

# Investment in Education Can Help Sustainable Development

Prof. M. Shamsul Huq

Development is essentially a process of change embracing the whole gamut of inter-relationship of man, environment and development. In my perception, man has been the central and principal actor in determining the character, direction and outcome of this inter-relationship. His choices in this regard are governed not only by his physical needs, which are beyond doubt extremely important, but also by his social and cultural needs. For hundreds of millions who today live on the edge of hunger, the problem is essentially of creating an economic, social and political environment in which they can meet their economic and social needs and also lead a fully productive and creative life in freedom and dignity. The recent mass upsurge in Bangladesh clearly demonstrated such an aspiration of its people.

World War II. The world was literally swept by a wave of freedom leading to the emergence of new independent sovereign states. Emancipated from long colonial domination and exploitation, their aspiration to a life of human dignity was reflected in their efforts for planned development.

The emerging picture of progress during the last four decades is one mixed with hope and despair. Between 1965 and 1985 consumption per capita rose by almost 70 per cent. Under-five-child mortality was halved. Life expectancy at birth increased to over 60 years. Primary health care was accessible to 61 per cent and safe water to 55 per cent. Educational attainments at various levels improved, adult literacy rising to 60 per cent.

These aggregated statistics, however, hide the wide disparities in development among nations and within nations. Especially distressing in the

ugly reality that in absolute terms the number of the world poor has increased.

Poverty is now recognised as a major source of environmental degradation which is on the increase globally and has many manifestations. The destruction of world's forests is accelerating. Deserts continue to expand. Soil erosion is sapping agricultural production and livelihood of millions. Rapid extinction of plant and animal species is endangering man's biological heritage.

Significant parts of the earth's land mass including a quarter of Bangladesh are in danger of being submerged due to 'greenhouse effect'. If the environmental deterioration is not halted, not only the third world countries but the world as a whole faces the threat of the collapse of economic, social and political structures on which human civilisation rests.

Another factor which impinges

on sustainable growth is the choice of nations in the allocation of resources to productive use.

Currently, resources of the value of a trillion dollars annually are diverted to non-productive use—production of arms and maintenance of the military apparatus. On the other hand, external assistance to developing countries has gradually dwindled and a positive flow of 42.6 billion dollars in 1981 was reversed to a negative flow of 32.5 billion dollars in 1988. The problem for the developing countries was further compounded by the swelling of the external debt to over \$ 1.3 trillion requiring \$ 200 billion a year in debt servicing alone. The quality of external aid was also affected by donors' choices in which poverty alleviation often received a low priority.

The problem of sustainable development is formidable. But, it can be met if the na-

tions are willing to make rational choices and adopt a participatory approach both at national and international levels in coping with the problem.

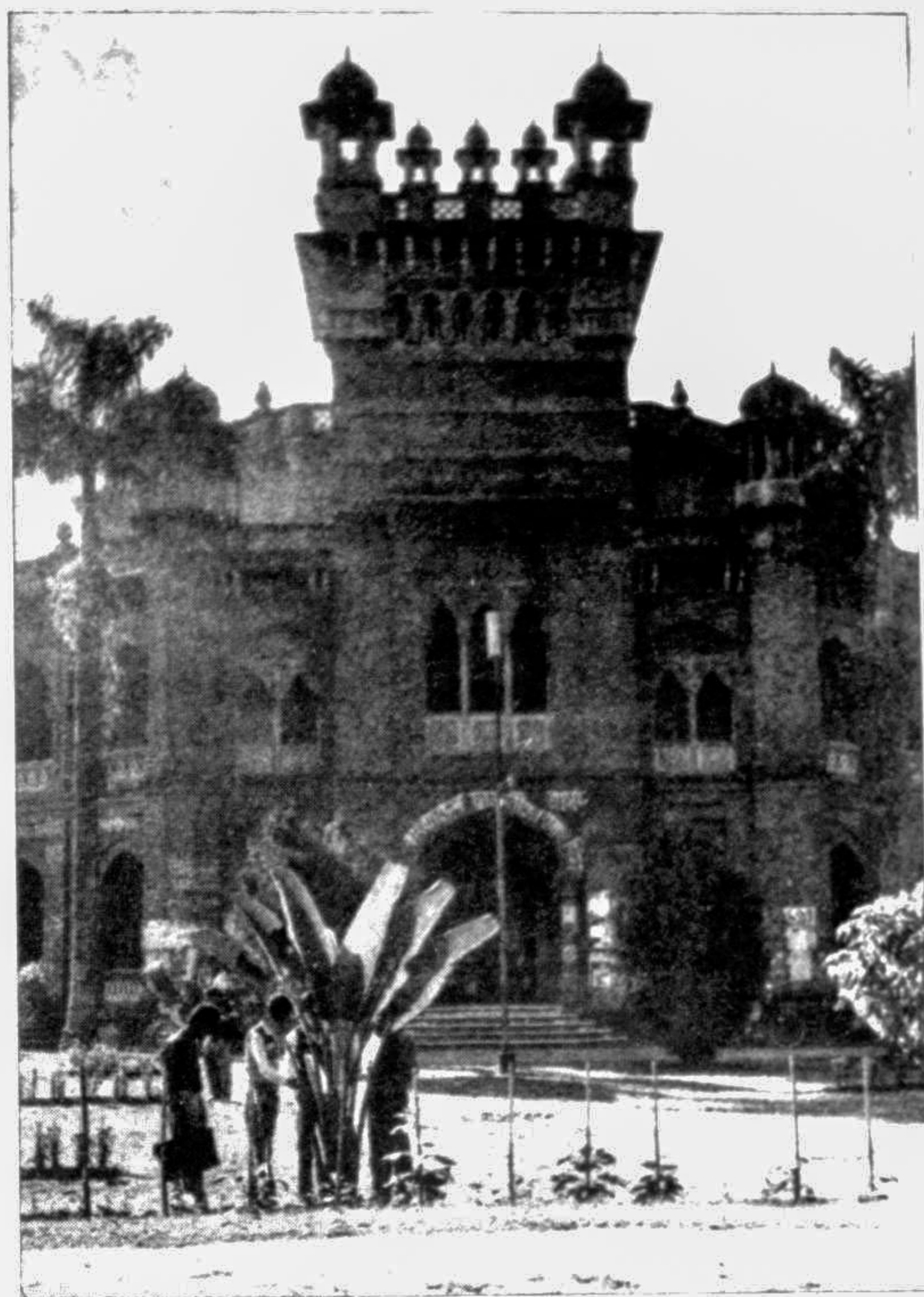
Policies to reduce poverty clearly involve a political will and a sincere commitment on the part of the government, attainable only in a truly democratic society where the people has the participatory role. There are, of course, rare but commendable exceptions where private initiative has succeeded in making some dent into the problem of mass poverty. Notable among them is the 'Grameen Bank' in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh need not be deterred by the constraint of resources in effectively approaching the problem of poverty alleviation. But, its choice of policy and priority must truly reflect the goal of sustainable development which is human development in harmony with the environment. Such a plan-policy does involve a trade-off. But, the trade-off is not between growth and poverty alleviation but between two growth strategies. It implies a shift in strategy to efficient labour-intensive patterns of development and more investment in human capital of the poor through more investment in education, health and creation of income-earning opportunities. This is fully consistent with faster long-term growth. In the short run, the trade-off is largely between the interests of the poor and those of the non-poor.

Man's knowledge and creativity have in contemporary times proved to be the main engine of growth in Asia, Europe and North America. There are now overwhelming evidences that investment in human capital is an important key in both growth and poverty alleviation. Hopefully, the plan policy of the new government of Bangladesh will appropriately reflect this development strategy.

The principal asset of the poor is his latent power and labour time. Well-designed education increases the productivity of this asset resulting in higher income. In addition, there are many other benefits, some tangible and some not so tangible, that flow from education and the blossoming of the creative talents of the people.

National Professor M. Shamsul Huq read out this paper at a seminar organised by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Forum of Environment Journalists of Bangladesh (FEJB) in Dhaka last week.]



Students examining a plant in the premises of Curzon Hall of Dhaka University, the highest seat of learning in Bangladesh. —Photo: A.K. M. Mohsin

## Study Abroad: Lumumba Varsity to Charge Fees Partly

From the new academic year 1991, at the Patric Lumumba People's Friendship University, Moscow, some students will now have to pay for part of their education. The actual training of future specialists has also changed.

As of now, all those who want to study at the People's Friendship University (PFU) have the chance to go there, by signing a contract with the university. Copies of the contract, as well as the cost of the courses on offer, will be distributed through all USSR representative offices.

Enrollment will comprise a full undergraduate year's education and all types of post graduate education (post-graduate, exchange, internship, courses providing further qualifications, seminars).

Instruction will cost on average about 3 thousand American dollars per year (respective of the chosen faculty) and a further 1.5 thou-

sand dollars for preparatory studies.

Post-Graduate studies will cost in the order of 4 thousand. Exchanges will cost 400 dollars or 100 if you are a graduate of the university.

In other respects foreign students who have been accepted by the university as paying students will enjoy the same advantages as non-paying students at PFU, including the provision of a stipend and lodgings, free medical care, social and cultural services, warm clothing on arriving in Moscow. The university will ensure that foreign student who have been accepted for a full academic year have tickets to Moscow and back home after they have finished their course of study.

Any individual who wants to pay for his/her undergraduate studies at the university must send by the end of April an application addressed to the rector (V. F. Stanis), indicating

his/her speciality, curriculum vitae, a legally certified copy his/her Secondary Education Certificate, indicating subjects studied and grades received. A medical certificate, a copy of his/her birth certificate (maximum age of 27), four 4 by 4 cm photographs and a legally certified obligation as proof that the requisite 1.5 thousand dollars has been paid for his/her undergraduate studies should be attached to the application.

After the aforementioned documents have been studied by the university's admission committee, a personal invitation shall be sent to the successful entrants, entitling them to an air ticket, to Moscow, paid for by the university and picked up at Aeroflot's representative office, and a visa collected at the USSR Embassy.

The aforementioned contract will be signed on the arrival of the student in Moscow. To meet student-demands, education will, as of the start of the 1991 academic year, be in two stages (bachelor's and master's) at the People's Friendship University, according to information received in Dhaka.

proof that the requisite sum for a year's post-graduate study, internship, the full term of the exchange, further qualifications or seminar has been paid should accompany the application.

Any individual who wants to do post-graduate studies at the university must send by the end of April an application addressed to the rector, indicating his/her education and speciality, curriculum vitae, a legally certified copy of his/her university degree and an academic reference. A medical certificate, a copy of his/her birth certificate (maximum age of 35 for post-graduates), twelve 3 by 4 cm photographs, a legally certified obligation as

## WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN MALDIVES

Rasheeda M. Didi

In the Maldives there is equal opportunity for both men and women at all levels of education. Parental inspirations for a better standard of living, through education, has been a strong influence in making educational opportunities accessible to girls. However, due to various reasons, there are marked differences in the choice of professions, skills and percentage of higher educational achievements. For example, as there are no higher educational facilities in the country, students depend on bilateral government aid or international assistance for scholarship and fellowship programmes to study abroad. In some cases the period of waiting can be up to four years. Therefore, although the will to participate and join training

may be present, idleness and the social environment leads to the constraints of marriage and motherhood which prevent a good number of female school-leavers seeking proficient training, as compared with male school-leavers.

Despite limited educational resources, the comparatively high national rate of literacy, which, at present stands at 86.7% and the high female literacy rate, are due to a strong home-based system of literacy education, which has prevailed over the centuries and the more recent programmes of Adult Literacy, Basic Educational Continuing Education for over-aged children, in which 2/3 of the participants are women.

Non-formal education of women in, specific, traditional, female-oriented skills had

been prevalent throughout history. These include areas such as the early childhood and infant education, mat and thatch-weaving, rope-making and shell collecting.

In the past 15 years, women had been trained, along with men, in a variety of fields. The main areas include teaching, medicine, nursing, midwifery, community health and secretarial work.

But specific formal women's education as such is a recent phenomena in the Maldives. This does not mean, however, that there had not been fields and professions, such as nursing, midwifery and embroidery work, in which training had been undertaken exclusively by women. These had not been organised with the aim and conscience of training women particularly but because of the

cultural norms of the society, unofficially, the nature of the training demanded the enrollment of women.

However, with the establishment of the National Women's Committee, a government body for the development of the welfare of women, in April 1979, a conscious effort of training women gradually materialised.

The most important programme for women, conducted in the past 4 years, by the National Women's Committee has been the Leadership Skills Training for rural women. This training aims to develop women leaders in the island communities and hopes to train at least, one woman in each of the 201 inhabited islands of the Maldives, by the end of 1986. The broad curricula attempts to incorporate basic areas of health, education and income-generation along with the more specific leadership skills. In this, the training aims to educate the women in the basic methods of child-care, environmental health, nutrition, child-spacing skills needed for income-generating work, such as basic Arithmetic, project planning, sewing and cookery and leisure time activities such as handicrafts, library-reading, and sports. It also attempts to create an awareness amongst the women regarding their rights as citizens, familiarisation of the functions of the government, and the educational radio programmes. It is hoped that these women, then, will impart the knowledge and skills gained in the training, to other women, and act as leaders in organising the island women in activities that are desirable and beneficial for the community. Other programmes planned by the NWC for women include nutrition workshops, handicrafts training and sewing courses.

Women's training are also organised by the National Youth Centre, the form of sewing courses, the Allied Health Centre, in Nurse-Aid and Midwifery training and the Ministry of Trade and Industries in embroidery work.

## Education Revamp set for Nepal

The education policy is 'outdated and useless' after the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy, by Jan Sharma

KATHMANDU: The new government, expressing concern over sharp decline in educational standards, is reviewing the education system in the light of new democratic changes in the kingdom. It aims to improve university education. Several thousand Nepali students, enrolled in university campuses in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, spend millions of dollars a year while university campuses in their home country are not getting enough income to support themselves.

It is not only the technical subjects for which Nepalis prefer neighbouring countries. Even students of Sanskrit language and literature have distinct preference to study in India. Ironically, the Mahendra Sanskrit University in Dang is not finding enough students to run classes.

"We need to get rid of such an anomalous situation," said Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai during a national conference of university teachers association last December.

Dr. Keshar Jung Raymajhi, minister for education and culture, described the existing education policy as "outdated and useless" in the view of the transition from an authoritarian rule to democracy. He has called for "drastic changes" in the present education policy to allow university campuses to meet the growing demand for higher education as opposed to restricted access to higher education under the previous

regime. Without doubt, higher education in Nepal has been passing through a critical phase ever since the voice of dissent began to ferment against the previous regime.

The policy goals were defined by the National Education System Plan (NESP 1971-76). Its main architect was King Birendra, with a bias for vocational education and science. But it lacked full political backing.

When the NESP completed five years, it did dismantle the previous system without creating a new one. The education, especially at the university level, was virtually left in shambles. An evaluation on its major successes and failure was ordered by the government but the report was never published.

Under mounting pressure for political reforms as well as reforms in education policy, leaders of the deposed one-party regime bowed down to demands for withdrawing some of the basic features of the NESP praised for its relevance to Nepal's development.

These included the abolition of entrance tests to get admission at campuses, comprehensive examination, credit ceiling, compulsory thesis at Master's level, among others. The students were also given freedom to form their own independent unions.

Following bloody clashes between government troops and students agitating for democracy in 1979, the government also pulled down the entire

semester system. Private campuses were allowed.

The students, who used to serve in remote villages under the National Development Service programme, were seen as main enemies of the previous regime. The programme was withdrawn to stop students campaign for multi-party democracy in the 1980 national referendum.

Since then, Nepal's education has been on extended holiday, policy-wise.

One of the main issues reformers will face is the question of access to higher education which, Dr. Kamal Prakash Malla, a former rector at the Tribhuvan University, believes to be the most important single challenge to the management of higher education.

There have been tremendous increase in the number of graduates joining the university campuses — from 250 in 1951 to about 40,000 at present. However, this makes less than 2 per cent of the university-going population in the country.

"This low percentage figure, in part, is a reflex of the structure of a literate population rather than a consequence of conservative enrollment policy in higher education," says Dr. Malla.

Nepal annually produces 60,000 high school graduates. Most of them get enrolled in colleges.

The rush for university campus should not suggest that Nepalis have special taste for academic pursuit. The university degree brings social

status, political power and economic opportunities.

But the poor standard at secondary schools is reflected at the campuses where both dropout and failure rates are very high. This is also because no serious effort has been made to introduce entrance tests because of political pressure. Lack of such tests makes investment in university education look wasted.

"The problem with us is that the university is a huge bureaucracy," says Dr. Bharat Sharma, American-educated professor of political science at Kirtipur Central Campus.

The previous regime misused its authority to interfere in the day-to-day running of the university administration in the form of issuing "policy directives" which actually were meant to "flush" opponents of the regime out of the campuses.

One such victim was Sahana Pradhan, leader of the Nepal Communist Party (Marxist) who is now minister for industry in the new democratic government. She was expelled from a university teaching job in 1976 for her political beliefs.

Another victim was Prof. Basudev Chandra Malla, who is now the vice chancellor of Tribhuvan University, expelled also in 1976 for his pro-democratic and human rights views.

University teachers have always asked for academic freedom and have threatened to launch agitation if academic freedom was denied them. —Depthnews Asia.



Children of more educated mothers have a greater chance of survival than those of the less educated or illiterate. That is one of the reasons why literacy was top priority during International Literacy Year last year.