

FOCUS

A Vision for Higher Education

by Munir S Kazi

We want to see year 2000 as a beginning of a new era — our universities will be free from political tyranny and violence. We want to be proud of our educational institutions. We want to be proud of our students as well.

EDUCATION is a system of the people that led to intellectual and emotional growth. A system that placed too much emphasis on theoretical knowledge without addressing the country's priorities was doomed to failure. Education is a system that grew out of the traditions and history of the land and brought people into intimate contact with nature. Such an environment would lead to an integrated personality and the harmonious development of intellectual and emotional faculties.

For Tagore education was a way of transcending parochialism. He advised his pupils to keep an open and free mind. He stated: "Fanaticism is death to the human mind. Think of man as a member of the great community or race. Human understanding would grow from Tagore's vision of education."

As a result of his early school experiences Tagore had become highly critical of the prevailing teaching methods. About his memories of school days he recalled: "we had to sit inert like dead specimens of some museum, while lessons were pelleted at us ... like hallstones on flowers." Tagore believed that teachers should be more than just bodies of knowledge dispensing wisdom from the podium. He likened education to the lighting of lamps. The teacher was a lighted lamp setting his pupils aflame with ideas. Education is a mutual process of learning. When once the teacher ceases to learn his flame is extinguished.

Criticism of the Education System

The current education system of Bangladesh remains largely irrelevant and outdated. As a legacy of a colonial system designed to produce clerks and petty bureaucrats our education system is failing to meet the needs of our country. It is a system that was never intended to transform the population into valuable human resources. Neither was its purpose to imbue our people with a sense of cultural identity. The British were only too aware of the threat

that such education might pose to their imperial domination.

The system is incapable of producing the kind of people who will take part in the building of a nation.

Our education system

divides us from our rural roots.

The heart of our nation still lies in the thousands of villages throughout the country. Higher education, however, is to be obtained only in urban areas and once equipped with the requisite diplomas we never return to the village. The education system, therefore, robs us of our empathy and relationship to rural life.

Removed from the harsh reality of rural life we forget that this country is built on the backs of those giving manual labour. We lose our respect for the millions of people who give their labour to provide us with our city based life style. Valuing the toil of our citizens must be regained.

Our education system is suffocating under political violence and tyranny. Incidents of slaughter, intimidation and banditry are commonplace in our education establishments. Our students' energies are being wasted as they are recruited as political thugs to engage in the politics of violence and disruption. Politics has replaced education, classes are devalued and learning is arrested. Students have become cynical, politically craft and alienated. During the 70s, 80s, and 90s universities have remained closed for up to half of the academic year forcing those who have money to send their children abroad for education. (Novak, 1993, p. 128).

Development Issues

This country lacks the facilities to teach the subjects that it is most sorely in need of. If one were to survey the courses of Bangladesh's universities one would find a meagre selection of environmental science subjects and a complete lack of development studies. With such a gap in our educational offerings our students are forced to go abroad to pursue their studies in these areas. The expertise in these fields is to be found in developed countries. It is in these countries that development

theories and policies are formulated ready for implementation in countries such as Bangladesh. Since the policy makers are frequently divorced from the reality of development in the lesser developed nations their models and analytical tools fail to meet real needs. Development has come to mean short term economic gains with little concern for justice, inclusion or sustainability.

Time and time again models of development produced in the West have been exposed as faulty, inequitable and unworkable. There is a growing need for an alternative vision of development; a vision that should be created in the nations where it will be implemented.

Some of the most successful development organisations exist in Bangladesh. Bangladeshi NGOs reach millions of poor rural people with a development strategy that provides basic needs such as education, health and employment opportunities. It is undoubtedly true, as recent studies have shown, that they having an impact on the lives of the poor people of this country. However, their contribution to the economic development of this country has yet to be established.

Despite the seemingly successful interventions of NGOs the number of poor people in Bangladesh is ever increasing. NGOs find themselves operating in a hostile environment such that their goals are becoming unreachable. They face opposition from society at large who are distrustful of the efforts of these organisations to bring about social change. Government antipathy is another hurdle for NGOs to overcome. It is only recently that development organisations have come to see the relevance of policy advocacy to their work with the poor people of this country. But is this enough? How can the overwhelming apathy of the people of this country be com-

bated? How can a nation of disbelievers and cynics be transformed into a body of people committed to the development of this country?

Global Trends

Several global trends experienced during the 80s, including those related to ecology, incidence of poverty, communal violence, drugs, population growth, refugee trade and debt suggest a breakdown in the systems by which human societies manage their relations with each other. The number of victims of violence is increasing and the nature of this violence is changing. Formerly war took place between nation states while laterly the combatants are political, ethnic or religious factions. Poverty and unending environmental and social degradation have given rise to a sense of hopelessness and frustration amongst the disadvantaged of this world. The resulting anger breeds violence that is most immediately turned against one's neighbour. The populations of Sri Lanka, India and Burma are witness to this phenomenon. This is a violence that can never be solved by conventional warfare resulting in victory of one state over another. Only by relieving human crisis can reconciliation take place. (Korten, 1990, pp. 222, 226).

We are undoubtedly committed to relieving the suffering of humanity yet the number of poor and disadvantaged is ever increasing. Why is it that even though we are committed to development it does not seem to be taking place? Faulty development paradigms developed in wealthy nations based on short term economic gains have failed to produce increases in human wealth. There exists a need for a new development paradigm based on justice, sustainability and inclusiveness. This alternative vision of development should be created by wealthy and poorer countries

working together. The interdependence of all nations should be recognized. Development should not be seen as the wealthy nations aiding the less wealthy but as the cooperation of all nations for mutual benefit.

Vision: An economically and culturally wealthy nation free from violence in which the contribution of every member of society is recognized.

Mission

Universities will create a pedagogy that will encourage analytical and critical thinking, creativity and a questioning attitude to society. Students will be encouraged to experience the world both critically and compassionately. The faculty will be devoted to the task of producing committed, skilled and politically astute individuals capable of playing a role in the building of a nation.

University will investigate communal, ethnic and religious conflict, particularly at the regional level, in order to promote peaceful resolution of con-

flict through a process of cross-cultural understanding and mutual respect between peoples. The link between peace and development will be traced and new development visions founded on humanism will be sought. Through advocacy and development education the University will build commitment around these new visions by working with the rural people, the youth of this country, academics, government and national and international development organizations.

Goals

• To produce, through the process of education, a body of skilled, thinking people committed to the building of our nation.

• To promote cross-cultural understanding and the peaceful resolution of conflict at the national and global level.

• To empower the poor and alleviate their poverty.

• Students will take ultimate responsibility for their own learning through the use of learning contracts, self and peer assessment. The teacher's role will be to facilitate learning while acting as a spiritual, moral and intellectual guide.

• Interactive lectures will be supplemented by seminars, small group work and student presentations.

• Experiment-based educational practices such as internships, field placements, work study assignments, structured exercises, role plays and gaming simulations will be a feature of the new University.

• Experiential learning will facilitate the student's ability to link theory and practice. University will be rural set in a model village providing for constant contact with rural life for both students and faculty. The students will be in direct contact with rural people which will again emphasize the link between theory and practice.

• Students will be expected to develop a sense of compassion and empathy and understanding of the rural people of this country.

To foster this understanding both students and faculty members will be required to take part in farming, con-

struction and maintenance activities in order to understand the value of manual labour.

• While it is expected that, as a result of their studies, the students become politically conscious, political factionalism will at no time be tolerated on the campus.

The academic programme will provide the students with stimulating courses that will meet their needs and produce people with skills that this country requires. Education will be organised around an interdisciplinary approach in which the students cover a broad range of subjects necessary to produce a well rounded, knowledgeable person. Development studies will be a compulsory subject for all students. Together with millions of Bangladeshis I'm applauding His Excellency President of Bangladesh for his remarkable comments on our existing education system and students policies. We want to see year 2000 a beginning of a new era — our universities will be free from political tyranny and violence. We want to be proud of our educational institutions. We want to be proud of our students as well.

The author, a PhD is a Bangladeshi by birth, living in Europe from childhood. Since 1994 he has been working periodically in Bangladesh consultancy in various fields.

was 3888, showing the ratio one teacher each to 17 students. The standard ratio is one teacher for 10 students.

When asked whether the vacant posts of the teachers will be filled up, Vice-Chancellor Prof AK Azad Chowdhury said the university has no plan to fill up all the posts at a time. "It would be done in phases," he said.

Lack of accommodation is another minus point. Dhaka University was designed to impart education to 8-9 thousand students, but the present enrollment of the university would be more than 30,000.

There is also lack of sincerity among the students as well as the teachers to abide by the university rules and regulations.

For example, for a student to appear in the examination 75 per cent attendance is a must. But the provision is hardly followed. The authorities are kind enough to show the required percentage regardless of attendance by the student concerned.

An impression has developed over the years that admission into a university is much more difficult than passing it out.

About the present state of education, Provost of Sir F Rahman Hall Dr Harun-ur-Rashid accused the political parties of breaking down backbone of education. "It's the politics which is to blame for this situation."

To get rid of this unpleasant situation, Dr Rashid, a teacher of Political Science, called for bridging the gap between the ruling party and the opposition. He also stressed on formulating a sustainable education policy and a ten-year planning.

That makes little sense to hundreds of parents like Mandol.

True, they worry about failing education standard. But what they dread most is the deaths on the campus.

— News Network

Universities — No More Ideal for Learning!

by Palash Mondal

According to a report published by Bangladesh University Grants Commission in 1996, inadequate fund, lack of library research and unscheduled closure of universities are among main reasons behind the fall of standard in higher education.

Tokyo University topped the list followed by another Japanese institution Kyoto University. Delhi University of neighbouring India and Colombo University of Sri Lanka are among the top 50.

According to a report published by Bangladesh University Grants Commission in 1996, inadequate fund, lack of library research and unscheduled closure of universities are among main reasons behind the fall of standard in higher education.

There are 17 private universities alongside the 11 public ones. The UGC report not only blamed the public sector universities for poor quality of education, the private universities are also not better.

The Federation of Bangladesh University Teachers Association recently organised a seminar in Dhaka on "Education in Bangladesh at University Level: Its Problems and Solution" with President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed as its chief guest.

Speaking on the occasion, the President regretted that the standard of education in Bangladesh fell to a level that our degrees nowadays cannot achieve recognition from outside world.

Justice Ahmed blamed party politics for the gradual decline in quality of our education. "Party politics of the university teachers has fuelled the students politics," he lamented.

As per the 1973 University Ordinance, a university teacher has the right to do politics like any other citizen. But most often not the right gets blurred. Political faith degenerates into partisan politics.

According to a survey, one-fourth of the Dhaka University teachers always stay on leave while the posts of 276 teachers have been lying vacant for a long time.

Prof Aminul Islam said a good number of teachers, meanwhile, returned as the university authorities had taken effective measures in this regard. The efforts would continue to force the remaining teachers back home.

The number of teachers in Dhaka University was also said to be inadequate in comparison with the growing number of students.

The UGC report showed that the teachers-students ratio is not satisfactory. In 1996, the total number of students was 66461 while that of teachers

By Hanna-Barbera

THAT'S IT!

DRAWN BY JOHN MCCLUSKY

Tom and Jerry



James Bond



Metropolitan

'Computer software export has high potentials'

The committee on the problems and prospects of computer software export yesterday submitted its report to the government with comments that this sector has the potential to be the highest revenue earner, reports BSS.

Enactment of law for the protection of intellectual property rights, establishment of internet in the country and setting up of an information technology village have been recommended in the infrastructure area.

The suggestions in the marketing area include arrangement of meetings, seminars in the potential markets including the USA, sending marketing missions abroad and setting up permanent liaison offices in the dominant IT markets.

The committee also suggested forming a standing committee comprising experts, business leaders and executives to formulate and implement policies, strategies and action plans for promotion of software export and data processing services.

The committee, formed as per decision of the national task force on export last June, made 45 recommendations, including some short term and medium term actions, in the four functional areas to overcome the problems and barriers.

AUB executive MBA programme from Jan

Asian University of Bangladesh (AUB) will offer 'Executive MBA programme' (evening session) from January 1998 with the objective to produce efficient managers, corporate leaders and executives. The total cost is Tk 75,000, duration 1 year 8 months, says a press release.

AUB will run MBA regular programmes (day & evening) as well. Interested candidates may contact AUB admission office for further information (telephones: 892366, 896161).

HERE and THERE

BRAC

The children of BRAC non-formal primary schools, with the help of their teachers, have planted seven lakh four thousand trees in three months, beginning from July.

Under its 'Bonosree' programme, the saplings were distributed to the students in eleven thousand BRAC schools in 45 districts. Each child was given two saplings, one for wood and the other for fruits.

Under the supervision of the teachers, the trees were planted around their homes and schools, says a press release.

The rural development programme of BRAC supplied the saplings and provided training on planting and nurturing. BRAC programme supervisors, the teachers and the parents will monitor the care and growth of the trees.

City Dental College

The City Dental College accorded a reception to the freshers on Saturday, report BSS.

Dr. Mozammel Hussain, State Minister for Social Welfare, Women and Children Affairs attended the reception as chief guest.

Weather

Dry weather forecast

Dry weather is likely to continue across the country in the next 12 hours till 6 pm today, reports BSS.

Met office says the period throughout the country.

Country's highest temperature 24.7 degrees Celsius was recorded at Sitakunda and the lowest 21.3 degrees at Rangpur.

The sun sets today at 5:40 pm and rises tomorrow at 5:53 am.

Oxford Int'l School

Water Resources Minister Abdur Razzak yesterday called for building the future generation with orientation in scientific and technological education, reports BSS.

Speaking as the chief guest at the inaugural function of the annual science fair and painting exhibition, organised by Oxford International School at Dhanmondi, the minister pleaded for an education system suiting the needs of the time for over all development of the country.

Shipping Minister ASM Abdur Rob spoke on the occasion as special guest.

Presided over by the chairman of the school managing committee, Shawkat Hossain, the function was also addressed by principal of the school, Ayesha Hossain Shahnila and vice principal Abdul Malek Raton.

12 lakh MT rice for cyclone victims

The government will distribute 12 lakh metric tons of rice, worth Tk one crore fifty lakh and twenty-eight thousand, through 37,300 vulnerable group feeding (VGF) cards in the nine cyclone-affected coastal districts for the next two months, reports BSS.

A press release issued by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief said yesterday that each VGF card-holding family will get 16 kg of rice per month.

Of the total cards, 29,000 cards have been issued among the distressed people of the badly-affected Bhoila district, followed by 4,800 in Laxmipur and 3,500 in Noakhali districts.