

Feature

**'To Acquire Knowledge'**

RECENTLY I attended an interesting meeting arranged by BISS. In the meeting Md. Irshadul Haque, the Education Secretary, spoke as the chief guest and Dr. Shamsheer Ali, the Vice-Chancellor of the Open University made his thoughtful presidential remarks on improving the quality of education of the country. I could not agree with the Education Secretary more when he said in his address about his 3-point formulae on the purpose of education, namely: to acquire knowledge, to learn and practise moral values and to do a respectable job to support himself and his family.

After having explained the purpose of education, the Secretary regretfully said that none of the above objectives is being realized under the existing educational system and yet, he pointed out, that the IQ of young Bangladeshi students as judged by the American Company installing the 'OPTICAL MARK READER' computerized system for use in SSC and HSC examinations is high compared to many countries.

Obviously then, as he analyzed the situation, the fault lay not with the students but with the system and method used in our country to impart education to our students. The question arises: how we should approach to find a satisfactory solution of this complicated problem under our limited resources.

Before we come up with any solution let us analyze what led to the downfall of our standard of education. Dr. Shamsheer Ali offered a very convincing explanation for this downhill trend. He said that the competition among schools and students for capturing one of the 20 top most positions in HSC and SSC examination is very acute because they get state recognition, the news of their success is flashed in national dailies, radio and television; on top of that they get award from the Prime Minister.

Obviously a student would not like to miss such a golden opportunity of earning fame. Naturally to earn that unique distinction he would go to any length such as engaging as many house tutors as there are subjects to learn the technique of answering, and adopt any other means to score highest possible marks in every subject rather than acquiring knowledge.

In our childhood we were told that the best teachers are those who can create an urge among their students to acquire knowledge but now a teacher is supposed to train students in the art of answering questions, not help them acquire knowledge. While most of the students in an English medium

school develop an urge to acquire knowledge, his counterparts, barring exceptions, would not read a book unless he has to.

The majority of students of Bengali medium would rely on note-books. They are reluctant even to consult a dictionary to look up the meaning of a word. When the question of learning



Hard facts of life. Courtesy — Shishu Digonto



Life is harder than these stones. Courtesy — Shishu Digonto

Bengali on the part of an English medium school student comes, he also behaves the same way, i.e. he does not know how to consult a Bengali dictionary to look up the meaning of a Bengali word.

What contributed to the success of the people of the old generation? The main reason is that there was no scope to memorize either in English or in Bengali be it language or literature. As a result examinees had to read all the important pieces

Education

**Education Briefs**

**Educating Cities**

HOW cities can improve education and promote a broader understanding between people of different cultures will be highlighted at the Third Congress of Education Cities, taking place in Bologna, Italy, from 10-12 November 1994. The meeting will focus on multi-culturalism and discuss themes ranging from exclusion and marginality in cities to ways of encouraging creativity and integration. UNESCO's international programme on street children will be among the educational concerns presented in ten workshops. Initiated by Barcelona in 1990, the concept of 'Educating Cities' has grown into a worldwide network of 100 urban centres that exchange experiences on how to promote a positive learning environment for children and young people.

**The Sound of Success**

A choir of former Ecuadorian street children showed off their talents at UNESCO in June with a programme of traditional Latin American songs and Beethoven's Ode to Joy. Thanks to Obra de Promoción para la Educación en el Mundo (OPAM), an Ecuadorian NGO, they are now off the streets, following an education and performing regularly. For more information on UNESCO's education programme for street children, please contact Alfonso Tay, (address in box p 8).

**Staging Issues**

VILLAGE-based theatre, an ancient cultural tradition in Papua New Guinea, has turned into a powerful medium for getting educational and health messages across in a nation that counts more than 860 different languages, and where 65 per cent of youths have had no or little schooling. Several years ago, unemployed youths started to perform plays aimed at raising awareness on health, family planning, the environment and human rights. Their efforts led to the birth of the Awareness Community Theatre Network (ACT), under the umbrella of the Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific. The programme, presently comprising twenty-one local theatre groups in seventeen provinces, has worked with the Department of Health on several projects, including one on

HIV/AIDS that reached more than 84,000 people in rural areas. In performances, actors use a wooden phallic symbol to demonstrate the use of condoms, since censorship forbids any pictorial instructions from being included in condom packets. In workshops, ACT trains community drama groups to raise awareness through stage performances.

**Southern Asia: Sharing EFA Experiences**

REPRESENTATIVE from six countries of southern Asia met in Bangladesh to exchange experiences on innovative approaches in the field of basic education for girls and women, during a workshop convened by UNESCO's 'EFA-Making It Work' project from 28 May to June. Participants from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Thailand stressed the importance of training the local community to identify problems in the field of basic education, propose solutions and participate in the implementation of projects. Programmes work best when a climate of confidence prevails among various partners and a clear distribution of responsibilities at various levels is spelled out. Lack of information at lower government levels about national plans and strategies was identified as an obstacle to effective collaboration. Participants underlined the need for relevant, gender-sensitive curricula and suggested that teachers, especially women, should be upgraded to play the role of development agents. They also stressed that in-service training could enhance teachers' effectiveness in putting a child-centred approach into action.

**Agency Action for Africa**

ON 16 and 17 June, representatives from five United Nations agencies (UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA and the World Bank), as well as the Donors for African Education consortium, met in New York to fashion a concerted strategy to assist African countries in achieving important improvements in EFA. Over the next few months, the agencies will meet with African ministers to see how to put new approaches towards education into place.

Courtesy — UNESCO

**Private Tutoring: An Educational Malady**

by Nazma Yeasmeen Haque

TO the majority of the students, whether in school or college or in the upper levels, getting tutored in some form or other has become a must ascribing to it a look of an educational pilgrimage. This sounds all the more alarming when intelligent students capable of managing themselves scholastically are also found rushing to tutors along with the bandwagon.

A volley of questions can be raised in this regard. Why do not the students want to think and study by themselves? Why do they want the tutors to think and organize lessons for them? Why do most of the teachers prefer tutoring to teaching while the latter being their regular job? Why do parents/guardians worry about finding a good tutor as soon as their children are five year old or even earlier? Why are we allowing an educational system eat away the vital faculties of our children? It is undoubtedly a very complex problem.

Tutoring or coaching may be a temporary necessity for some students at a particular time. It therefore may origi-

nating a need of private tuition to the students. Some teachers are known to label students weak and therefore, unfit for the class. by contrast, the same students produce good results when tutored privately by the same teachers. While it is dubious to infer that the students were taught, it is axiomatic that readymade, prepared notes were lent to the students for memorization in the guise of tutoring which fetched them good marks. This is a normal practice among the teachers while they tutor privately. Since they earn much more from tutoring compared to the salaries drawn, they keep on neglecting the students in classes for attracting them to private tutoring. Spoonfeeding the students have grown on a massive scale, eating away the thinking ability of the students. In other words, tutors do not care if their students are losing their heads or not. A kind of intellectual sterility is thus grown and nurtured by tutors of which only they themselves are the beneficiaries.

No investment in particular is needed for private tutoring

running an institution in an unauthorized manner as a lucrative business. Concomitant to the examples set by such teachers of recent times are the temptations of the students to find an easy way out for performing well in the examinations which seeking readymade answers for committing them to memory. They have learnt to depend on tutors and prefer to do so however capable they themselves may be.

An obsession of tutors have engulfed the students community who shirk from working hard and exercising their mental faculties. Being young, the students are not conscious of the longterm effect of dependence on tutors thus losing confidence in their capabilities unknowingly. For appearing in public examinations or any other regular examinations, the students run to as many tutors as the number of subjects they have been studying.

The students themselves have often discovered that their teachers know magic as private tutors when lessons taught in institutions for long two years remain quite incom-



Deprived and wretched, isn't education a must for them? Courtesy — Shishu Digonto

prehensible but while in coaching same lessons are dished out to them in fully prepared form in only six months time or even less than that. Even the bright students become so glib that they fear they may miss something very important if they do not pay a visit to the tutors. This way, the baneful influence of tutoring goes on unabated.

A situation like this in the sphere of education is an academic crime committed jointly by us and our society that has been fast degenerating itself into an undestined goal.

A complex situation that has put us in quandary has arisen from poor quality of teaching, stereotyped examination systems. Teachers craftily deprive students in classes insinuating a need for private tutoring. Under the circumstances, the following suggestions are made to ameliorate the situation:

Number of educational institutions at least up to HSC level must be increased manifold, both in the public and private sector.

Quality control in education must be given the top priority supervised by an efficient authority where the policy of reward and punishment must be applied judiciously whether in government or private institutions. Examination systems need to be revamped. Only professionally committed teachers should come to teaching. Morality must be upheld in education at any cost. Tutoring done either individually or in a body on a large scale must be required to be registered with some appropriate authority because of its very commercial nature.

**Population Education Comes of Age**

IN Zambia, Grade 1 students draw their family tree, explore their environment, learn about personal cleanliness and common diseases, and discuss their responsibilities at home and school. During their first six years of study, children are exposed to a gamut of current issues, ranging from population growth and gender discrimination to HIV/AIDS and environmental degradation. At the same time they participate in community development programmes and outline possible solutions to problems facing their society.

Currently in its testing phase, this revised curriculum aims to make education more relevant to the lives and surrounding of students. Like some 100 countries around the world that have recognized the critical links between population, environment and development, the programme introduces population issues into the mainstream curriculum.

In the past, primary school age children were sometimes considered too young for exposure to population concepts, but it is now widely recognized that attitudes and beliefs are formed early in life and can be influenced by education starting at a young age," says O J Sikes, chief of the Education, Communication and Youth Branch at the UNFPA. Viet Nam has taken a lead by exposing kindergarten children to concepts such as family size through drawing, 'story telling, games and dances, while their parents attend classes on health and other matters related to childcare, human sexuality and reproduction.

In Latin America and the Caribbean region, current concerns are to expand coverage, modernize population education content and design evaluation techniques. The majority of African countries have developed strategies to introduce population education into the formal system. To further improve coordination in the area of population, environment and preventive education, UNESCO



national campaigns to involve a broad cross section of participants in the reform. In Madagascar, where children are considered gifts from God and an honour to one's ancestors, a dialogue with parents, teachers and community leaders focused on how to best insure the child's well-being and hence, that of future generations. By analysing today's economic context, parents gradually recognized that children from smaller families stood a better chance of being well cared for and educated. Their involvement with teachers and government authorities in shaping the educational reform played an important part in its acceptance. "Population education has the potential to help alleviate school attrition by improving the quality of education, especially when parents are involved in the programme and children and teachers are visibly motivated," says Sikes.

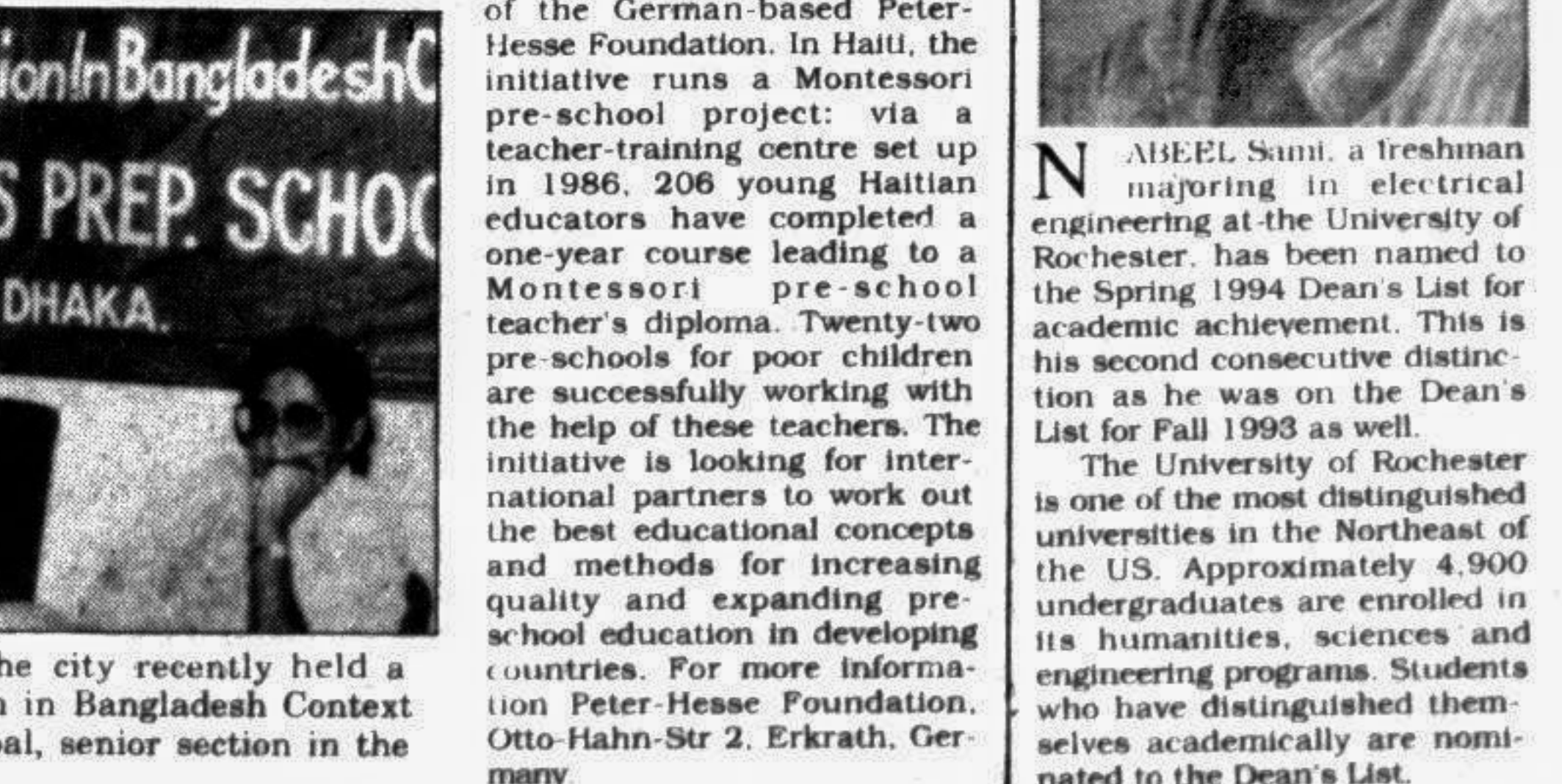
Courtesy — UNESCO

where the teacher-student ratio is very low, any plan however well organized and method of teaching is bound to fail. This is very much commonsensical. Along with it, financial needs of the low paid teachers are also recognized as another reason prompting them to take to tutoring. But the crux of the problem of tutoring becomes obvious and exposes other potent factors responsible for it when seen in contrast to the situation mentioned so far.

Educational institutions having a manageable number of students in classes where teachers are also well-paid, the students are neglected and well-planned method is not applied for teaching let alone stimulating them. Therefore, normal teaching does not help the students learn which is purported to do so. Teachers thus want an easy way out in teaching that saves their time and energy indirectly suggest-

**World Bank Development Report**

ALTHOUGH developing countries invest \$200 billion a year in new infrastructure, one billion people in the developing world still lack access to clean water and nearly 2 billion lack adequate sanitation. In its seventeenth annual



Blooming Buds Prep School in the city recently held a seminar on Modernising Education in Bangladesh Context with Sohail Akhtar Panna, principal, senior section in the chair.

**Quality Pre-Schools**

IMPROVING pre-school quality in developing countries is the main motivation of the German-based Peter-Hesse Foundation. In Haiti, the initiative runs a Montessori pre-school project: via a teacher-training centre set up in 1986, 206 young Haitian educators have completed a one-year course leading to a Montessori pre-school teacher's diploma. Twenty-two pre-schools for poor children are successfully working with the help of these teachers. The initiative is looking for international partners to work out the best educational concepts and methods for increasing quality and expanding pre-school education in developing countries. For more information: Peter-Hesse Foundation, Otto-Hahn-Str 2, Erkrath, Germany.

**Academic Feat**

NABEEL Sami, a freshman majoring in electrical engineering at the University of Rochester, has been named to the Spring 1994 Dean's List for academic achievement. This is his second consecutive distinction as he was on the Dean's List for Fall 1993 as well.

The University of Rochester is one of the most distinguished universities in the Northeast of the US. Approximately 4,900 undergraduates are enrolled in its humanities, sciences and engineering programs. Students who have distinguished themselves academically are nominated to the Dean's List.