

Ekushey, and Education for All

Along with the rest of the nation, we in The Daily Star, pay our highest respect to the martyrs of the Language Movement...

It is now, for more than four decades, that we are commemorating Ekushey February. The tone or spirit of the commemoration has principally been political and cultural.

However we would like to argue that a qualitative change had taken place with the birth of independent Bangladesh. While the first two decades of Ekushey observance concentrated on gaining our independence from Pakistani rule...

Within the broad area of HRD, the goal of Education for All suits the aim and the spirit of Ekushey. As we have said earlier, and in articles in this page and elsewhere, that our claim for respect for our mother tongue rings hollow with nearly 70 per cent of our people not being able to read or write.

We would like to suggest therefore, that a fresh initiative be taken by the government and the opposition to build a consensus on using the spirit and emotion of Ekushey for a national campaign to eradicate illiteracy and provide primary education to all school going children.

How to Restrain Them

Between 1990 and 1993 five industrialised countries exported 5.4 million tons of toxic waste to 11 Asian nations including Bangladesh and this nation was among the importers of 50,000 tons of lead waste and 100,000 tons of plastic waste that was dumped by those western nations.

Simon Divecha, the Greenpeace activist, while giving the above and other disquieting figures in Manila last week blamed loopholes in the 1989 Basel Convention making such dangerous trade possible.

There can be holes, intended or unwitting, in the pious protestations inked at international forums led by industrialised nations and Divecha is most welcome to call all the bluffs there are in the environmental high-minded stuff churned out by those bodies.

The question that remains after the exposure of the double standard — which is as old as Methuselah — is how to make the poor nations keep the wastes out in a foolproof manner? If these nations fail their people, it doesn't become voices from the same nations to fulminate against the north nations.

Although the above is how things should be, there is very much a question of many south nations having at some time or the other governments not strong or responsible enough to protect their nations against these governments' vulnerability to fat cash.

While keeping our pressure on our own government in the matter we are one with Divecha for injunctions aimed at restraining the rich nations from exporting toxic material.

THE Daily Star has to be warmly congratulated for recently organising a roundtable meeting on universal primary education (UPE) participated by well known educationists, development thinkers, veteran political leaders, policy-makers and heads of the UN donor agencies in Dhaka.

As somebody who has been involved for sufficiently long time in the planning and management of primary education in Bangladesh, I propose to follow up, in this article, the lead given by the distinguished participants of the roundtable meeting.

Creating universal access to primary education has long remained an unresolved problem for Bangladesh. Without going into the (unverifiable) official statistics of enrolment and drop-out, it can be said that there is still a very large unmet demand for primary education in the country.

The BRAC schools have already shown the most cost effective and successful way of doing this. The BRAC model, based on the concept of small community based feeder schools is a 3-year programme of non-formal primary education for 7-9 years old out-of-school children.

MIGRANT workers seem to be a problem not just in developed countries. Despite claims of the government that Nepal's economy is in the pink of health, Nepalis are finding it more difficult to land a job.

Nepalis, who had to put up with severe unemployment for several years, are unable to benefit from the upswing in their economy. In fact, they expect the employment situation in Nepal to become grimmer for them in the next few years as migrant labourers from India, mostly Muslims fearing Hindu backlash in their own country following the destruction last year of the sixth century Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, are pouring into the Himalayan kingdom which is known for religious tolerance.

The migrants include both skilled and semi-skilled workers and are readily employable. At present, there are no estimates on the number of labourers crossing from either side of the 1,725-kilometre open common border between the two countries. Citizens of the two countries are free to cross each other's borders without any official document.

Nepal recently rescued 23 Nepalis languishing in Malaysian jails and another 195 Nepalis at the Immigration Detention Depot. Government officials said many Nepalis are in Korean prisons while some Nepali girls have been forced into prostitution. Similar cases have been reported in many

Building a Literate Nation Access to Primary Education

by Mahmood Aminul Islam

The writer, a retired Additional Secretary, was responsible for co-ordinating the policies and programmes of a major primary education project in 1980s while in the Ministry of Education. His views that follow are further to The Daily Star's roundtable on Primary Education published on 12 January.

teacher, usually a woman with 9-10 years of schooling is locally recruited on a monthly salary of Tk 500. She receives an initial training of 10-15 days, and one-day recurrent training with her supervisor every month. The classroom (called school), situated within the safety of the village neighbourhood and easy walking distance of children, runs for two and half hours a day and six days a week without long vacation. The learning takes place in an enjoyable and friendly environment where the teachers pays individual attention to each student and does not burden him/her with home work. The students who are spared from the dread of formal examination are evaluated through weekly and monthly tests. The local community and the parents (either of the parents is obliged to attend a monthly meeting with the teacher) are closely involved in the management of the school and they decide about the school timing. The schools are closely supervised.

All these arrangements have resulted in regular pupil attendance with almost no drop-out. On completion of the 3-year studies, children generally get enrolled in grades III/IV of local primary schools where they, reportedly, do well. These schools imparting non-formal education are in fact functioning as feeder schools to primary education. Mr Abed who is the progenitor of BRAC schools thinks that almost 100 per cent children in a village can be enrolled, and 98 per cent of them re-

tained till they complete 2/3 years of education. Following the BRAC example, 200 satellite schools imparting education to children at the competency level of grades I and II, have been opened in community provided structures and with the financial and administrative support of the government. These schools are run by locally resident SSC passed (10 years of schooling) female teachers on a monthly pay of Tk 500. The satellite schools have proved to be successful in terms of enrolment, regular pupil attendance and community involvement. But it seems,

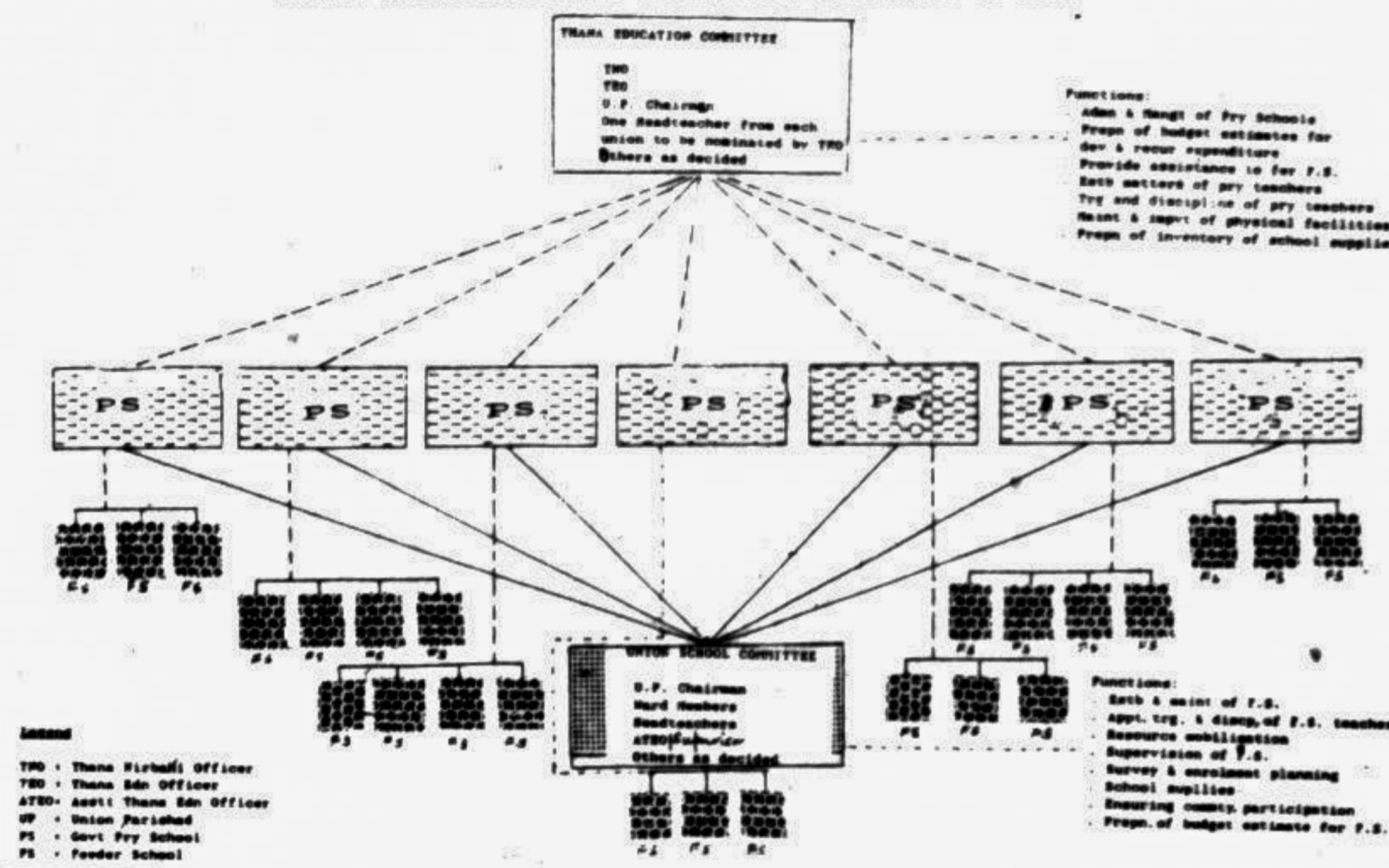
satellite schools are evolving in a slightly different way which may dampen the community support for education and lower their efficiency as teaching institution.

For example, the government is now trying to construct a 2-roomed school building on land being donated by the community to house satellite schools. We would need several thousands of these schools to ensure universal access to education by children. Is it possible to construct so many schools given the time and resource constraints? Moreover, what is wrong in renting premises for

satellite schools as BRAC is doing.

The satellite school building, in a way, would be a replica of the existing primary schools which would give rise to vested interests. Already there are reports that satellite school teachers want government servant status. It is also reported that the class size is being increased from 30 to 50 due to local pressure. If done, this will destroy the charm and efficiency of satellite schools. These tendencies have to be resisted (if we want to stick to BRAC model), and instead, arrangements for close supervision of satellite

DIAGRAM SHOWING PROPOSED TWO-TIER PRIMARY EDUCATION SYSTEM AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE TAKING A UNION AS AN UNIT LINKED TO THANA



Nepal's Labour Force Becomes 'Indianised'

Jan Sharma writes from Kathmandu

The Himalayan kingdom is 'India-locked' because it is surrounded by its neighbour's poorest and most populous states

The flood of migrant workers from India occurred after the restoration of the multi-party parliamentary democracy in Nepal. Coincidentally, the economic, political and trade systems of the kingdom also seemed to undergo Indianisation.

A contributing factor to the influx of migrant workers is the enactment by Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's government of the 1992 Labour Act which allowed Indian citizens to hold permanent semi-government and industrial jobs.

While the Indians are moving to the kingdom, Nepalis who can afford and are faced with bleak prospects at home, are going to Malaysia, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and other countries in search of jobs. A few get lucky while many are victimised by fake agents. They travel on fake visas and rely on false promises. Even foreign nationals are involved in the labour export racket.

Nepal recently rescued 23 Nepalis languishing in Malaysian jails and another 195 Nepalis at the Immigration Detention Depot. Government officials said many Nepalis are in Korean prisons while some Nepali girls have been forced into prostitution. Similar cases have been reported in many

other countries. Hari Prasad Panday, a member of parliament for the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist), the country's largest opposition group, said of the situation, 'Thousand of people are facing unemployment at home while about five million Nepalis are forced to live a humiliating life outside the country.'

Nepal's labour force grows by 200,000 every year making the unemployment problem more serious, says an independent study commissioned by the Federation of Nepal Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI).

Also joining the job market are Nepalis returning after serving on the Indian and British Gurkha armies. There are about 150,000 Nepalis serving in the Indian army while those serving in the British army number 8,500. With the British government deciding, as part of its austerity measure, to cut down drastically the number of Nepali Gurkhas, many will be going home and looking for employment.

As for Gurkhas serving in Hong Kong who would be affected after the colony reverts to China in 1997, Britain has assured Kathmandu that they would be provided with employment opportunities either in Britain or elsewhere. There are 6,600 Gurkhas in Hong Kong. After 1997, 2,500 of the Nepalis would continue to serve in Britain while the rest are likely to join jobseekers back home.

The FNCCI survey showed that the total unemployment figure for last year was 650,000. A major user of Nepali labour is the flourishing carpet and ready-made garment industry in the capital city and other towns. It attracts job-seekers from rural areas. The more educated Nepalis prefer jobs in the modern, organised sectors but new job opportunities have fallen short of the real demand.

Public and private investment in various sectors is expected to create an additional 1.5 million jobs between 1992-96 which will help alleviate the unemployment problem.

The education policy is being criticised for not doing a good work of preparing Nepalis for the job market. The primary and secondary school systems remain weak in vocational and skills training relevant to Nepal's actual situation. Higher education remains highly subsidised and is far cheaper than primary education.

The lack of a human development policy has resulted in a paradox: high unemployment rates in spite of many unfilled vacancies. A government task force in 1983 recommended the regulation of the border in three stages: registration of people crossing the border in either direction to be enforced immediately, a system of entry permits to be introduced a year later, and a regular passport system 'at an appropriate time.'

Fear of retaliation from India has prevented the government from implementing the recommendations. Many still remember that requirement of work permits for non-Nepali workers in the three districts of Kathmandu Valley in 1987 was one of several reasons behind India's economic blockade against Nepal in 1989. But many believe that unless the entry of foreign workers is regulated, other measures to ease unemployment would have little effect.

To the Editor

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Capital gain through share appreciation

Sir, With the vitalization of the Stock Exchange activities through foreign investors' participation and with the establishment of Securities and Exchange Commission, more people are getting interested to invest in the stock market.

At the same time small investors find it an easy way to achieve a good capital gain by investing in strong shares. To show this capital gain in the annual tax assessment one has to have proper documents from the stock exchange.

Translation of university books

Sir, In recent years, English knowledge of the students in general has declined like anything. But most of the university level text and reference books are in English. They are yet to be translated into Bengali. Even otherwise bright students cannot decipher the meaning of many a content of English text and reference books. Even after securing star marks in HSC most of the students find it hard to understand the English reference books.

Students alone are not to be blamed for this sad state of affairs. There is also a serious dearth of quality English teachers at all levels — school, college as well as university. And things are not improving. It is rather going from bad to worse.

However, this calls for an urgent need to translate English text and reference books in Bengali. Time is fast approaching when it will be difficult to find suitable teachers to translate English reference books into Bengali. Hence it is high time our universities should take initiative for translating all important text and reference books into Bengali. Board of teachers should be set up for this purpose with provision of appropriate remuneration. Government should patronise the universities with adequate fund and logistic support.

Otherwise, we shall be limiting the horizon of knowledge of our future generations very seriously. And they will not forgive us for landing them in such a situation. There is no harm in having higher education in one's own language as is done in many European countries, China, Japan etc. Will the Ministry of Education look into it?

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Money snatchers

Sir, Like the alarming rate of increase of traffic accidents, leading to tragic deaths, gruesome injuries and permanent disability of persons involved, bus dacoity and robbery has

become the order of the day, in which we take a casual interest when we come across such news in newspapers and journals. On the contrary, we often are surprised when news of such mishaps do not appear in newspapers or when we do not hear of such incidents from some one.

OPINION

Campus Violence — Consensus of Silence!

It is high time for the Government or the State (apart from BNP, the ruling party) to publicly announce, in clear terms, and categorically, the official policy on combating the unabated campus violence, which has become a national problem for the last three years, and is agitating the minds of the guardians in regard to the future of higher education in the country.

Many pious statements have been issued by the ministers, politicians, academics, students, and govt spokesmen on the issue, but to no effect. To bring the issue into the spotlight once again, here are some pointers:

Whether the student fronts of the political parties would be allowed, that is, continue to operate inside the campus. This sensitive and explosive issue should be reviewed on all-party basis through open debate in the JS (this sensible action is long overdue).

Why the JS is postponing continuously the debate on this malaise? No party is saying anything clearly. Why? Who should set the ball rolling, and take the initiative? Obviously not the Opposition.

Without a clear and firm policy there is no point in 'urging' the educational sector, teachers and students to continue the studies 'peacefully', and 'resist' the evil forces, and bring about a 'peaceful atmosphere' on the basis of what policy? what is