children aged six years old a day before the new academic year starts.

"We understand the rules are being enforced because students are packed to capacity in classrooms in government schools, which makes it very difficult to educate them properly," said Southern Municipal Council chairman Ahmed Al Ansari.

"But having it enforced on students in private schools is questionable since

parents are paying money and not availing free education thereby putting pressure on the ministry from a financial, administrative or educational aspect," he said.

"The rules when introduced around two years ago shocked many, causing disruption and panic before the ministry considered children born between September 1 and December 31, 2010 as exceptional cases and promoted them; even with that several students missed out.

"Now children born between September 1 and December 31, 2011 face the same problem."

Mr Al Ansari said his council had sent letters in this regard to Northern and Muharraq councils, besides the Capital Trustees Board, parliament and the Shura Council.

"We have around 3,000 students who will miss out on grade one; that number is not a joke, it is massive. I have compiled a list of all students across Bahrain, of those planning to go to government schools and those wanting to continue in private schools.

"The rule should have been introduced when the existing students go to grade one in accordance with when they enrolled in nursery and not with immediate effect when announced two years ago.

"We managed to get exceptions by putting pressure but that shouldn't be the case and all legislators must force the ministry to back down because there is not enough time with schools set to resume in September."

Northern Municipal Council chairman Mohammed Buhamood confirmed getting a letter from Mr Al Ansari saying the ministry's stand was unrealistic and ridiculous.

"I can't stand seeing one child cry; how about 3,000?"

"The rule says the ministry is not obliged to take students below the age of six before the academic year, but it doesn't say the ministry can't accept them.

"We know government primary schools are under strain, but private schools want money so students can be enrolled there; so why have this rule forced on them too?"

"The age change is wrong, it has to be rectified or else 3,300 children will lose their smiles – no-one wants to see that."

Regulations

Parent Sayed Mohammed Al A'ali, aged 35, said his son Sayed Abdulla finished KG2 with merit, but Abdulrahman Jassim Kanoo International School is refusing to put him in grade one in September because he was born on January 18, 2012. "My son is excellent and has graduated this month, but the school has told me that it can't promote him under ministry regulations," he said.

"My son is in a miserable state and keeps asking why. Are the rules there to hurt him or help him excel?"

"I am not planning to spend BD1,200 to have him repeat the same class and can't have him sit at home; so, please tell me what to do."

His daughter Bushra is going to grade two in the same school as she wasn't included under the new rule last year and already moved classes.

Ministry officials were unavailable for comment.

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More than 80 business projects were presented as Bahrain Polytechnic hosted its eighth ICT and Web Media Project Exhibition at its Isa Town campus. Graduating ICT students worked at USKI Studios, Labour Market Regulatory Authority, Gulf Air, the Judicial and Legal Studies Institute at the Justice Ministry, Huawei, the Commerce Ministry, Azimuth, Tree Projects, the Youth and Sports Affairs Ministry, the Bahrain Institute of Public Administration, MaroonFrog, the Works, Municipalities Affairs and Urban Planning Ministry and Southern Area Municipality. Above, one of the students presenting his project.

Congolese and Somali leaders greeted

HIS Majesty King Hamad yesterday sent a cable of congratulations to Congolese and Somali Presidents Joseph Kabila and Mohammed Abdullahi Mohammed Farmajo on their countries' National Days. His Royal Highness Prime Minister Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa sent similar cables to the Somali President and his counterpart Hassan Ali Khayre. His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Premier also congratulated the Somali leader.

Award to be presented

THE seventh edition of the Shaikh Isa bin Ali Al Khalifa Award for Voluntary Work, organised by the Good Word Society in co-operation with the Arab Federation for Voluntary Work, will be held between September 12 and 14. Attracting participants from the GCC and Arab countries, the award events will be held marking the Arab

Voluntary Work Day. Good Word Society chairman Hassan Bu Hazza'a said that the award has become one of the most important voluntary work awards at the GCC and Arab levels. He explained that this year's edition will honour Arab voluntary work pioneers, as well as the best voluntary work projects in Bahrain.

Youth projects success

A TOTAL of 178 youth-oriented programmes were carried out in towns and villages during the month of Ramadan. This was revealed by Youth and Sport Minister Hisham Al Jowder, who added that 9,390 participants took part in the events and functions at youth centres across Bahrain. Women-only committees have also lined up 14 programmes at youth centres.

Salary cuts denied

AN MP denied claims that basic

salaries, annual increments and allowances would be affected in the state budget for the fiscal years 2017-2018. "The draft budget does not stipulate any measure which prejudices public employees and pensioners," said Abdurrahman Bouali. He said that a meeting which will bring together government officials, parliament and the Shura Council on Monday would yield positive results, taking into account economic challenges. Meanwhile, Shura Council's financial and economic committee is keen to raise queries about any measures in the budget that would result in cutting down spending on subsidy and aids benefiting citizens, committee chairman Khalid Al Maskati said. The committee has already drawn up a list of questions regarding the state budget, which will be combined with the parliament's list and submitted to the Finance Ministry thereafter, he said. Shura Council's list of queries includes

five main points, namely revenues, expenses, government subsidy, financial deficit and public debt in addition to legal basis for injecting additional funds in Gulf Air budget despite being wholly owned by Bahrain Mumtalakat Holding Company, he told our sister paper *Akhbar Al Khaleej*.

Security forces hailed

THE Shura Council commended security agencies for their dedicated efforts and vigilance in protecting national security and stability. In a statement yesterday, it saluted the security forces which conducted a successful pre-emptive operation, arrested a number of terrorists and thwarted plots seeking to destabilise Bahrain and target national achievements. It denounced foreign-backed terrorist groups that seek to spark division, fuel strife and support terrorism in Bahrain, the Arabian Gulf region and the whole Arab region.