Our education system

The inborn disease

UR students have failed miserably in acquiring quality education. their knowledge is dwindling. receding and getting shallower day by day - an indictment often levelled against them without making allowances for the jeopardising circumstances they have fallen victim to through no fault of their own. They are the inevitable product of a system that was

diseased at its very genesis. True, the students have been parroting bazaar notes, sure successes and guides, a considerable portion of them have been resorting to unfair means in examinations, some of them have even made attempts on the lives of the teachers who prevented them from cheating. This scenario of our academic arena has been the cause of concern for our men at the helm of educational affairs, and many others in society. It is assumed that were it possible to remove these symptoms, it would surely lead to resuscitation of academic life in particular, and national life in general. Stringent measures were called for and there could be no denial of it. Seemingly we could have a peaceful slumber if such a monstrous malaise could be arrested. If examinations could be conducted peacefully, free from unfair means, we would rest assured as to the excellence of the education system.

Magnificent school buildings have been erected, new universities and higher institutions of learning have been established over the vears. But all these could not have brought about the desired result in the field of education Why? The answer perhaps lies in the fact that the very system of education is defective in itself. The ills are inherent in that our system of education is far removed from real life, it is not relevant to the actual needs of our society. Without making the education system answerable to social needs and relevant to real-life situations. no measures, however stringent, to bring back fairness in the examination halls will prove adequate to secure education for the greater interest of the nation.

The education system of the country is a legacy of British rule, and barring a few touches of plaster here and there it has remained unchanged to the present time. It has however degenerated, and the degener-

115th out of 131

countries with respect

to literacy, with only one third

of those over the age of 15 able

to read and write. Of rural

women. 85 per cent are illit-

erate and amongst the poorest

one third, illiteracy may even

100 per cent. Primary school

enrolment figures are decep-

tive, since no more than 15

per cent of all school children

pass the primary level. The st-

tuation among girls is worse;

estimates of successful female

completion of primary school

is about 3 per cent. Around

half of all dropouts occur in

the first year of school, when

the futility, cost and irrele-

vance of education becomes

apparent to both parent and

education are many: unmoti-

vated or absent teachers, lack

of encouragement from par-

ents and the community, large

classes, irrelevant currentill

content, lack of books and

other teaching material rigid

turning of schools gender of

teacher, an economic situation

which compels the child to

work within or outside the

July (Speaking to a Committee

of the US Congress in 1989)

"Human capital is a more fru-

portant factor for achieving

economic growth than physical

capital ... Investment in human

deficient educations well into

for education (1990-1995) has

earmarked 3.58 per cent of

the total budget for this sector,

which is relatively higher than

allocations in the past but still

highly inadequate in compari-

son to the need. In neighbour-

ing countries, 4.4 per cent of

the GNP in spent on education.

Furthermore, much of the ex-

penditure is in urban areas,

whereas over 80 per cent of

the population are rural resi-

The Fourth Five Year Plan

the twenty first century."

Yet according to Richard

home.

Obstacles to the pursuit of

by M Arshad Ali ation is the consequence of an inexorable natural process, i.e., the system was ill-conceived and ill-motivated from the start. All ill things inevitably rot and decompose. The British rulers felt it necessary to introduce an education system which would ensure the supply of clerical hands required in their offices and establishments. For reasons social and financial it was not feasible for the British to import these people from England. The education system conceived for the Indians was based on the traditional British policy of 'Divide and Rule'. The British never planned, nor did they ever intend, to develop the population into human resources which would be imbibed with the consciousness of the actual needs of their own society, and of their accountably to it, knowing full well that such a real life-oriented education would be fraught with destructive possi-

Europeans in fashion and manner, in thought and deed. the more they suffered from an inferiority complex compared to the Europeans. This inferiority complex in its turn engendered in them an abhorrence for the common indian people. The educated people could easily find governmental jobs but instead of sharing their knowledge with the general mass, they utilised it for the promotion of their personal ends. The newfound education made them complacent in their clerical jobs which they considered as the be all and end all of their lives. The great majority of the people the labouring classes who eked out a living by the sweat of their brow - were held in contempt. Physical labour was an indignity and their own position was one of overlord in relation to the working people. This caused a craze among the young people for securing clerical jobs in government of-

The education system of the country is a legacy of British rule, and bearing a few touches of plaster here & there, if has remained unchanged to the present

bilities to their colonial ag-

grandisement. They aimed at turning out a group of English speaking people who would be isolated from the broad masses and scornful of their way of life -"a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect". And Macaulay was right, as this education system gave birth to a class of educated Indians who were totally alienated from the native way of life. They consumed European culture at the cost of the indigenous one, and detached themselves from their own people and society. Fed by foreign culture under British patronage the native elite developed a serious attitude of antagonism against the prevalent manners and customs which the dubbed as detestable superstitions and taboos. And they made no efforts to reform those social customs and practices because of their estrangement from that soci-

Moreover these newly-educated young men were infected with a peculiar affliction - the more they mimicked the

fices in utter disregard of other vocations. This craze became contagions among all strata of society. The man who held the higher position in government service commanded wider social acclaim. so much so that he superseded the dedicated social workers or those who carried on independent trades earning sizeable incomes. The parents and relations of these government servants wallowed in the status of the service holders. Their neighbours instigated and groomed their offspring to follow their suit. Lured by the acclaim which government service holders received, the people tended to be averse to free thinking, independent vocations or manual labour. Hence the utter disrespect of the educated Bengalees for manual work.

After the independence of 1947, and even after the liberation of 1971, this trend of the education system had but little changed. We have enacted a constitution which has democracy as one of its basic principles. Democracy -"government of the people, by the people and for the people"

— demands a high degree of consciousness of the people for its success. And education of the common man is the chief instrument to inculcate mass consciousness. We have been deafened by the much vaunted calls for universal primary education, mass literacy and the like under many different regimes. But have we made any remarkable headway towards the removal of illiteracy from the country?

The needed all-out attack is

vet to be unleashed. The in-

herent spirit of the British ed-

ucation policy is kept intact.

with only some patchwork

here and there on the wear and tear of time. Our budgetary provision is hardly sufficient to facilitate the stupendous task of the removal of illiteracy -75 per cent of the population are steeped in the malaise Greater importance is still attached to producing graduates to fill in clerical vacancies in offices as was the case during the British rule. Though it is the avowed policy of the state that greater emphasis should be laid on the spread of primary education, very little has so far been achieved in this field. Literacy has increased by only 4 or 5 per cent during the twenty three years of post liberation, whereas student population in the universities has doubled adding to the number of unemployed educated youth. hateful of manual work, mostly seeking clerical or similar jobs. This attracts attention to that aspect of the system which holds paramount importance from the national point of view. Most of the graduates belong to the social groups whose per capita income is higher than the labouring people. They belong to the more privileged group. Benefited by the greater share of the national exchequer, they again add to their own affluence as they find employment, while the down trodden lack the bare minimum of education. This further widens the gap between these two groups, creating a vicious circle. This may give rise to forces baneful to national cohesion and integration, and this was the cool calculation of the 'Divide and Rule' policy-

makers who introduced this

system of education which we

have miserably fafled to undo,

even by constituting as many

commissions for education as

there have been changes in the

government since 1947.

Myth: Poverty is the root of female illiteracy

by Raana Haider

In rural areas, 37 per cent of all girls eligible for primary education (6-10 year olds) attend school; the rate is 50 per cent in urban areas. According to a World Bank study in Bangladesh, the proportion of the education budget spent on girl students is: 44 per cent in primary education, 32 per cent in secondary education and 13 per cent in university education.

The overall picture of girls education is one of limited opportunity, numerous obstacles and questionable relevance. There are also a host of gender-selective attitudinal, infrastructural and cost-benefit factors which in isolation and in combination further undermine the schooling of girls.

Contrary to popular thinking, poverty is not the root cause for the low level of

Education (NFPE). Basic education in Bangladesh refers to education intended to develop basic learning skills (i.e. 3R's) as well as some basic life skills necessary for the children to survive, to improve the quality of their lives and to continue learning.

The definition of basic education includes three components: a child's ability to read and write a short, simple statement on everyday life; a child's ability to work out everyday arithmetic; and a child's knowledge/attitude on selected life skills necessary for him/her to improve the quality of his/her life.

Successful innovative educational programmes, focusing on girls' education, by two Bangladeshi development organisations (BRAC & DAM. Dhaka Ahsania Mission) have

"If you educate a man, you educate an individual. If you educate a woman, you educate the family".

schooling, particularly of girts. Repeated studies have shown that compared to economic solvency of the families, rele-

capital in the form of nutrition, basic education, and health vance of curriculum, proxim cannot be postponed: it either ity, female teachers and partic ipation of parents are the factakes place at an appropriate age when the need is present tors which both attract and re- or it does not. For the young tain girl students. child there is no second Almost all NFPE outlets chance. The underemphasized which have incorporated the tragedy of the disinvestment in human capital in the 1980s is that the results will be carried forward in stunted bodies and

above factors into their schooling programme, have reported that the participation of girls is higher than boys. Most NGOs which undertake such educational programmes, limit their activities to the landless and the poor. The students thus come from very poor families and yet, more than two-thirds of the students are girls, which negates the popular belief that poverty is the root cause of female illiteracy.

· Given the low level of literacy in Bangladesh, the move is towards providing basic education for the maximum number of people in non-formal settings i.e. Non-Formal Primary

relied on the Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) approach.

-Mahatma Gandhi

The BRAC programme is designed to serve the nonstarters and dropouts; the emphasis being on girls, of rural poor landless families who are largely unreached by the formal primary educational system. The programme has succeeded in implementing, since 1985, an innovative 3-year curricula for children 8-10 years of age, and in 1988, a 2year curricula for children 11-16 years old.

Villages are selected on the basic of parent demand and availability of target children and teacher. Class hours are flexible, meeting for two-anda-half hours daily. The timing convenient for each school is decided jointly by the teacher and parents to suit seasonal work and religious needs. Classes are held 6 days a week for 268 days each year. There is I teacher for each BRAC

country. Schools report a dropout rate of less than 5 per cent and over 90 per cent of students graduating from BRAC schools gain admittance to Class 4 in the formal primary educational system. Calculated on the basis of number of children completing their education, the cost is low - an estimated 25 to 50 per cent lower than costs in the formal sys-

As of January 1992, 75 per

cent of BRAC enrolment was

made of girls and 180,000

children were enroled in over

6000 schools all over the

DAM works for improvement in the life situation of disadvantaged groups, both in rural and urban areas of Bangladesh. In rural areas, the focus is on the illiterate landless poor, marginal farmers and fishermen, destitute womer and people having little education. In urban areas, beneficiaries include unemployed youths, child labourers, destitute women and slum dwellers. Target beneficiaries have to meet the following criteria: Those who earn their livelihood from physical labour. Those who sell their labour for around 180 days a year. Those who have a maximum land holding of 0.50 acre of land, including the homestead.

Women constitute more than 70 per cent of beneficiaries. The Mission's package of development support services include non-formal primary education, need-based and work-oriented functional literacy, human resource development training, skill training, credit for income generating activities and healthcare. However, the priority is education in general, non-formal education in particular and overall, the enrolment of girls.

The success of the NFPE programme can be measured by the fact that in 300 centres throughout the country, 70 per cent of the students enter the formal primary educational system. More girls are enroled at all centres and their continued presence at school is proof that a girl-friendly-educational environment can go a long way to increase female literacy in Bangladesh.

Raana Haider is a Bangladeshi socialist, currently resident in Catro.

Higher education needs updating

TNIVERSITIES may be in danger of becoming

___ museum pieces.* Eminent Nicaraguan educator Carlos Tunnermann Bernheim believes universities are in crisis. These venerable educational institutions are suffocating within rigid, outdated structures and are poorly adapted to the modern world, he says.

Mr Bernheim thinks change is the biggest challenge facing universities and colleges.

He pointed out that the world is undergoing profound transformations as it prepares to enter a new millenium. The transformations, he said, have created a completely different and much more promising international scene. He cited. among other things, the emergence of more participatory societies.

Mr Bernheim said higher education, like the rest of the world, will have to accept that change has become a characteristic of the times. It

will have to adapt accordingly. Pointing out that most universities were created during the first centuries of the current millenium as a result of a change in the thinking of humankind and social relations, he said the institutions will have to review thought-fully and, subsequently, revise their objectives, missions, tasks and organisations, and methods of work. They will have to train people to respond to social change and to the rapid

HE challenge of the Universal Primary Eduction programme of Bangladesh is educating a large number of children of the illiterate poor. It implies access, retention and completion of primary schooling with satisfactory achievement levels by disadvantage learners. Attracting the poor to education has become a real dilemma for the existing formal primary education system of Bangladesh. The poor are not only unable to attend schools for long durations, and heavy curriculum. but many young boys and girls can not be spared by their families for earning some income or undertaking household chores that have indirect costs. The situation for them worsens in schools because they lack the academic preparation and support the schooling demands, and remain far behind their peers from advantaged and literate families in academic performance. In the course of time, they develop a lower self-image which plays a key role by introducing a number of problems related to primary education - failures, repetition, lack of interest and poor academic performance. Unfortunately this group represents about 90 per cent of the target group of the Universal Primary Education

programme Positive self-image is an aspect which Early Childhood Development programmes and primary education should foster. If a child is respected. his/her opinions are considered, his/her achievements are appreciated, the individual child gains self-confidence — a tremendous advantage to deal with any problems not only in his/her academic performance, but in day to day life

It is a well-known and wellestablished fact that the beauty of nature and one's country makes a lasting impact in the minds of children. One day's visit to the country-side and other outings, can help children develop a sense of belonging to the motherland, its culture, language, nature and people. Listening to stories of the liberation war from a local

Universities will not be able to face future challenges if

they cling to traditional approaches

by Estela Carreon

development of knowledge and

This means that universities must be constantly prepared to review their teaching structures and programmes, since crists becomes more acute when the need for change coincides with rigid academic organisations and educational traditions that ascribe more importance to form than to cognitive content, Mr Bernheim said.

Federico Mayor, directorgeneral of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organisation (UNES-CO) agrees saying what the world needs are 'universities adapted to the pace of life today, and to the different characteristics of each region and each country. Institutional and conceptual changes in universities are therefore an essential part of overall change and the transformation of society, all of which are needed urgently as we approach the threshold of the next mille-

Mr Bernheim warned that if the universities are unable to face up to the challenge, other institutions are likely to fill the vacuum. Such a situation could turn centres for higher lear-

ning the museum pieces. But he acknowledged that

some problems might make if difficult for universities to adjust readily to the new rea-

The first problem is how to deal with rising enrollments without sacrificing the quality of tertiary education. UNESCO reports that university enrollment throughout the world rose from 28.2 million in 1970 to 47.5 million in 1980. This further increased to 58.4 million in 1988 or more than double the figure less than 20 vears before.

The increase was particularly significant in the Third World, Between 1970 and 1988, the number of students has multiplied eight-fold in sub-Saharan Africa, six-fold in Eastern Asia, the Pacific and the Arab states, by four-and-ahalf in Latin America and the Caribbean, and doubled in Southern Asia, according to UNESCO.

The second problem is relevance of programmes offered by universities.

The lack of connection between the output of higher education, in terms of graduates' knowledge and skills, and social needs gives rise to some of the harshest criticism levelled against the higher education system, whose financial requirements keep on

rising and compete for funding with other levels of education.

Mr Bernheim said. The educator warned that universities will not be able to face future challenges if they continue to cling to traditional approaches. Rigid archetypes have to be replaced by flexibe academic structures and

practices. Post-secondary education systems should begin to take steps to encompass both universities and non-university higher, institutions. Interlinkages must be set up to give young people a full and varied range of educational opportunities. Early entry into the world of work and the continuation of studies up to the highest academic levels should be allowed.

Mr Bernheim said it should be a natural part of the universities 'mission to cater to the requirements of lifelong and continuing education they are to be considered centres for the updating of knowledge throughout life.

He said the idea of a 'critical university' - a place where 'the keenest awareness of the times (is allowed) to flourish" - should now be complemented by the concept of 'anticipatory university' which looks firmly to the future, makes future-oriented reflection one of its central concerns, draws up possible scenarios, and anticipates, rather than being led, by - Depthnews Asia

tion of knowledge, skills and

attitudes should be through

Early Childhood Education and UPE

by Momtaz Jahan



Photo: Clande Sauvageot, UNICEF.

freedom fighter would give a high educational return which can not be achieved through a hundred-page text.

Likewise, the seeds of health habits, ethnical sense and civic sense should be planted during pre-school and primary school age. Small activities like keeping wastes in a specific place, not to throw rubbish in other people's yards, not to destroy others' crops and plants, not to pollute pond water, taking care of plants, trees, and animals, listening to others, considering others' opinions, finding the owner of something lost, confessing wrong-doings, considering others' needs, and so on, should be addressed by the curriculum and translated into teaching-learning activities for the children. Thus the children gradually will develop a strong sense of good and bad, desired and undesired habits and attitudes.

In this period, while the programme is addressing tender-age children, the transac-

play, games and planned activities, rather than memorisation of facts and information. Piaget views play as a way of taking the outside world and manipulating it so that it fits the child's present organized schemas. Erikson describes play as a developmental progression in which the child adds new and more complex understanding about the world at each stage. Play is very important for various reasons. It is primarily through play that children learn to be social share, wait for their turns, and cooperate or subordinate their wishes to the group. Moreover language skills are also fostered through play. Under educational play, manipulative play involves constructing, fitting, arranging, sorting, etc which help children develop muscular coordination, fine motor skills, problem-solving skills and concept formation. Physical play refers primarily to activities involving gross motor coordination. Dramatic plays help children to place them in imaginary situations and play imaginary roles which help attitude building, language and social-emotional development of the children. -Considering the disadvan-

taged position of the children of the illiterate poor, the Early-Childhood programme as well as the Primary Education Programme should compensate for their weaknesses and lackings in the academic field. Otherwise mere access and enrollment in schools will not be able to achieve the goals of Universal Primary Education programme in Bangladesh, the success of which would largely depend on the academic assistance to the disadvantaged learners of the system. In brief, there is no alternative to the compensatory education component in ECD or the Primary Education Programme, may it be homebased or centre-based, if we want to make Universal Primary Education a success and if we mean by UPE, the call of the day. Education For

How children's performance can match their potential

AMI is very good at explaining details about any object, picture, place etc. Even after a long time, he can give a detail description of the places he has visited. Pavel is very strong in doing things. He wants to learn everything by touching objects, doing activities and by moving

his body. These are not exceptional cases. In every class we can find some children who are good at learning by listening and have good auditory memory. Others of them can learn easily by seeing objects, pictures, diagrams graphs etc. They can clearly recall from their visual image.

A very basic question is How does one teach children?" Our common sense tells us that in order to teach children one has to know how children learn. Without knowing the learning style of children, how can one teach them? Every child learns differently, they have an individual learning style which is

unique, like a signature. According to Professor Howard Gardner (Harvard University) we have seven different types of intelligence. These are: Verbal/Linguistic, Logical/Mathematical, Visual/ Spatial, Musical/Rhythmic, Body/Kinesthetic, Interpers-

by Farida Akhtar onal and Intrapersonal. One child may be very strong in

Our brain has two sides that work in harmony. The right side is called "The Creative Brain" and left is called "The Academic Brain". The right brain gives emphasis to Rhyme, Rhythm, Music, Pictures, Imagination, and Patterns. The left brain deals with Language, Logic, Numbers, Mathematics, Sequence and Words. In order to use productively both sides of the brain, we have to have activities for children at school by which they can use the left and right sides of their brain.

Logi-cal/Mathematical and an-

other in Body/Kinesthetic.

In the teaching/learning process four steps are important. These are: Motivation (Why), Presentation (What), Practice (How) and Application/Creativity (What

These four steps come like a wheel. We can explain the wheel in this way: For learning, a child must know "why I am going to learn it?" That means, she must be motivated to learn it. The next step is to present the lesson. After presentation children must practice it. But presentation and practice must follow different modes such as visual, auditory and

haptic (doing, touching, moving). After practicing, a child must have the scope to apply the knowledge or to create anything out of newly acquired knowledge. After these four steps again comes "Why".

Some common arguments on the issue are as follows: Child Rights Argument: Every child has the right to develop according to his/her full potential. This is possible only when we create a child friendly learning atmosphere considering individual learning

Economic Argument: A student friendly learning atmosphere can guarantee reducing dropout, better school performance, sustainable education, application of knowledge in real life situation, creativity

etc. That means, it guarantees the meaningful and better utilization of money.

Development Argument: When learners are able to apply their newly acquired knowledge in different areas of life, it makes a great difference in respect of overall development. It can have a positive impact on health, personal hygiene, environment, psychosocial life, culture, society, etc.

Our magic brain has enormous potential. But for most of us our performance does not match up to it. The same applies to children. For children, we have to be aware of, and create a learning environment where:

- learning can be equally effective, enjoyable and acceptable to all children, and - children's performance

can match their potential.



Md Mozammel Haque, son of Md Jashim Uddin, obtained a first class Master of Education Degree (Educational Administration Department) from the Institute of Education and Research, University of Dhaka. The topic of his masters thesis was "Need' and Importance of establishing OPEN UNIVERSITY in Bangladesh." It is a pioneer research of its nature in Bangladesh. He got a positive opinion for

establishing Open University in Bangladesh. He is interested to Complete PhD degree on the same topic. Now he is preparing for the same.