

# Feature Education Buying Peace on Campus

**M**OST vice chancellors of universities today, when they take office, seek to ensure by any means whatsoever that they manage to survive in that seat. The situation is as bad as that.

Towards this end, they will make every kind of compromise. They compromise with those who appointed them. Sometimes they continue to bask in their favour in order to gain another term in office. Even if that is not on the agenda, they are rarely strong enough to stand up to their political masters.

They also compromise with the various factions on the campus. Generally speaking, teachers are divided into politically motivated groups. The vice chancellor commonly aligns himself with one of these groups. On occasion he will choose to build a separate group around himself. Whatever the case, in order to keep individuals and groups on his side, he has to show them favours. That is the surest way of winning over the teachers.

However, what mainly undermines academic standards in the long run, are the most objectionable compromises with the dominant student leadership. After all, they are capable of disrupting the peace on campus more decisively than anyone else.

Students tend to be volatile. They are not bound by any ethical considerations which, for example, influence the teachers (up to a point). Even non-teaching employees cause disruption only in a limited way.

They are employees of the universities and therefore cannot defy the university authorities openly. Students however are a law unto themselves. With support from political parties outside the campus, they cause havoc yet many vice chancellors continue to pander to them unashamedly.

Not being particularly confident of their own competence to hold office, they feel that this is the best way to survive. Survive they do, but at what cost?

In one university, students on campus collected about one lakh rupees, by way of student subscription. The number of students was small, and thus the subscription was not high. Nonetheless, as in most places, the money was collected by the university and passed on to the student union. The amount however was so small that the student leaders were not able to utilise it as they wished.

Step by step, the university started making concessions. For example, the union was provided with one telephone in the office and two others, one to the president and the other to the secretary of the union at their homes. Before anyone realised, the bill mounted to almost 2 lakhs within months. To cut a long story short, within two years, the university was paying about 2 lakhs to the student union on a regular basis.

In another university, student leaders would intimidate

the university into admitting students under the discretionary quota available to the vice-chancellor. The student leaders would charge prospective students for each admission and the transactions ran into almost a million rupees per year. The vice chancellor never disobliged any student leader for that was the way to buy peace.

In yet another case a whole new system was devised to co-opt student leadership into university administration. One vice chancellor hit upon an ingenious device. Those who had passed out in the preceding year or two and still hung about the campus, calling the shots, were recruited into a new campus security service that the university created. It meant a salary of over Rs 1500 per month, for hardly any active work. They had previously been the trouble makers, and now they were being asked to guard against trouble. Evidently no one made any trouble — the whole system was hailed as a remarkable success.

And what about those student leaders who were still on the rolls? It was understood that as soon as they passed out they too would be recruited. They were in any case hand in glove with their seniors of one or two years, and everything went peacefully until they hit upon a new way of making money.

Known for their proximity to the vice chancellor, using the system, they would get

someone's file moving, another person's held-up result declared, even get a contract for somebody, of course, always in return for some consideration. Instead of Rs 1500 a month, they started making several times more. In other words, they became experts in manipulating the system. No one would refuse them because not only could they turn nasty, they could simply get the vice chancellor to straighten out any bureaucratic hassle.

Within a year, the whole thing had reached the proportions of a public scandal. When at the end of his third year, the vice chancellor vacated his office, the whole security set up was in the palms of the students. How the next man coped with this issue is another story, but a story worth telling.

He was a professor of the university who had lived on the campus for a number of years. He had a high academic reputation and was respected by the students. When the earlier vice chancellor devised this system he opposed him openly as well as consistently. When he in turn got appointed as the next vice chancellor, no one expected him to continue this system.

In fact, his opposition to this dubious system was so well known that soon after he took over, the student leaders virtually left the campus. Most of them did not even submit their resignations. He was no

angel in his conduct, but he did not submit to the intimidation of students. This fact by itself ensured a considerable degree of peace on the campus.

Many more such stories can be given. They illustrate the point that buying peace on campus has become a fairly widely-practised strategy of survival. The most disquieting part of it is when students too lend themselves to this game; a reflection of what is happening outside the campus. They exact a price for not being a nuisance. By paying a price for this kind of thing, a vice chancellor damns himself. Not only that, he creates a kind of precedent which is difficult to live down.

The method of dealing with students is elusive. Some are able to do it, others are not. But it can be learnt to some extent. The surest way of ensuring that students do not misbehave and instead respect the man and the office? The vice chancellor has to make sure that he earns that respect. How does he do it? There is no cut and dry method but a couple of points need to be emphasised.

No vice chancellor can win respect from his students unless he is honest and truthful with them. Most of them look upon him as a manipulator who has managed to get himself appointed. However unpalatable this statement might be, this is the general perception.

In order to win their respect, he has to function as he should function. Students do not respect anyone who is not straight forward with them.

Even if a request has to be turned down, this should be done openly and without any prevarication. As most adults can testify, parents do not accept everything that their children ask for. They do not lose the respect of their children thereby. On the contrary, children, even when they are in their late teens and may sometimes defy their parents, accept their decision. But this happens only when they are convinced of its logic.

Young people see through any kind of sham or humbug. No one can pretend before them day after day, perhaps once or twice but not more.

Students appreciate being treated as adults. In other words, if something is refused, proper reasoning for that refusal must be given. It is not acceptable for any adult to bluff his way through, or be only stubborn and unreasonable.

There is another dimension too. Students expect their teachers, as also the vice chancellor, to be fair in their dealings with them. Fairness demands both openness and logic. One cannot have a situation where a thing is refused to one person but granted to another without reasonable cause.


None of these points, and these are some of the more

obvious ones, is novel or original. Students expect consideration and care. Once it is conceded to them and there is a general feeling of trust between the students and their seniors, there are few problems of a serious kind. This is something that most vice chancellors, who choose to

manipulate things for their own benefit, forget. Unfortunately, the way they get on in life is through manipulation of one kind or another. This formula may work elsewhere, but it cannot work with students.

Mr Amrik Singh is a former vice-chancellor of Delhi University.

**12 Years On**  
**Has Anything Changed?**



*"Primary education [in Bangladesh] does not help the child to affirm his/her relations with nature and other ecological forces, and as such does not impart receptiveness to change. Secondary education alienates him/her from traditional society but fails to integrate him with the modern sector."*

(A H Choudhury, quoted in Higher Education and Employment in Bangladesh, UNESCO/NFRHRD, Paris/Dhaka 1983)

## Obstacles to Learning

Fetching water is one of the most common household chores preventing children, especially girls, from attending primary school, in Bangladesh. Rural poverty continues to stand in the way of universalising primary education.



## Empowering Teachers

**T**HE aim of the Shikshak Samakhya Project is the empowerment of the teacher. An empowered teacher can provide effective education by improving his/her teaching.

'Shikshak Samakhya' literally translates as 'Teachers' Empowerment'.

The Shikshak Samakhya Project was launched in September 1992. It is envisaged as an important part of the strategy for achieving Universal Primary Education in Madhya Pradesh.

Madhya Pradesh is the largest state in India and has a wide variety of cultural zones. It was recognised that a continuous teacher education programme, even if it is experimental, should be tried in more than one place to ensure that it could be replicated in similar areas. Therefore, five districts were selected for the initial phase of this project of teacher education: Raigarh, Jabalpur, Tikamgarh, Dhar, Raisen. There are over 23,000 primary school teachers in the five project districts.

subject has been designed. These are:

All parents want their children to go to school and learn. Parents will send their children to school if they learn in school. Children will come to school regularly if they find the learning process enjoyable and attractive.

Financial and non-financial incentives are poor substitutes to good and enjoyable learning in the classroom.

The community will support the teacher and will accept the school as its own when-and only when they find their children are learning well.

India, being a poor country, has to find low cost yet high quality solutions to the problems of primary education.

About 10 per cent of teachers will teach under any circumstances, while the large majority has to be motivated to teach. Settling of all administrative and financial claims, and ensuring promotional channels as well as openings for professional growth, will go a long way.

Teachers will become highly motivated if they are involved in decision-making in the project activities. If they prepare their own teaching-learning materials they will in the process discover their hidden talents as well as gain recognition from their local community.

Five critical workshops were organised in which a consensus about the basic strategy of the project was developed. Resource centres were established, each of which covers approximately 30 primary school teachers within a range of 8 to 10 kilometres. These teachers meet once a month in their respective centres to discuss their problems, their experiences, and suggestions to make their teaching interesting. These resource centres have been provided with materials. The teachers have also been provided training and regular academic support.

In Badnawar block of Dhar district, 23 resource centres

## Indonesia Developing a Skilled Workforce

**T**HE naked, 15-watt bulb dangling from the ceiling centre is the single source of light. Twenty-plus individuals aged 11 to 35 sit behind wooden tables for two. They squint their eyes to read what is on the blackboard.

These people belong to a night class in reading and writing. They meet twice a week in the rural Beduyut Primary School in this rice and mango growing district of Indramayu, three hours drive east of Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia.

The tutor draws the outline of a pair of trousers on the blackboard. "What is this?" he asks.

"Celana!" the pupils reply in unison.

The tutor then writes *ce la na*, the Indonesian word for trousers, on the board, seeing to it that the syllables are written separately.

"Who wants to come forward and read this out?" he asks again.

One young woman does and reads the word slowly, if not painstakingly, syllable by syllable.

What does the class mean to the pupils?

Bu Sunari, 35, a farmer's daughter and now a farmer's wife, says she did not get to attend elementary school. Now she wants to catch up and admits without any shame that her school-going daughter coaches her at home. "I want to become a teacher myself," she confides.

Pak Ibnu Suhendra, 35, the volunteer tutor, says the daytime farm work of his pupils get in the way of regular atten-

dance even though the class meets only at night.

Nevertheless, those who persevere finish the course with a primary level equivalency examination certificate, says Pak Ibnu who also teaches at the local school.

On class nights, another group meets in another village. The dozen pupils at the religious boarding school of Al Qohariyah also come twice a

year, mainly in grades one to three. This means in one five-year period, six million schools kids drop out. Most of them never reach grade five and come under threat of losing their literacy.

Statistics compiled by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) show that, as of 1990, Indonesia's estimated adult literacy rate was 77.1 per cent. Illiterate adults, people aged 15 years and above, numbered 24,440,000.

Gross enrolment ratio for the primary level, as of 1988, was 118 per cent. The ratio exceeds 100 per cent because it includes drop-outs who have returned to school, in addition to those who really belong to the primary level because of age.

Unenrolled primary school-age children were a little over half a million — 508,000 — but the annual number of drop-outs from the primary grades was 1,392,000.

The government-sponsored but community operated non-formal education programme now helps to save these children from reverting to illiteracy. It serves as a safety net to cover those drop-outs.

And throughout Indonesia numerous day and night community classes have sprung up to help those who did not finish primary school. The classes are also being held now for those who did not finish junior high school.

More education means more opportunities. But for many of the pupils in these classes ambitions remain modest. Seventeen-year-old Lutflah joined the junior high school equivalency class to become a good wife. As an afterthought, she said, "If I get a scholarship to the IAIN (Islamic teacher's college), I want to become a missionary." — *Depthnews Asia*

He said education provides opportunities; the more education the more opportunities open up.

Realizing this, he says, the government will launch a nine-year compulsory education programme on May 2.

For a country with a population of 180 million, this is an ambitious programme to provide Indonesia's children with a stronger education base to make them more competitive job seekers.

To prepare the children to become members of a skilled workforce, Indonesia will expand its compulsory education programme to nine years. A skills training component will also be added to the curriculum for junior high school. President Soeharto told the Education for All Summit of the nine most populous developing nations in Delhi last December.


Ten years ago, Indonesia embarked on its six-year compulsory education programme. The results speak for themselves.

By 1991, 83 per cent of Indonesia's school-age children reached grade five. This is lower than South Korea's 90 per cent, Malaysia's 86 per cent, China's 85 per cent, but higher than the Philippines' 75 per cent and Thailand's 63 per cent, according to the 1993 report *The Progress of Nations* by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Grade five enrolment indicates the percentage of children who have had at least four years of primary education, the minimum needed for a child to become literate and numerate.

Indonesia's enrolment percentage also implies the relatively high dropout rate. Some 1.2 million children, 4.3 per cent of the total, drop out each

**Perfect SAT Score**



Fahim Ahmed, a junior at the exclusive Washington DC school, St Albans, recently became the first ever Bangladeshi student to achieve a perfect SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) score.

Fahim, son of Dr Fakrudin Ahmed, of the World Bank, and Neena Ahmed, scored a maximum of 1600 points in the test, held in the US. He has a 4.1 GPA (Grade Point Average) and has already won several academic distinctions, including perfect scores in the PSAT.

The Indonesian government's nine-year education programme is an ambitious project for the country of 180 million people

week. All are in their teens or early 20s. The boys wear velvet pecc caps. The girls cover their heads with scarves, to comply with the Muslim dress code.

In this class, the pupils have completed elementary school. But they do not have the money and time for three years in junior high school.

The Boarding school offers the night class in junior high school equivalency instruction covering mathematics, bahasa Indonesia, natural and social sciences to make up for these people's missing formal schooling.

On this particular evening, an inspector from the district education office gives a pep talk.

Pak Dradjat, 51 and a 30-year veteran of the school system, expounds on the importance of pursuing an education.

