

University Education : Search for a Solution

"TODAY there is an alien youth culture, which is due to young people who are not primarily committed to the goals of education. In some measure the youth culture draws its values from the entertainment industry. Work becomes a bore, and there is often resentment against lecturing which does not seem to be specifically useful for examination purposes." This is the scenario Bryan Wilson described in his book, "Youth Culture and University" published in England, 1959, which now appears to represent the Oxford of the East, Dhaka University.

What is more to the point is the fact that "university education as we traditionally knew and valued it in our society, sought to introduce students to the richness of our cultural inheritance, to provide access to the cumulative aesthetic, literary, philosophical and scientific resources of mankind, and to stimulate intellectual discussion and critical assessment in a context in which young people have leisure and opportunity to savour all the best that our culture has to offer." (Bryan Wilson)

Having completed academic life by graduating in sociology from the Oxford of the East, I often ask myself what I have achieved. I would like to share some of my own views on the education system which is prevailing within the University. In Dhaka University only a small proportion of the students use the library. You will find an average rate of passes in the SSC, HSC and Degree level. But hardly will you hear of passes at Honour's and Master's levels. Rather the authorities say it is the duty of

the teachers to pass the students, specially in the sociology department.

In social science and the arts faculties, except for the subject of Bangla, most of the books are found in English. Sometimes you may get some articles and a few books — but this is hardly worth mentioning. Yet Dhaka University library still is one of the richest libraries in the subcontinent.

We had a very glorious Language Movement in 1952. Bangla Academy was estab-

lished after the historic Language Movement to provide higher education in Bangla. But having established the academy, it has become the weapon of the political parties. We still in 1994 don't have the necessary books needed for higher education.

Most of the students in Social Science and the Arts faculties pass Honour's and Master's without going through the books. They often collect notes from their elder brothers. The time has come to choose whether we want to

give certificates to the students, or knowledge. The political leaders are busy with the tug of power. Every political party is using university students for their purposes. It is hardly believable that our political leaders want proper education for our students. Many students died in the gun battle in Dhaka University. The political parties did not take responsibility, though some offspring of the political leaders study in neighbouring countries for their safety. They relax, sending their sons and

daughters abroad for higher education. But it is a very expensive process. Bangla Academy cannot finance the expense which is required to translate the books. The government does not have the intention to finance it. The private publishers are not interested in translating the required books because they are not as commercially profitable as, say, publishing the books of Humayun Ahmed, Imdadul Haque and Taslima Nasreen.

There are, however, some technical problems in learning English. We learn some grammar and stipulated translation. But in schools and colleges students simply memorise questions, essays and paragraphs which they reproduce in the examination. They are tested on how to memorise and reproduce, not how to speak, write, read English.

We are a very poor country. In diplomatic exchange there is no alternative to English education, but are busy creating chaos in our own educational institutions.

A major proportion of teachers are busy with panels — blue, pink, white. They often try to make a liaison with the political parties for their own benefit. They don't care about their students' education. Teachers' politics is a daily phenomenon.

To improve the education system we must introduce English medium in Dhaka University. No doubt a majority will oppose this system claiming that the mother language should be used for university education. But educating the students in their mother language is a time consuming matter. You will have to translate a large number of books

The Public Service Commission reports that inefficiency of the government of officials creates obstacles in diplomatic exchange. It was recently published in a daily that foreign organisations prefer other countries because lower level government officials don't communicate in English properly. Foreign NGOs especially have to face this problem. We in the export and import business have to exchange in English. We have to learn English for the achievement of economic prosperity.

"Higher education operates on the assumption that there are certain objective values which older and more experienced persons can transmit to younger and less experienced ones in a university context." (Bryan Wilson)

Student are the future of the nation. The time has come to question whether students should simply collect certificates, or acquire true knowledge. Dhaka University at one time produced world famous scientists, literati, philosophers and educationists. Teachers are the conscience of the nation. They should concentrate on building up the future.

Morning shows the day. Since Post Independent Bangladesh 23 years have passed. In India when the Mondal Commission report was published, there were questions about whether India would "become a mercenary nation." We don't have the caste problem. We should have a national consensus to improve the education of the Oxford of the East, for the benefit of all the nation.

Acknowledgements to "Youth culture and university" by Bryan Wilson (1959).



Courtesy — Unicef

Breaking the Barriers

by Johanna Son

"THE roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet," reads a poster hanging at the back of a classroom in an all-girls' school near this dusty capital of the western Pakistani province of Baluchistan.

Women in Pakistan commonly lag behind their counterparts in other developing countries. Maternal mortality, life expectancy, their literacy and participation in the labour force is behind most other nations.

But because education gives women a chance for a larger role in society, the clearest signs of change in the status of Pakistani women may be sprouting inside the country's all-girls' classrooms.

Fatima Mohib Ali, a 15-year-old student in a women's school in Quetta, would like to marry only after she finishes her university studies. "I would like to work and repay my parents, because they spent for my education," she said.

Asked if she would agree to have her marriage arranged as is common in Pakistan, a 10th grade teenager in a state girls' high school said: "I will do my marriage in my own way."

Other students said they wanted to be office employees and doctors, among others. Most said they hoped to have "plenty" of children, but a few wanted only "one or two."

These girls are a minority in Pakistan, which ranks among the 10 lowest countries in the world in terms of educational achievement.

Female enrollment is half that of boys and female literacy is only 22 per cent, way below the male average of 49 per cent. Pakistan's literacy rate is much below the already-low average for South Asia. Pakistan hopes nearly half of its population will be literate by 1998.

In the outbacks of Baluchistan the literacy rate is 20 per cent for men and 12 per cent for women. School dropout rates are also highest in the province, reaching 68 per cent for males and 93 per cent for females in rural areas.

Pakistan's conservative culture, which disapproves of women mingling with men outside immediate family, makes mixed schools a difficult idea to sell.

Institutions like the Asian Development Bank (AsDB) which run a major girls' primary education project in Baluchistan, instead opted to open all-girls' schools with women teachers.

Such projects to uplift women's status are part of Pakistan's Social Action Programme (SAP), a five-year scheme launched in 1993 focusing on basic education, primary health, population planning and rural water supply. Some US\$940 million in foreign aid is expected for SAP, funded also by the World Bank and the Netherlands.

Officials say rigid opposition to girls' education may be changing. Says Sajjad Akhtar, project manager of the AsDB Girls Project: "Now the parents

are interested in educating their children. But previously, they didn't allow especially female children to go to school."

Women's education is often linked to falling fertility rates (6.3 per cent in Pakistan), improvement in health and nutrition and productivity, which in turn boost a nation's human resources and contribute to development. Akhtar says: "A literate mother can also teach a family, a nation."

He says Islam is not the reason for Pakistanis' reluctance to educate women. "It's not religion. It's the social system that is against education. We start the day with a prayer saying 'O God give me knowledge,' so how can Islam be against education?" he asks.

Illiterate parents may see less value in formal education, thinking that having daughters away from home deprives them of an extra pair of hands to help in the farm or in household. Thus, officials and teachers are using novel means to bring in — and keep — girls in school. This year, the government began giving monthly 300-rupee stipends (US\$10) to girls in rural areas who go to school. Some teachers help pay for students' uniforms.

Salpina Awan, a 19-year-old teacher at the AsDB-funded Community Model School in Killa Sardar, seeks out mothers or students who are absent for days or weeks on end. "I say please send your daughter back, because education is important for her future."

The community primary school used to be a mudhouse with 56 students. Rebuilt in 1993, the school now has 202 students although its capacity is only for 120 children. There are also six boys in the girls' school, probably the best indicator of success.

Mohammad Ramzan, deputy director of the Science Education Project in Quetta, believes the next step is to ensure that the economy has a demand for the girls after finishing their education.

"There must be jobs for these girls after school, or else the parents will say education was a waste of time," he says. "They will say 'I educated my child, but he or she is still doing the same thing as me.'"

More changes have to take place before women's status makes a marked climb, although Shahnaz Kazi of the Islamabad-based Pakistan Institute of Development Economics says Islamabad is focusing on women more than ever before.

But laws that institutionalise bias against women remain, such as one saying the testimony of two women equals that of one man. Kazi says Premier Benazir Bhutto has been unable to muster the political clout and numbers in parliament needed to change them. Still, she adds: "Much of what has happened have been symbolic gestures, but they have impact. The point is that once you've done the little things, you can't go back to the past."

— IPS

Value-Added Lessons

by Yojana Sharma

THE Me Generation. Generation X... what next? A generation of nihilists?

Many parents and teachers in Asia do not want to wait to find out, and educating children about values is gaining ground in countries across the region.

South Korean children must learn 'national ethics' and moral education, in Singapore and Taiwan moral education is compulsory and now China is introducing more Confucian teaching in its schools to arrest the alarming decline in moral standards. In Hong Kong education in human values is spread throughout the curriculum.

There is recognition that throughout Asia the family unit, while not falling apart, is not as cohesive as it once was. Divorce is rising while external distractions such as television, electronic games, and comics are increasing.

Only children with strong, sound value systems will be able to resist the corrupting onslaught — or so the argument goes. Asian politicians also favour the teaching of values to safeguard 'Eastern' values against 'Western' values being increasingly imported via satellite television and other media.

But ironically, teaching values in schools separates values and ethics from religion and community, and breaks it down into its components such as loyalty, integrity, gratitude, endurance, self-esteem and so on, all of which are universal rather than 'Eastern'.

For teachers, the point is not whether children prefer 'Western' or 'Eastern' values but whether they have any at all. Educators are more concerned that children develop basic human values common to all cultures. They believe some of what had contributed to perceived moral decline in the West are ominously present here, and increasing.

"In the past there were not so many distractions. Basic human values were always at the bottom of every child's heart," says Sister Marie Therese of Hong Kong's Good Hope Primary schools. "Now they are drowned out."

In the last two years, all the teachers at Good Hope have attended workshops and undergone training on how to integrate teaching of human values in all parts of the curriculum.

They are taught the method developed by the India-based Satya Sai Foundation and adapted for international use by Lorraine Burrows, a Montessori teacher from Britain and Thai member of Parliament At Ong Jumsai.

The method is now widely used throughout Thailand, heavily promoted by the government there. It is also being increasingly used in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Japan, Britain and Australia.

Although the Satya Sai Foundation's 'Education in Human Values' is itself adapted from the ancient Indian Bal Vikas (blossoming of the child)

system of moral education, it is seen as non-religious.

"These values are values that I had been teaching myself for a long time," says Sister Marie Therese. "What the Foundation has done is to organise the teaching of basic values in a methodic way which makes it easier for teachers."

Many educators talk about the importance of human values in education, but have little clue of how to integrate it into the classroom. The Foundation has developed lesson plans and non-culture specific teaching materials for use schools.

In Hong Kong, the Foundation has trained more than 2000 teachers in the last 18

months and they in turn have introduced the method wholly or partially to some 20 schools.

Lesson plans devised by the Foundation include storytelling, artwork, singing, dramatics and other group activities to convey positive con-

cepts such as honesty, integrity, gratitude, perseverance, self confidence and so on.

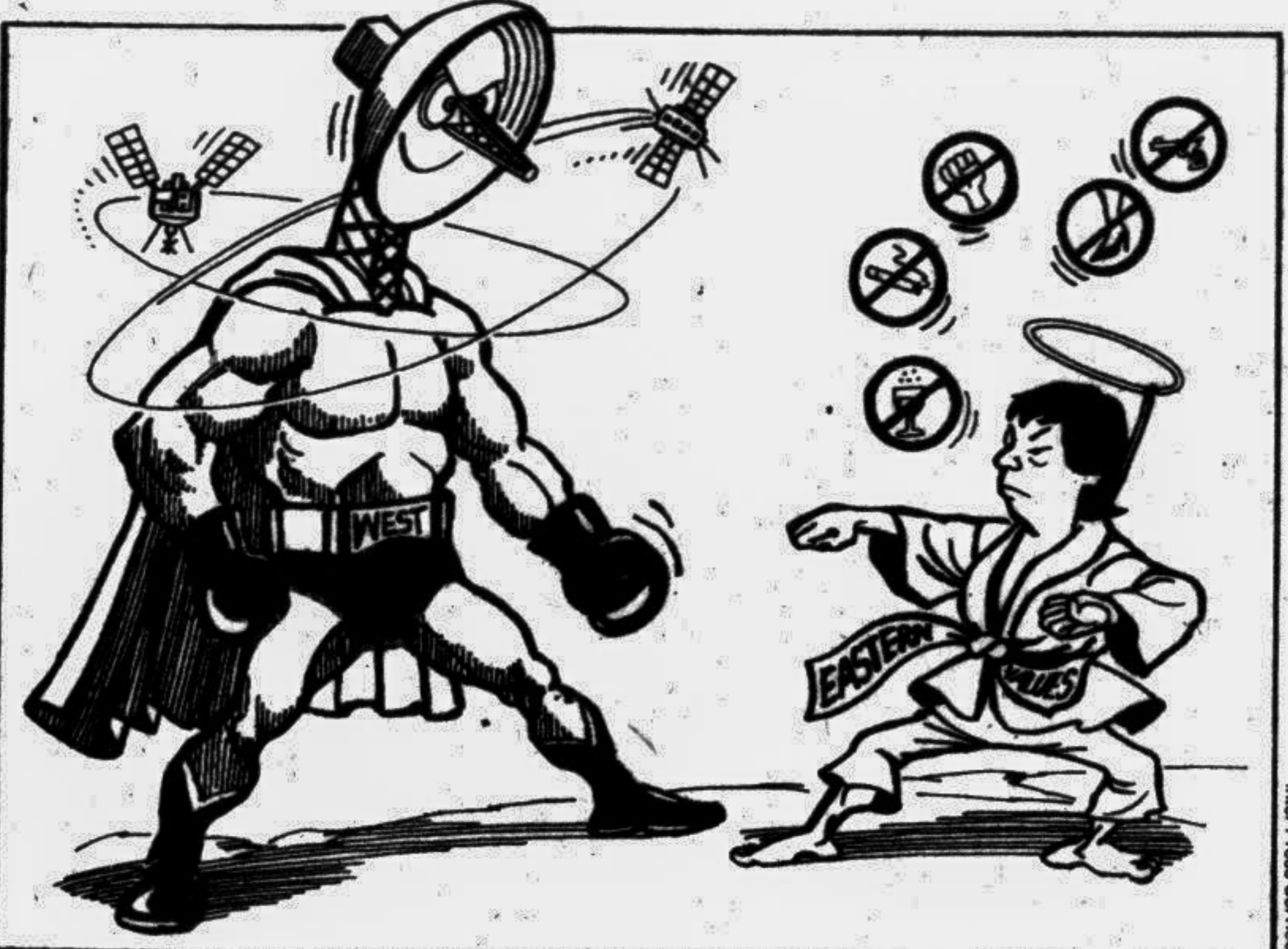
Dorothy Chung of Hong Kong's Institute of Language in Education has developed teaching materials for Chinese medium schools, incorporating much of the Foundation's materials. She notes, "Human values are universal. There is no discrimination between Chinese culture and modern culture which some would call Western culture."

The important thing if children are not to be turned off altogether is how to teach values without sounding trite, cloying and insincere, says Daakshu Mansukhani of the

taught. Says Mansukhani: "You can instill values by always emphasising the positive, whether teaching history, geography or science. We are not saying ignore the negative, but the strength of the positive must overcome the negative."

Since Hong Kong began promoting education in human values as an integral part of the curriculum in 1992, charities and groups dealing with human rights, social help and even green issues report a growing interest by schools in their work in the past few years.

Often the very organisations that Asian governments attack for promoting 'Western' ideas, these groups are now being invited to give talks on their work. And they report that



Satya Sai Foundation in Hong Kong. Children do not want to be preached to about values by adults who they see flouting the same values all the time.

Basic human values must be "instilled" so that they become part of the person, rather than

schools are not merely interested in hearing about their work but the philosophy behind their activities.

Says Robin Kilpatrick of Amnesty International in Hong Kong: "I don't just talk about human rights but start with prejudice and intolerance — whether it be against kids who wear glasses or fat kids, and show how it has no logic."

The demand from schools is such that the human rights organisation is now hiring a full-time education officer in Hong Kong, something it never needed before.

Will the teaching of values work? Teachers say at the very least, it will mean a more balanced education in many Asian nations where the only thing that counts is exam results.

"A child may be brilliant academically, but is he able to handle his emotions? Is he able to care about society? Without these, academic success will waste away," says Mansukhani.

Many teachers also add that teaching values in schools will bring home to children how universal basic human values are. — IPS

School Phobia

by Col Mirza Shafi (Rtd)

FOR one child in every 200, school becomes too terrible to bear. Imagine a child who refuses to get out of bed in the morning, sometimes develops headaches, and nausea, as time goes by becomes panicky and then finally refuses to go to school. He locks himself in the bathroom, starts screaming, crying and even vomiting. His mother gets him into the car but when at the school, he clings to the door crying hysterically and would not let go.

This scene happens daily in front of all schools. 'School phobia', as the psychologists call it, is not a common condition but when it happens it causes great anguish in children, parents and schools. Strictly speaking, it is hardly a true fear of schools, rather some aspects of school, which most children would take in their normal stride, which causes panic in a particular child. These aspects could be:

- When class arrangements are changed suddenly, or without apartment reasons.
- When a new teacher is introduced during the term.
- When a teacher unwittingly threatens another student.
- If there are certain unhygienic situations (dirty) bathrooms, furnishing etc.
- Over crowding in the classes.

Again, there are certain complex family process at work that can make school phobia more akin to a separation anxiety the problem is not going to school, it is more about leaving the home. This habit does not grow overnight and parents are the ones who sow the seeds of bad schools attendance in the early stage of a child's life. Some parents see their child's 'great distress' and decided to leave the child at home. They feel that if the child is deprived of going to school the symptoms disappear. This makes many parents more protective and more unsure about the wisdom of attending classes. This way of thinking gradually makes the parents anxious themselves about separating from the child.

In cases where the parents consider schooling at this early age is not compulsory, they are apt to be rather relaxed. When families oversleep or the child wakes up late and shows un-

willingness to go to school, they normally don't bother; on other-days a child arrives later than others. The message that school is a dismissible option and not very important, seeps home and the child slowly avoids going to school. Again, some children are able to go to school in normal days, but the problem creeps up on Sundays or the days immediately after a holiday break. Even as adults, it is a case for study. During our cadet training period there was a term, 'Monday morning Sir' — of which we were reminded by the Drill Instructor, for our apparent lethargic movements.

Let us, therefore, evolve strategies which can help a child out of school phobia. First of all, unless a child shows real symptoms of an illness parents should insist gently but firmly that he/she goes to school. If there is some emotional upheaval at home, the child would be better off at school where life is usually consistent and normal. A change in a child's life does not have to be upsetting and parents can do much to make school going or transition from one school to another smooth and easy. Parents must visit, at times spending half a day or so in a class; talk positively about the school during the after-school chats; particularly explain about the positive values of education, etc.

Some children could be helped by asking for a list of the situations they fear most. The children could then be taught techniques for controlling panic in real situations. The usual advice we at MIT offer is to allow the children to face the situations gradually with constant support from the school and family. If any child has a specific worry about the school, we take serious note of the case and solve the case mutually after discussions.

Whatever approach is decided upon, the problem must be tackled jointly by the school and the family. And once the child knows what to expect, has been helped to develop a few personal strategies for dealing with it, he is far less likely to panic in a new school environment or expect home situations from barring him attending school.

The writer is Administrator, MIT Banani.

Bhutan Steps up Drive to Increase Literacy Rate

by Jagan Nath

UNITED Nations aid agencies and Western countries appear to be loosening their purse-strings to promote the spread of education in the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan.

Both in education and health facilities Bhutan is one of the most backward countries in the world.

The Bhutan government has signed an agreement with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and other UN agencies for the renovation, upgrading and, in some cases, new construction of 29 primary schools and basic health units in the six eastern districts of the country.

According to official sources, the first phase of the project to strengthen infrastructure for primary education and basic health services is expected to cost about Nu. 112 million (\$3,630,731).

According to the agreement, seven entirely new structures are to be built, four reconstructed, one upgraded and three rehabilitated.

An UNDP spokesman reports that quite a number of UN-funded development activities have already been carried out in the eastern part of the kingdom in keeping with the royal government's policy of balanced regional development.

Officials of the external resources division of the Finance Ministry have been quoted as saying that implementation of the second phase of the project will depend on the performance of the current phase. It will also involve schools and health facilities.

Incidentally, the World Food Programme (WFP) is going to stop assistance to monastic and technical institutions in Bhutan. The assistance will be diverted to needy areas like primary education.

Says a WFP spokesman: "The impact of the WFP aid has been felt and it has contributed as an incentive to attract children to schools."

An official Bhutanese source admits that the WFP has been responsible for a 10 per cent increase in school enrollment and also for the decline in the drop-out rate in schools.

Britain is also lending a helping hand in Bhutan's drive to improve the literacy rate in the country.

For instance, the Drugyal High School at Paro has been built with assistance of L1.05

million from the British High Commissioner to India, Sir Nicholas Fenn.

"It is a new concept of school design which is tailored to Bhutanese ways, respecting tradition and culture and yet also a school that has something of the British experience of residential school education," he said.

So far, as many as 128 Bhutanese teachers and educators have studied in the UK under a training programme, while five British technical officers had lent their expertise to the development of education in the country.

Designed to be a model secondary school, the Drugyal High School was initiated as a project in 1989 after a landslide damaged much of the Paro school.

India has also been playing a significant role in the spread of education in Bhutan. Even right from the start of planned educational development in the kingdom, the neighbouring country has played a key role.

In fact, when Bhutan first introduced the modern system of education three decades ago, more than 40 teachers were recruited from India.

In remote schools, they lived in temporary shacks with little or no furniture, and slept on hard mud floors away from spots where raindrops seeped in through holes in the thatched roofing.

At present New Delhi provides 100 scholarships every year to talented Bhutanese students for higher education and professional studies. In-service training is given to nominees of both the civil services and the private sector.

Bhutanese students also go to Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Japan, Singapore, the UK and the United States for higher studies.

While the need for teachers is still filled by recruiting non-Bhutanese, mostly from India, the proportion of local teachers in the education system has seen a dramatic increase. Trained Bhutanese teachers, most of them educated by the Indian pioneers, now make up more than 60 per cent of the teaching force.

Education officials are confident that the proportion would increase to 90 per cent by the year 2000. The remaining 10 per cent would be recruited from outside to enable an exchange of ideas and technology with Bhutanese teachers. — Depthnews Asia