

Feature

# An Approach to Learning that Actually Works

by Aasha Mehreen Amin

HERE is no doubt that there are major flaws in the existing education system of this country. In spite of efforts by the government to make primary education compulsory, the drop out rates continue to remain high. In most schools, both primary and secondary, the curriculum is the legacy of colonial times, outdated and ineffectual in current times. Many students pass out from one class to the other regurgitating volumes of memorized text, forgotten almost the instant the examination is over. The main culprit behind this unfortunate crime of ignorance is the method of teaching.

In most classrooms students are not expected to think for themselves. Creativity, critical thinking and analytical assessment are furthered from the mind of the teacher who dictates a few lessons from the book and expects his students to reproduce them word for word. An unmanageable number of students per teacher, low salaries of teachers or conversely, teachers who are solely motivated by financial incentives have led to an artificial need for expensive private tutoring which many parents cannot afford. All this has created a crying need for an education system that actually teaches students something.

Runa Doja is a young educationist who has developed a system of learning for children, that is self-sustaining and easily applicable in a developing country like Bangladesh. She has already published several primary school textbooks that have the unique quality of introducing basic strategies of learning and teaching both children and teachers respectively. The books which are being used by many schools in Bangladesh, keep in mind the mental development and vocabulary level of different ages. With colourful diagrams and illustrations, the books are designed (by Runa) in a way that makes each lesson simple, easy to comprehend and more importantly, fun to do.

One of Runa's Early Learning Series, activity books introduces writing beginning with how to hold a pencil. The teacher is instructed to encourage scribbling and teaching the child how to control his hands so that later he may be able to move the pencil and create patterns or copy examples given to him. Many of the lessons include joining dots to form shapes, colourful objects and later letters. The book also introduces colour recognition which helps a child in his early attempts at reading.

What is special about Runa's books is that they are self-teaching; the lessons are designed in such a way that a child can learn them by himself without the help of an instructor. Moreover, the detailed notes before each lesson and questions after them are extremely useful for the teacher whose work is considerably reduced and made easy.

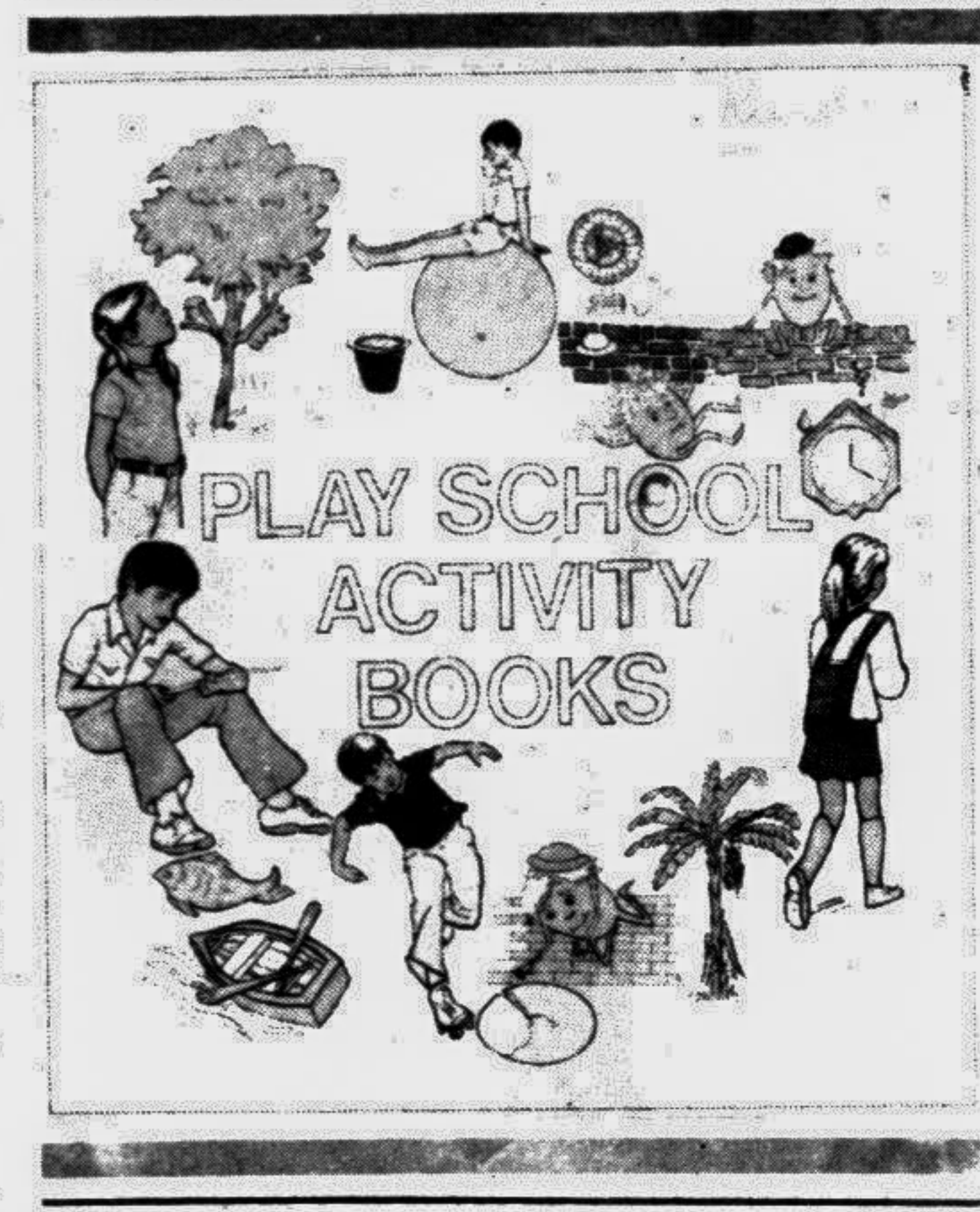
Teachers are instructed, for example, to explain to the inquisitive child that the position of a letter in relation to another can alter the sound of a word e.g. a vowel after a consonant alters the previous vowel to a hard sound 'a' as in 'bake'.

Rhymes are introduced to help the child listen and recognize different sounding words.

"Children have an aptitude for learning," says Runa, "once shown the child will be able to build words and make sentences, sensible or nonsensical by themselves." Crosswords are included to help the child to improve his logic and recall words to his memory, thereby improving his vocabulary.

Comparisons and contrasts are also included to help discriminate between like and unlike objects. "This is important", comments Runa, "for the development of spoken languages and helps the child to learn to organize things around him by having specific structures and patterns."

Runa's unique and unconventional approach to learning and teaching used in her books, is simple and easily implementable not only at the primary level but at all levels of education. Moreover, since her methodology encompasses the basic tools for learning and absorbing information, her books



can easily be translated into Bangla and used widely in Bengali medium government and private schools.

In fact, one of Runa's future goals is to target secondary school children in rural areas. After a survey to find out exactly which classes have the highest drop outs Runa plans to create a curriculum for children who are likely to work right after their schooling.

The education package will include books and lessons on subjects that have practical value such as information on agriculture, engineering, book keeping etc. This will enable the students to be better equipped in helping their parents in a particular vocation.

Meanwhile, Runa has been commissioned by her publisher UPL (University Press Limited) to write four more textbooks on Geography, History and General Knowledge.

She is also planning to write a few story books for children which include folk tales and popular 'puthis' like Rupban-Rahim.

One of the main constraints in her work being financial, Runa has ventured into another project that generates an income for herself and 40 under privileged women. As a talented fashion designer with a keen business sense, she has opened a boutique in Dhaka that sells designer clothes for women. Although quite successful in this business, Runa's main interest lies in developing an education system that is self-sustaining and practical.

that the English we expect as the answer is formal and unusual. The normal and informal use with the native speakers is: Who was it done by? But we hardly expect this kind of usage as the answer.

Let us point out some of the gross errors that many of us are making while teaching voice change. We are teaching our students to turn sentences belonging to all the different tenses into passive voice. As for example we are asking them to turn into passive sentences like — We will be eating rice, we have been playing football, but the pity is, if we turn them into passive like — Rice will be being eaten by us, football has been being played by us we are making some peculiar sentences never used by the native speakers in real life situation, that is, in everyday language. And teaching our students such peculiar passive sentence structures, (I still remember the woman who was seriously teaching such bizarre

## Education

# English Teaching in Our Colleges

by Hamidul Islam

ENGLISH teaching in our colleges has reached a stage no less miserable than what it is in our schools. Almost all the students crowding the Intermediate and BA (Pass/Hons) classes are poor in English — so poor that they shudder at the idea of writing a single sentence correctly or their own. Even if they write one or two correct sentences on rare occasions, they probably do that accidentally, for they cannot justify their usage.

Undoubtedly they are gorging on market notes, vomiting the memorized materials to answer scripts and getting higher marks. And this bad practice of rote learning, that is, pushing something into the brain without understanding, is gnawing at the vitals of almost all our students. So in higher stages of learning and in competitive examinations that demand originality of thinking and expression, these students grope in the dark, fumble for words and prove to be misfits.

The most difficult task for a sincere teacher of English at the college level is to present the excellent pieces of prose and poetry written by the native masters like Somerset Maugham, O'Henry, Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Coleridge to this new generation of students whose knowledge of English means a smattering of the English alphabet, a few grammatical rules and a few words and phrases. Unfortunately these students have already devoted their valuable time and energy in vain to the arduous task of learning English for long 10/12 years at the school level.

We don't think they have still the time and energy to learn it afresh. Even if we suppose they have still the energy, can the teachers at the intermediate level afford to perform the tremendous dual task of offering language courses to them and preparing them on the beautifully written prescribed pieces within a short span of two years? Practically speaking most of our teachers are desperately trying to perform this terrible dual task but with little or no success. So the problem for a responsible teacher at this level is — how to begin, from where to begin.

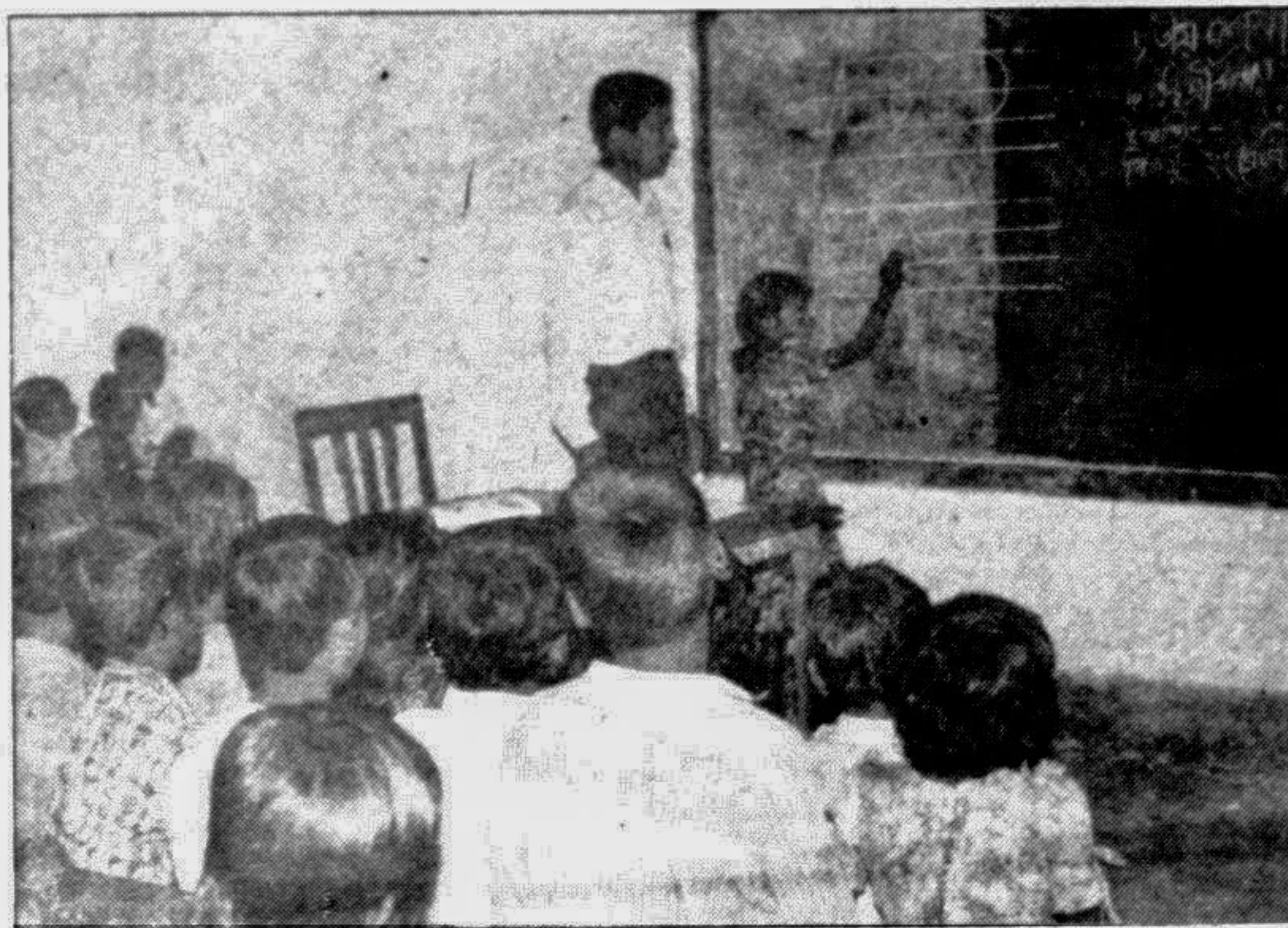
Strangely enough, there is still another thing plaguing English teaching in our colleges and that is the new generation of English teachers. And by this I mean a great many of our post liberation English teachers as well as those just fresh from the English Department of different universities. We have seen them mostly teaching outdated use of words, incorrect and funny pronunciation and old grammar points which have already been replaced by the new ones.

We know of many never hearing the name of Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, let alone its phonetic transcription of words, its latest impressions and editions.

As to the grammar questions that we are setting at secondary as well as higher secondary level, a number of

them are miserable — for example the question like 'Rome was not built in a day. — Turn it into Active or Honey tastes sweet /The book reads well. — Make it passive. And when by way of giving answer we teach our students 'Nobody built Rome in a day or Honey is sweet when it is tasted or The book is well when it is read', we are teaching grammar, not for the sake of grammar.

We are teaching impractical grammar. But the emphasis in the latest grammar books written by the native scholars is on practical usage. So modern grammar books are practical grammar books teaching practical usage of grammar points. These books are dealing with those patterns and structures that are used in real life situation. They are not teaching 'Honey is sweet when it is tasted' because the native speakers do not use this pattern in everyday life. We are setting questions like 'Who did it?' — Make it passive and expect answers like 'By whom was it done?' But the irony is



Courtesy: Shishu Dignata

that the English we expect as the answer is formal and unusual. The normal and informal use with the native speakers is: Who was it done by? But we hardly expect this kind of usage as the answer.

Let us point out some of the gross errors that many of us are making while teaching voice change. We are teaching our students to turn sentences belonging to all the different tenses into passive voice. As for example we are asking them to turn into passive sentences like — We will be eating rice, we have been playing football, but the pity is, if we turn them into passive like — Rice will be being eaten by us, football has been being played by us we are making some peculiar sentences never used by the native speakers in real life situation, that is, in everyday language. And teaching our students such peculiar passive sentence structures, (I still remember the woman who was seriously teaching such bizarre

passive sentence structures on the television in the evening a few months ago) we are simply teaching them impractical English and isolating them from the rest of the world where English is taught more or less competently.

So we should be careful that sentences belonging to future continuous tense, present, past and future perfect continuous tenses are not changed into passive. And this should be done in the greater interest of teaching our students practical English, that is English frequently used by the natives in day to day life.

In recent years the whole job of learning as well as teaching English both at the secondary and higher secondary level has been a gigantic bungle. Most of the teachers are not serious about the ineffectiveness of their language teaching (which is in most cases inappropriate) nor the students very much aware of the danger they are falling a prey to. The very idea of get-

ting lot of marks through ticks not knowing the subjects as well as the grammar points properly has already done a colossal harm to our young learners. If it has given them any plus point, that is some degree tagged to their names which they cannot use to gain any benefit worth mentioning.

We have seen how our boys and girls have become guinea-pigs of such methods imported from foreign lands. We have seen how these hapless boys and girls have failed to learn any subject properly specially English after ten years of struggle with it at the primary and secondary level. The crying need of the hour is immediately replace these tick or other methods which have failed to yield expected practical results. In this respect the result justifies the means' should be our guiding principle. Brilliant teaching at the higher secondary and the tertiary levels can never be fruitful if the teaching at the pri-

mary and the secondary levels is ineffective. The sooner we understand this, the better.

The majority of the teachers of English at the secondary, higher secondary and even at the tertiary levels do not have the qualities to be ideal teachers of English. They have forgot the truth that teaching English which is a dynamic subject, may be a part time job but learning it, is almost an all time job — a kind of unending process. So to be an ideal English teacher one has to remain ever earnest, ever active and ever prepared to learn the ever widening horizon of the language, its subtle niceties of expression and the novelties in the use of its vast vocabulary. Complacency (that is a sick feeling of self-satisfaction — a feeling that one has learnt a lot and no further knowledge is necessary) is a major stumbling block to any further progress in learning the language. And some of our teachers of English with big Hons and M A degrees tagged to their names have been suffer-

ing from such sickness of thought. But the fact is: English is a vast subject and they learnt a little bit of it some 10/12 years ago when they studied in various institutions. In the mean time many things have changed — and in some cases changed beyond recognition. So can they (specially when they are dealing with such a dynamic subject) afford to remain static and dead to new knowledge?

Certainly not. So apart from assiduously learning the basics of the language and the delicate use of its countless words and phrases, they must keep new usage, new trend. They must keep pace with the change. Or else they will lead the students backwards. We cannot swear that we are not doing it.

The study of the grammar books only gives us an impression of the structure (very often dull and drab) of different sentences that we are obliged to use. But only the

study of the pages of creative writings by the masters of the English language like Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Tennyson and Frost, O'Henry, Conrad, D H Lawrence, Orwell, Hemingway and Golding can give us a taste of the niceties of the language and the novelties in the use of words and patterns of a living language.

The language that the grammar books teach is like an ordinary girl you may or may not take a fancy to but the language that you come across in the pages of creative literature is like a lovely girl you feel irresistibly drawn to and fall in love with. She is like a maiden having a fire that touches you and lights you up and everything around you. So if the study of the authoritative grammar books is a necessity, the study of the classics — the great classics of English literature written by the native masters is a must.

A genuine student or a teacher of English should therefore study the authoritative grammar books like A Practical English Grammar by A J Thomson and A V Martinet and learn how to solve the exercises given in the brilliant books like A Practical English Grammar Exercises 1 and 2 by the same authors, English Grammar in Use (Cambridge University Press) by Raymond Murphy and Practical English Usage by Michael Swan. And he should do it to properly learn the basics of the language and some subtle niceties of expression. But he must read the old and the new classics that are highly creative and artistic and keep on reading them in order to learn the delicate use of the words and their nuances of meaning.

He may be tired of grammar but he is never tired of literature specially the classics because in it he finds superbly enjoyable well-knit pieces of fabric woven out of exquisitely beautiful threads of words, phrases and idioms. He is never tired of the garlands — the finely scented and the highly enchanting garlands that the great writers have woven out of the flowers of experience of life and world. To be tired of literature is to be tired of life, the fire of life, the warmth of life, the charm of life.

So in both our Secondary and Higher Secondary levels we must make an arrangement for the study of both grammar books and the books of literature. Well-written grammar books by the local writers as well as the native scholars should be included in the syllabus. And the inclusion of both types of grammar books will enable both the students and the teachers to make a comparative study of the grammar points and the usage of words and phrases both from the viewpoint of a local master and that of a native master of the language. There will then be scope for revision and modification of our use in the light of the use of the native users. Our language policy makers may kindly take note of this humble suggestion. The writer is Assistant Professor, Department of English, Govt M M University College, Jessore.

THIS chapter focuses on some key issues relevant to qualitative expansion of the education sector, specifically the post-primary sub-sectors, and the improvement of their internal and external efficiency, by adopting identified policy and strategy options, and potential programmes and projects.

Presented below are the key issues and some carefully identified set of strategies and ideas as possible policy objectives which may be adopted by the Government for the enhancement of effective post-primary education. Analyses of the strategies, where needed, are presented in this report.

### National Policy Framework

The Government's overall policy framework for national development remains primarily the alleviation of poverty and the acceleration of economic growth. These are the propellants towards greater macro-economic efficiency, human resources development, and the empowerment of women, as they were in the recent years. Development in its various aspects — economic, social and cultural — depends increasingly on knowledge-intensive industries, agriculture, and services. Largely, human development must pre-empt the overriding pre-condition for growth takeoff. Education is a major factor to human development and to the ability to adjust to changes characteristic of economic development.

### Education Sector Policy Framework

The Ministry of Education laid its broad base for human development by implementing the universal primary education and mass primary education programme with enrollment ratios of 59.1% when it

## Education and Development

started in 1980 and 76% in 1992. The pressure of increasing enrollments resulting in the demand for post-primary education will: (a) require more student places in this sub-sector; (b) necessitate the adoption of non-traditional and innovative strategies, such as maximizing the utilization of existing classrooms through suitable shifts; and (c) require enormous increase in resources. Access to schools by more students will require that the qualitative aspects of post-primary education including curricula, textbooks, resource materials, examinations, teacher preparation and in-service training of teachers, school management, etc. be addressed to ensure that investment in education will yield the desired result — quality graduates. The low external efficiency of post-primary education is indicative of the need to re-orient the design and structure of general secondary education. The Fourth Five-Year Plan (1990-95) recognizes that education in Bangladesh is more biased towards general education as against technical-vocational education. Technical-vocational education skills and work ethics need to be integrated into general secondary education in order to develop well-rounded, self-reliant, and productive citizens.

### Education Development Values and Employment

Development in its various aspects — economic, social, and cultural — depends increasingly on knowledge-intensive industries, agriculture and services. Education is the factor to developing that knowledge and the ability to

adjust to change which economic development requires. The quality of the nation's work force is important to economic growth and social development. Two factors are generally considered to be prime determinants of the quality of the work force. The first is labor productivity and the second is the flexibility of the work force to move across sectors of the economy as the structure of the economy changes. Education in Bangladesh should be able to contribute to these two factors. The higher the country's labor productivity and the more flexible its work force, the better the country is to acquire and adapt the technology needed to produce efficiently.

Education influences attitudes, values, and skills which learners can build in later life. Education provides the potential to learn, to respond to new opportunities, to adjust to social and cultural changes and to participate in the political, cultural, and social activities. As the country develops, education becomes a necessary condition for further economic growth. Studies confirm that less than 60% literacy does not allow a country to take off economically.

Education, through its linkages, influences nutrition, safe drinking water, health services, and environment. Education has, therefore, a multi-dimensional role. It prepares and trains skilled personnel at all levels. Economic returns on investment in education generally exceed returns on alternative investments. The ability of individuals to identify with their changing cultures and find

productive roles depends largely on what education can provide by way of self-understanding, better knowledge of the choices available to society, a critical view of the traditional values and the ability to face life confidently.

The education of women has been focused as an important determinant of sustainable development. Investment in female education has generally a higher social rate of return than investment in male education. The poorer the household, the greater the tendency of parents to rely on daughters to do domestic duties. Cultural and religious factors such as early marriage and social customs that define women strictly as mothers or wives can be improved with investment in education of women. Studies have confirmed that family planning and women's education are highly positively correlated.

Uneducated women generally tend to have larger families. Women constitute an important source of skills in a rapidly expanding telecommunication, financial and computer industry. The existence of educated labor force is the most important factor in the location of high-tech industries in the newly industrialized countries (NICs).

Education by itself cannot eliminate poverty but by developing skills persons can gain productive employment or organize self-employment. Education helps acculturate the people. It brings about desirable change in traditional habits and attitudes, raises the general level of aspiration, inspires progress and sparks the urge of drive and enterprise.

By building human capital, education expenditures contribute directly to economic progress and raise future earnings of people. Cognition, understanding, knowledge, skill, technological advancement and material and cultural progress — all essentially follow from education and learning. Moreover, the relationship is two-way and mutually reinforcing. As education helps raise cognitive skills and labor productivity, that encourages greater physical investment and reduces the dependency burden of the population, the growth prospect of the economy brightens up. Along with economic growth, the capacity to generate and spend more resources on education increases, which, in turn, generates further labor productivity.

The preceding discussion makes a very strong case for the role of education in development as a whole and its relationship with labor productivity as well as people's positive behavioral change in favor of economic and social transformation. The socio-economic scenario forms the backdrop for the stark realities in Bangladesh.

Labor and employment in Bangladesh presents a scenario of the dilemma of developing countries. A 1989 labor force survey of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics indicates that the total civilian labor force was 50.7 million of which only 5.7 million was urban and the rest (45 million) rural. Employment generation could keep pace with neither the rate of growth of population nor the rate of growth of civilian labor force. During the

Third Five-Year Plan (1985-90), a total of 3.39 million person-years of job were created against the Plan target of 5.1 million person-years. Unofficial estimates suggest that about 40% of the labor force was unemployed.

The employment figures (1989) indicate that the largest group of employed persons by status are the unpaid family labor in the informal sector of 45.8%, followed by the self-employed of 29.6%, paid labor of 15.1%, and employees of 9.5% (BBS, 1989).

Because of the high importance of the informal labor sector in creating employment, macro-economic policies should sustain and promote growth in this area. There should be sector-wise policies which affect favorably the operation of the various sub-sectors of the informal sector. Integrated development projects will augment the growth and performance of rural informal enterprises. The essential point is that education policies must be harmonized and coordinated with agricultural policy, fiscal policy, and trade policies. Specific programmes like provision of credit, quality control, product diversification are required for augmenting employment of students turned out by the education system.

The internal and external efficiencies of education have been extremely low. The quality of performance of the system as indicated by the relevance to real life situation and the percentage of successful candidates support this fact. At the end of 1993, out of 11.2 million unemployed people, 4.07 million were educated unemployed of whom 154,000 were graduates and master's degree holders.

The education sector, as all

other sectors of development in Bangladesh, suffers from low investment in education due to low level of tax revenues of the Government. This has affected the quality performance of the education sector including the post-primary education sub-sectors. The Government must raise its budgetary allocation for education from the current 15% to 25% by the year 2000 in order to achieve better internal and external efficiency.

### Recommendations

The overall economic development should be accelerated in order to generate more income, thus increasing government revenues. But in order to help the country ac-

celerate its economic growth, the education sector must institute reforms aimed at relevant curricula to link education to work in the labor market, review its allocation of resources by levels of education due to high tertiary per-unit cost, and reduce its financial burden by cost sharing with the private sector. This is expected to help increase internal and external efficiency of education and thereby contribute its share to development.

Courtesy: Post-Primary Education Sector Strategy Review Final Report, Govt. of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, UNDP.

## Academic Feat

Nargis Farhana of Dhanmondi Kamrunnesa Govt Girls' High School stood sixth in the combined merit list of Humanities group securing a total of 846 marks.

She got letters in six subjects. Nargis is the youngest daughter of Alhaj Junab Ali and late Tahera Junab Ali, a press release says.

Navid Hossain stood 15th in the merit list (Science group) of the 1994 Secondary School Certificate Examinations held under the Dhaka Board.

Appearing from the Agriculture University High School Mymensingh, Navid obtained letter marks in all subjects.

His father Dr Mahboob Hossain is a professor of the Bangladesh Agriculture University. His mother Tasalli is a house wife.

Maniruzzaman of Brahmaudi KKM Govt High School, Narisngdi, secured 12th position

in the merit list of the Social Science group of the SSC examination of Dhaka Board held in 1994. He got 838 marks having letters in five subjects.

He wants to be a Civil Servant in future. He is the youngest son of Khuresduzzaman, who is a businessman of village Belanagar under Narsingdi sadar thana.

### Award of PhD Degree

The University of Dhaka has recently conferred the PhD Degree on Mr Md Khalilur Rahman, Associate Professor of Zoology, University of Dhaka for his research on Wildlife Biology. His research topic was 'Ecology and Breeding Biology of Mynas'. Dr Rahman worked under the guidance of Prof Kazi Zaker Husain. Prof Sarker was his co-guide.

Dr Rahman, only son of Late Taftuddin Ahmed and eldest son-in-law of Late Kazi Naimuddin Ahmed hails from village Charigram, P. S. Singair and Dist Manikgonj.