

NU : An Upgraded Board of Education

by Ahmed Ahsanuzzaman

WHEN the National University (NU) came into existence in the early '90s, the degree level students and their guardians heaved a sigh of relief. They hoped that there would now be a positive change; the standard of education would significantly improve and the unforgivable chronic delay in publishing different examinations results would cease to exist. Nearly half a decade has elapsed, but, there is no noticeable change as yet. The NU has failed miserably in fulfilling the hopes of the concerned.

When the University was established, renowned educationist and essayist Dr. MA Jalil in an article published in the Bangla daily *Ajker Kagaj* on April 30, 1992 expressed the concerned citizen's fear in the following way: "It would be like another board of secondary and higher secondary education, controlling the degree colleges of the country." And the fear surprisingly has come true.

A university which operates through its affiliated colleges should be more than an organisation with the charge of conducting various examinations. But, sadly enough, that is exactly the case with the NU. Even in its petty role of examiner, it has pathetically failed to discharge its duties as the results of the 1994 Degree examinations took about half a year to see light.

However, the objectives behind setting up of a university like the one in question were certainly different. It was expected that the NU would take the initiative to improve the administrative and academic standards of 612 degree colleges of the country in a fruitful manner. It was also designed that the intermediate branch of the degree colleges would be separated. But what is the actual picture? The University has little or no control over its affiliated colleges and consequently the administrative and academic developments of the colleges are still a far cry. For instance, just take any government college. It is being controlled by the directorate of education under the Ministry of Education as far as its administrative and financial matters are concerned whereas the NU is expected to look after its academic aspects. There exists a clear lack of coordination among these organisations which create obstacles that at times become unpassable. Suppose a post of lecturer of a particular department is vacant (the writer has first-hand knowledge of many such instances), the principal of the college can only write to the directorate for filling in the vacancy. The matter is to be decided by the directorate or the Ministry of Education which is indeed a time-consuming process. It so happens that the post remains vacant for a long time, even for a year or so. As a result, the students get admitted in a college, but do not get proper academic care and support because of the non-availability or scarcity

of teachers which causes the students to adopt unfair means in the examinations. What measures have been taken by the NU to erase the students' sufferings? In fact, it is not empowered to do anything in this connection.

Again, in the case of transfer of government college teachers, there is hardly any transparency. Who will be posted where and for how long? Ask this question to any education department officer, he will simply mumble over the issue. Therefore, as noted by Professor Kazi Abdul Latif in his write-up published in the *Daily Star* on December 28, 1985 "Competent teachers find themselves in places where their knowledge comes to nothing" and teachers allegedly with high connections are posted in the best colleges of the country. These less-competent teachers can hardly satisfy the ever-new demands of the advanced level students which is causing unrepairable damage to the academic standard of the colleges. And here, too, the NU is playing the role of a silent spectator with perfection. The natural question is: how can it aspire to improve the academic standard, let alone the administrative standard, of the government colleges when it can exercise little authority over them?

Then, of course, in case of only a handful degree colleges, the intermediate branch has been withdrawn. Most of the degree colleges, even Honours and Masters colleges, still possess the intermediate branch. Just have a look at the Eden University College in the capital. It offers Honours and Masters courses on a good many subjects, yet admission in the HSC level continues. You cannot expect even a good teacher taking four/five classes a day in different classes to maintain quality all the time. It is simply impossible. What can be said by the University authority?

A painful news item regarding corruption in admission in the Honours courses in the city colleges was published by the *Daily Ittefaq* on April 18 this year. The author of the story Resazur Rahman writes, "In exchange of money one can get admission in the subject of his choice... Many have got admission through 'backdoor' in return of money as there existed an artificial crisis of seats." The writer, however, added that it could not be proved. And it is quite understandable, we are quite aware of the limitations of the NU and we know the allegation will perhaps never be proved and 'teacher-officials involved in the evil work' will go unpunished and the event as such will be repeated next year, and the years to come.

However, we should not disturb the tranquil slumber of the National University. Let's allow it to remain pleased with its role of a silent spectator. Let it remain an elevated board on the mould of secondary and higher secondary education.

The author, a former journalist, is a teacher of English and a translator of foreign plays.



Neo-literate women attending evaluatory examination at Lalmonirhat



A vocational training centre organised by UCEP-Bangladesh

Continuing Education: A Broader Aspect

by Tapon Kumar Das

IN relation to the national commitment, "Education for All by the Year 2000", mass education programme has been taken up all over the country, and many non-government organisations along with the government organisations have taken initiatives to set up literacy centres. Every year, thousands of neo-literates come out after completion of their literacy courses. But this basic literacy courses is not guaranteed retention of skill. Like any other skill, this 'literacy' could be diffused and faded out in course of time unless it is systematically strengthened.

In the context of literacy situation in Bangladesh, continuing education programme is very important. Continuing education is a new concept and the main objective of it is to create a 'learning society'.

The idea of learning society was first advanced by UNESCO about 20 years ago. According to UNESCO, learning society is one in which all agencies of a society are educational providers, not just those whose main responsibility is education. Industrial units in this regard could be good examples. Though industrial sector's primary responsibility is to produce goods but it can — and should — play an educational role as well. It can provide training for its employees and also can intimate mass people with the skills and knowledge of its process and products. Moreover, it should have some social contribution in favour of literacy. Another aspect of a learning society is that every citizen should be engaged in learning.

In the genuine learning society, every citizen engages himself or herself in education from birth to death. In other words, education is a life-long process. Learning society concentrates specially on the self-planned and self-initiated learning environment provided by various development agencies instead of the programme provided by any particular organisation.

To quote UNESCO's 'Learning to Be': "Every citizen should have the means of learning, training and cultivating himself or herself freely available to him or her, under all circumstances, so that he or she will be a fundamental component of the society."

Some attempts made in the sixties by the government agencies culminated in publication of around 60 materials (booklets, charts, etc). Then in independent Bangladesh some NGOs concentrated their efforts to produce a few follow-up literacy materials. At that time, FIVDB (Syhet), BRAC, PROSHIKA, DAM, some other NGOs and INFEP (Govt) established rural libraries in villages. This type of initiative may be called "post-literacy" which is a component of continuing education.

Continuing education is considered as the mechanism for human resource development by which all aspects of human development can be systematically upgraded, in turn strengthening the basis for meaningful sustainable socio-economic development. Continuing education is an institution of many people that offers the opportunity to face and solve their social, economic, political and environmental problems. It also helps develop the society according to a meaningful and effective plan.

Continuing education has some interlinked components. It is important to recommend all the components in an integrated way to ensure the process of continuing education. Because a single component alone cannot stand for a long time.

Although Asia Pacific Programme of Education for All (Appeal) — a project component of Unesco, Bangkok—prescribed six components for continuing education, we can imply the essence of four components in the context of our country.

"Post Literacy" can be considered a very important component within the framework of continuing education. This component is designed to strengthen the literacy skills, so that the learner can be able to utilise the opportunities offered by other programmes under human development process. Literates and semi-literates are the clients of this component. A "learning centre" is needed to implement the activities of "Post Literacy". The "learning centre" may be institution-based, community-based or family-based.

Continuing education has another component which can certify its members as students like other educational institutions do, and this certificate should be recognised by the state. This component is designed as an alternate education programme equivalent to existing formal, general or vocational education.

Experience and many research studies show that the neo-literate adults are reluctant to educational activities. On the other hand, if the literacy activities are related to their day-to-day income and fulfil their immediate needs, they will be interested to continue literacy practices. So the literacy and continuing education activities need to be combined with income-generating programmes. Certainly, this type of activity would be self-initiated with the learning objectives set by the participants. However, it is needed to support the programme by a good counselling and advisory service. Facilitator of continuing education should remain alert in identifying potential providers and to encourage participation by individuals seeking to generate income.

Finally, "Future-oriented Programme" should be taken into consideration as a component of continuing education programme. "Future-oriented Programme" provides the workers, professionals, community leaders, villagers, micro-entrepreneurs with newer skills, knowledge and techniques to adapt themselves and their organisations to growing social and technological changes. In administering such programmes, the main focus is to see the continuing education in line with overall plans for national socio-economic development. It can be mentioned here that, future-oriented programme would establish a common base line of individual interest programme within continuing education that ultimately would cater to special concerns and objectives of the groups or individuals. The overall plan of future oriented programme will be concentration of individual interest towards adjusting with the modern society as well as the changing world.

"Learning Centre" is the main tool for the delivering the continuing education programme to the clients. In narrow sense, "Learning Centre" means simply an organised place where a person may learn. But in broader terms, it is a centre managed by the local people providing resources for local development and life-oriented training about what, how, where and when individuals can engage in various types of support locally.

"Learning Centre" may be the focal point of total development process of the learning society. Everybody would be allowed to use this place also for community purposes such as shalish (arbitration), marriage ceremony and other social activities. In a word, it can be said that this will be a place for social gathering. People will come here for learning, training, amusement, problem-solving and planning for their future development.

Continuing education has been ensured in many countries of the world on the assessment of particular need and education scenario of those countries. Although there are similarity in some aspects of continuing education among the countries, but the situation is actually quite varied and it is related to the stage of development of each country and to the pattern of general educational system of the respective country.

In Australia, continuing education is nationally coordinated and it has been conducted by higher education institutions and further education colleges and also by local community centres. In Indonesia, formal education system is integrated closely with continuing education which provides equivalent courses by alternative means for both primary and secondary education. In Thailand, continuing education is being carried out by the department of Non-formal Education under the ministry of education and there are well development infrastructure and network of village training centres and life-long education centres. In UK, it is essentially a learning society and both government and non-government agencies are responsible to ensure continuing education through "Further Education Centre" and community centres. Many other countries such as Japan, Mali, Vietnam, the Philippines, India, Tanzania, Malaysia, Brazil and China have ensured continuing education for their citizens by various ways.

We also need to ensure continuing education in our country now. There are a number of problems constraining the spread and promotion of continuing education. Firstly, basic literacy course is not qualitative enough and neo-literates are incapable to practice 3-Rs (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic) independently. That is why, they hesitate to apply their skill in their lifestyle. Secondly, because of scarcity of literacy materials neo-literates cannot go through with literacy practices. Although there are a number of continuing education materials being produced in the country, but these are not enough and self-motivational to fulfil the mental and practical demands of the neo-literates. As a result they do not feel interested to read. Thirdly, NGOs are very reluctant to take up continuing education programmes and this is caused by the lack of understanding the importance of continuing education. Moreover, many donors still do not feel any critical need for funding these programmes.

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A Continuing Education centre in West Bengal, India

Women working at a continuing Education centre in Turkey

The Daily Star Entertainment Guide

Tuesday 23rd April (All programmes are in local time. We recommend programmes printed in bold)

BTv: 3:00 Opening Announcement... 4:00 News in Bangla... 8:00 News in Bangla... 11:00 News in Bangla...

Foot in the Past: 3:00 BBC World News... 8:00 BBC News... 9:00 BBC News... 10:00 BBC News...

STAR PLUS: 8:30am Transformers... 9:00 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles... 10:00 The Beverly Hills Cop...

STAR MOVIES: 7:30am Future Shock... 11:00 The Money Market... 11:30 Special Event...

STAR Sports: 6:30am World Wrestling Federation... 7:30 The Asian Football Show... 8:30 AFB...

ZEE TV: 5:30am Entertainment (TMM)... 6:30am Jagran... 7:00 ZED...

PTV: 8:00am Tidawat Aur Tarjumat... 8:30am Cartoon... 9:00am Beauty Care...

SONY ET: 8:30am Gaane Jaane Maane... 9:00 The Three Stooges... 9:30 Dennis The Menace...

ZEE CINEMA: 8:30am Songs... 9:30 Keemat... 12:15 Bollywood Business... 12:45 Pati Parneswar...

EL TV: 8:30am Mohammed Rafi Special... 9:00 Tarane Aur Fasane... 9:20...

BBC: 6:00 BBC Newsroom inc. World Business Report... 8:00 BBC News... 9:00 BBC News... 10:00 BBC News...

CHANNEL V: 7:00am Rewind VJ Sophia... 8:00 Jump Star VJ... 10:00 Frame By Frame...

STAR MOVIES: 8:00 ZED-Naya A To Z... 8:30 Dream Merchants... 9:00 Insight...

ZEE TV: 5:30am Entertainment (TMM)... 6:30am Jagran... 7:00 ZED...

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EL TV: 8:30am Mohammed Rafi Special... 9:00 Tarane Aur Fasane... 9:20...

Rajesh Khanna Special: 03:00 Music Time... 04:00 Kishore Kumar... 05:00 Jazbaat... 06:00...

Mohammed Rafi Special: 01:00 Tarane Aur Fasane... 02:00...

