

Quality Assurance in Higher Education

by Dr Mawdudur Rahman

Many forward thinking academic institutions that care to deliver value-added education, treat their students as customers. "Customer satisfaction" and "customer intimacy" are the two key phrases frequently heard in such academic atmosphere.

QUALITY in higher education is a provoking issue in the academic world everywhere. The level of concern for quality differs in different societies. In most societies, however, the question is to prepare adequately the coming generation for a challenging and continuously changing future. It is not enough to be able to maintain and manage the present; the educated men and women must be ready to lead the future. Nevertheless, the challenge in all societies is to satisfy the incessant need for continuous improvement in quality.

The stakeholders of higher education, such as, parents, academic administrators, students, politicians, teachers, and employers are concerned for the quality in higher education in Bangladesh. They have different and at times wrong reasons behind their anxieties. Sadly enough, few people have any clear idea of what they want and far less how to achieve that. This note does not aim to identify reasons or offer solutions to the problem. The intention here is to expose some of the issues concerning the quality in higher education, which may be helpful to many of the stakeholders.

One year ago, to be exact on January 9, 1997, Dhaka University sponsored a day-long seminar for quality in higher education with the initiative of the current vice-chancellor. About 25 vice-chancellors, presidents, senior academic administrators, and deans from the private and public universities and representative from the University Grant Commission attended the seminar (at one time there were more than 40 floating participants). This writer was the seminar presenter. The seminar covered the issues and processes necessary for quality in higher education.

The seminar started with a short attitude survey. This is an analysis of the survey responses. Out of 25 participants 24 completed the survey questionnaire. The table summarises the responses.

There is no right or wrong answer. The questions were asked to survey the direction of the participants' perceptions. The discussions are presented by the areas of interest to the author and not by each question individually in order of their appearance in the questionnaire.

Positive Education Environment

The table shows that all participants agree that positive educational environment is necessary for quality education (Question 1). In other words, the stakeholders blame the deterioration in the quality of higher education on the unfavourable environment.

What Makes an Environment Unfavourable?

One simple answer given frequently is 'strikes' and the resulting closure of educational institutions, which disrupts the smooth flow of academic sessions. Think about the countries where occasionally it becomes extremely cold or heavy snow falls without prior notice for a long time. Do people stop working and let the treacherous nature beat them? They plough the snow, go to school, and make up for the lost time.

Strikes in Bangladesh are like unpredictable and whimsical natural disasters. Time has come to beat the fall-out of treacherous strikes and do the job by redesigning the system so that the future of higher education is saved from the hands of unscrupulous people (whoever they are, definitely

they are not friends of education).

Innovation in education delivery model is necessary to overcome the external threat and create an internally harmonious education system. All systems survive by adapting to the environment. Environment is a system of systems. Systems, though contribute to their immediate environment, have very little power to change the environment. Systems adapt to the environment. The antiquated educational system is responsible for lamentably poor quality of education in Bangladesh and is partly responsible for creating the discord in the environment.

Therefore, without blaming frequent strikes one should think about a delivery system that will not be hindered by frequent strikes. Answers should be sought in innovation in educational system through the use of technology, changing delivery modes, restructuring the faculty processes drastically, useful configuration of instructional resources, defining and redesigning the curriculum processes, and introducing effective student processes.

Responsibility of Teachers

Again, a large majority (87 per cent) of the respondents think that teachers are accountable for educational quality

(Question 2). It should be noted that these respondents were erstwhile teachers or are teachers now. This is a fair statement that teachers are the backbone of quality in education. They not only deliver the programs they also participate in managing the institutions. Why then there are no serious attempts by the teachers in this direction? I will suggest that the answer is in inadequate and antiquated faculty processes like, recruitment, development, remuneration, review, promotion, tenure (permanent status), and termination. Effective administration of these processes is essential for successful recruitment, retention, and promotion (increase) of qualified and responsible faculty members.

In the public universities faculty recruitment processes are so much maligned by the political interests that the educational goals no longer is the priority or at all a consideration. The qualified people have to wait for years for recruitment or promotion for the right political group to take the charge of the top administration. In private universities the need for cost saving or managing within available resources seriously hurt the quality. Many of them package ambitious programmes for recruiting and graduating students and not for recruiting qualified faculty. Faculty recruitment and development

suffer in the hands of people who have either political or financial motives and not the enhancement of academic quality.

Copying Foreign Educational Systems

Bangladesh education system should not continue to copy the antiquated British system or model itself based on the US or other foreign systems. Question 6 asks the participants about copying foreign curricula. Copying foreign curricula is not a desirable option in the opinion of 87 per cent of the respondents. But if one looks at the reality, the untrained copying of foreign curricula is going on everywhere.

Indiscriminate copying of US systems will not be appropriate for Bangladesh environment nor the continuous intrusion of British systems. The leaders in education in private and public sectors should seriously consider this issue. The new private universities may not be delivering what they are promising. They may be selling what is called the old wine in a new bottle. The parents and the students should carefully evaluate the value of a degree from any institutions. Questions 6, 8, and 9 also address the systems issues.

Students

Do the students study diligently enough (Question 3)? No, they don't was the majority answer. Who knows why the don't? Did anybody try to know the reasons behind this? Of course not. Again, the answer is not in the environment but in the student processes that are used to admit, retain, teach, graduate, and motivate students for life long learning. Many forward thinking academic institutions that care to deliver value-added education, treat their students as customers. "Customer satisfaction" and "customer intimacy" are the two key phrases frequently heard in such academic atmosphere.

Their needs are carefully monitored; they receive intrusive advising, tutoring, and study group helps to meet the demands from the programs and the teachers. Students need more than a few class visits by professors to learn from course. Four walls, some chairs and desks, and a talking body do not make a learning classroom for students to study diligently.

Academic Politics

Of the total respondent administrators, 79.2 per cent think that academic politics is not conducive to quality education (Question 5). No academic system is pure from politics. Healthy academic politics helps raise the quality. When faculty recruitment and promotion are used as tools for political support this must contribute to the deterioration of quality. Academic politics is one's personal vision within the current reality and the ability to reduce the gap between the two. Shared vision is what organizational participants want to do and create together.

Compensation is always an issue in any institution. This is not surprising that 70 per cent thinks inadequate compensation is a major reason to quality deterioration (Question 10). Higher compensations must be deserved by anybody anywhere. Has it been systematically proved that indeed real compensation is inappropriate given the outcome achieved? Inappropriate faculty processes within the system will explain inadequate compensation.

thority. Probably like everywhere, universities suffer from acute delegation upward and centralization in decision making. People must be able to take decisions and must take responsibility. If the vice-chancellor remains very busy signing files after files and is obliged to engage in political negotiations, where will he/she have time to think and lead.

Personal Responsibility and Compensation

The answer to "I alone cannot contribute to quality" is almost equally divided (Question 8). What else would have been the answer? If each person do his or her job right without looking for others to do theirs, that will contribute to quality. Doing the preparation for the class, learning to teach the right thing, being aware of the student's needs (customer intimacy) all will contribute to quality. Question for quality is an endless pursuit. In a quality oriented institution individuals accept full responsibility to accomplish the institutional objectives with the framework of personal mastery and shared vision. Personal mastery is one's personal vision within the current reality and the ability to reduce the gap between the two. Shared vision is what organizational participants want to do and create together.

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The Traffic Jam in Dhaka City

The question was "Can the traffic jam in Dhaka City be solved?" This question is a leading question designed to assess perceptions of the participants in general to an unrelated problem. Yes was the answer of 78 per cent respondents. An-

other 22 per cent do not think so. It shows that majority of the people have positive outlook about many serious problems. It also has given some measure of validity to the responses. The suggestion is that no problem is unsolvable. There will always be some unbelievers. The traffic jam can be solved through system redesign within the same environment. Then, why not the quality problem in education. It is not different from any other problem.

Vision and Mission

I did not discuss the question on vision and mission. The purpose of the question was to assess the awareness among people about vision and mission. The number of responses shows that knowledge of vision and mission is not widespread. How does each private or public institution differ from the other? They are different because they differ in their missions and visions. What are the mission and vision of a public university or any private university?

Conclusion

The conclusion is obvious. Educational administrators and faculty members are aware of and concerned about the quality problem in higher education. There is genuine interest in doing something about it. The problem is that hardly anybody knows what that something is and how to implement any change.

Quality assurance in higher education needs three things:

1. Strong and dynamic leadership
 2. Long-term perspective, and
 3. Commitment to quality
- I suggest that each institution should address the issue through innovative systems and appropriate long-term strategies. Some bold and drastic measures are necessary to assure the quality of higher education. If quality cannot be assured real and virtual migrations of students to foreign universities will only accelerate.

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Questions	Yes	%	No	%
1. Positive Educational Environment is required	24	100	0	0
2. Teachers are not primarily responsible for quality in education	3	12.5	21	87.5
3. Students succeed only because they study hard	8	33.33	16	66.67
4. Mission does not guide the vision	5	20.83	8	79.17
5. Academic politics is conducive to quality	5	20.83	19	79.17
6. Copying foreign curricula is necessary for good quality education	4	16.67	20	83.33
7. Top administrators have answers to all questions	4	16.67	20	83.33
8. I alone cannot contribute to quality	14	58.33	10	41.67
9. If rewards are not available evaluation and feedback of faculty performance are a waste	17	70.83	7	29.17
10. Traffic jam in Dhaka city can be solved	22	91.67	2	8.33

How Can I be Involved in My Child's Education?

A NEW PARADIGM FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT

by Tajul Islam

RESEARCH studies consistently reveal that high student achievement and self-esteem are closely related to positive parental participation in education. Parents and schools need to work together so that all children can succeed in school. Almost everyone agrees that parents, after all, are their children's first and most important teachers.

You, as a parent, have important knowledge about your child's dislikes, needs, and problems that the school may not be aware of. You may also have ideas for improving your child's school. But even though studies show that most parents want to be involved in their children's education, they may not be exactly sure how to go about it, especially if, in most cases, they work during the school day.

Parents often ask the following questions:

What Can I Do to Involve Myself with My Child's School?

Some schools value parent involvement by providing numerous opportunities for parents to interact with each other, with teachers, and with students. Your child's school can provide ideas on how to participate. One important way you can become involved in your child's schooling is to exercise any choice available in the selection of course work, programmes, or even schools. Many schools are moving towards "school-based management," in which administrators share the responsibility for operating schools with teachers, students, parents, and community members. You can become involved in committees that govern your child's school or join the local parent-teacher association (if any) or regularly visit the parent-teacher meetings as and when arranged. Check the school's list of events show interest in them.

Many reports by developed/developing countries reveal that schools should regularly communicate with parents about their child's progress and the educational objectives of the school. This communication should also include non-custodial parents, step-parents, and any other adults, such as grandparents, who are responsible for the child. If you aren't receiving such information, ask for it. Work with other parents and guardians to be sure that the school understands how best to keep you informed.

Some schools send newsletters and calendars home regularly, alerting parents to school functions and ways they can participate. Encourage your school to provide volunteer opportunities for working parents and to schedule some school events outside of the school day to increase participation.

Here are other ideas:

- Visit your child's classroom; a visit will give you an idea of what your child does at school and how he or she interacts with other children. This is

possible with prior arrangement.

- Volunteer to help in the classroom as an assistant (listening to children read, for example, or serving as an aide during computer work), seek school's co-operation on the matter. It is possible at junior levels, if not senior classes.
- Support student events and performances by helping with them (such as sewing costumes or painting scenery for a school play) and by attending them. Find out if your child participates in co-curricular activities.
- If your school has a Parents' Room/Lounge or Parent Centre, drop in to meet other parents and teachers there or to pick up information and materials. This can be regularly done when you visit to pay fees, when you collect/drop your child for any function or at least twice a month with your children after school hours. Let your child know that you will visit/meet his/her teachers. Ask him/her to inform the teacher concerned.
- Participate in meetings, function or workshops that are offered, such as those on child development or concerns that parents have (or help plan such workshops). Don't rely on verbal notice by your child. Write in child's diary on the related matter and ask him/her get it signed by the teacher.
- Take advantage of parent-teacher contacts (perhaps agreeing to read with your child for a certain amount of time each night), or on weekends and during vacation/holidays.

Take one/two text book when you visit other places. Read for pleasure and ask questions lightly.

- Ask your child's teacher if he or she has materials that you can use to help your child at home and to supplement homework. You may encourage your child to write articles for junior magazines and ensure subscription of weekly/monthly magazines. Read together, read for pleasure. Motivate, never force.
- Be part of decision-making committees about school issues and problems, such as a parent advisory committee. Get in touch with Head Teacher/Coordinators and meet them every month. Develop cordial relation. Don't be offensive if you hear complaints. Take it smilingly and ask for suggestions or remedial measures from the complainant.

How Can I Help My Child with Homework?

Most teachers assign homework on a regular basis because practice is needed before children fully understand new skills or concepts. Homework also increases the amount of learning time available and allows students to do more in-depth learning. But see that the child is not overburdened in any way. Don't hesitate to report if homework is too much.

Here are some general guidelines for helping with homework:

- Reward progress: use lots of praise, display good work.
- Request the teachers to do the same. Some teachers in our country lack the basic quality of encouraging students.
- Find out how much and what type of homework is assigned in each class, how students are expected to prepare it and turn it in, and what students can do when they don't understand something; help your child manage the workload by dividing it into small doses. Talk to school's authority if homework per subject exceeds class work progress/not done or discussed in the class. Discuss with the head teacher if exam-syllabus is lengthy.
- Help your child develop a homework schedule that he or she can stick to. Request the teachers to give hints/points or synopsis on the topic/chapter taught. Compare with other students.
- Talk to your child each day about homework assignments; go over work; see if it's complete; ask questions about it. But don't do your child's homework yourself. Don't allow private teachers to do the same. Your child may suffer and his/her progress is bound to hamper if others do the work.
- Provide a suitable place for study (if possible, make it quiet and away from the distractions of TV, phone, and loud music). Don't frequently visit to talk other topics during his/her preparation.
- Avoid making homework a punishment. Allow relaxation if assigned work is completed before stipulated. This will make the child prompt and lively. She/he will start right on time.

How Can I Make Our Home a Good Place for My Child to Learn?

- Have high expectations for your child's learning and behaviour, both at home and at school.
- Praise and encourage your child. Every good work should be recognised by parents and teachers. This is very rare in Bangladesh. We don't know how to motivate for better results. Every good deed deserves recognition.
- Emphasise effort and achievement, and be a role model for getting work done before play. Tell the teachers about your child's initiatives. Don't restrict games/play or deprive your child from the fun she/he deserves regularly. If not, she/he may become dull and lose interest in studies. Children are very delicate and repulsive.
- Establish rules and routines in the home. But see that such rules are neither rigid nor flexible. Ensure check and balance. Discuss the importance of routine life.

- Monitor television viewing. Late night TV should be discouraged even on holidays.
- Limit after school jobs and activities. Make yourself available whenever required. Don't show that you are too busy, even if you are. Try to return before your child sleeps at night.

What Should I Do If My Child Isn't Doing Well in School?

Contact your child's teacher. Don't wait for the school to contact you. It's important to solve problems as soon as possible when they occur. When parents work with teachers, they are often able to improve a child's performance in school. Children also get the sense that education is really important when they see their parents involved with their teachers and their school. Parents feel a sense of accomplishment, too, when they help their children succeed in school. Ask your child's teacher for specific activities you can do at home with your child and help the teacher

better understand what works best with your child. Make it clear that if the teacher sees a problem developing, you want to hear about it immediately. Then, meet with your child's teacher frequently until the problem is resolved.

What If My Child Doesn't Like School?

Using your unique knowledge of your child, try to find out why he or she seems unhappy with school. Observe and listen to your child. The problem may not be with school itself, but with peers or friends. It may also be a family problem or an issue of self-esteem. Arrange for a conference with the teacher or school counselor. Work toward being able to discuss problems with your child openly, and listen carefully to his or her views before you offer any solutions. Children whose parents are involved in their education have better grades, a more positive attitude toward school, and more appropriate school behaviour than those with less involved parents. So don't underestimate what YOU, as a parent, can contribute to your child's learning experiences, no matter how much education you yourself have. Getting involved in your child's education will make a difference. Try and see the result.

The writer is a senior section teacher of Scholastic School.

Tom and Jerry



By Hanna-Barbera

Garfield®



by Jim Davis

47 killed, 1955 hurt during polls violence last year

By Staff Correspondent

A total of 47 persons were killed and 1955 persons were injured all over the country in violence during the Union Parishad elections last year.

This was disclosed by Bangladesh Manobadhikar Samonay Parishad (BMSP), says a BMSP press release on Sunday.

BMSP observed the UP elections on random sampling basis at 39728 centres in 4297 unions all over the country.

BMSP appreciated the government measures for introducing "code of conduct" for the candidates, initiation of female

member posts to be directly elected, and taking massive security measures.

About 76 per cent male and 83 per cent female voters had cast their votes in the election, the BMSP press release said.

BMSP also suggested nine recommendations in the light of its election observations. The recommendations include, initiation of voters' educational programme, prohibition of campaign from door to door to stop vote purchasing, introduction of ID cards for the voters and predetermination of ceiling of election expenditure of the individual candidates in the election.

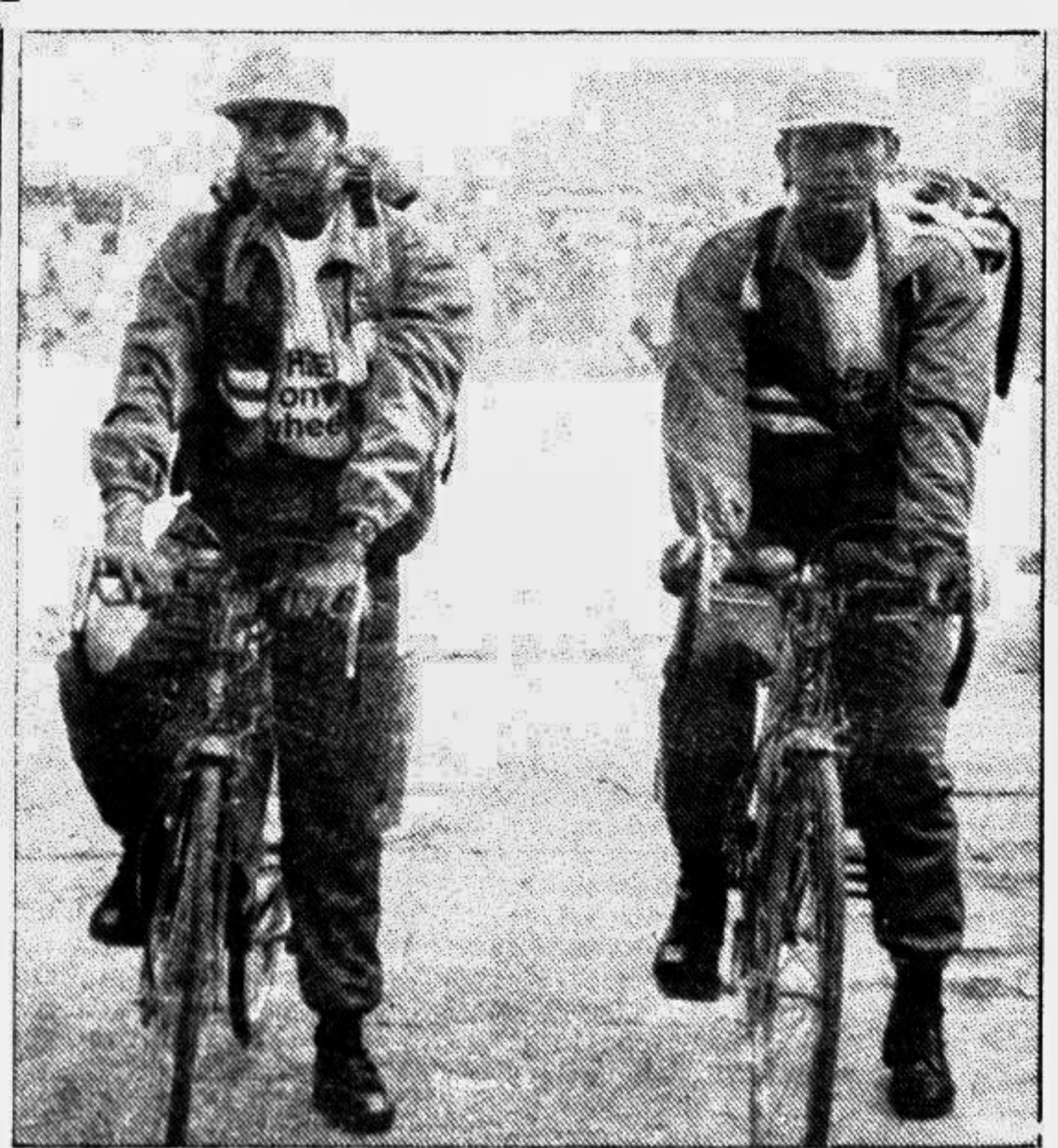
JU Treasurer assured of more Japanese cooperation

By JU Correspondent

Cultural and Information Attaché of the Japanese Embassy in Bangladesh Ms Yukimi Muramatsu called on the Treasurer of Jahangirnagar University (JU) Prof Abdul Bayes at the latter's office yesterday.

JP condemns govt for irregular distribution of winter clothes

Jatiya Party lawmakers criticised the government in Parliament yesterday for irregular distribution of winter clothes in the country's northern districts, reports UNB.



Sergeant Sheikh Nazom Uddin and Corporal Zahid Hosain, cadets of Karnaphuli Battalion 1, Chittagong University Unit BNCC have started out on a "WHEEL on wheels" regional cycle tour in the SAARC countries. They started their journey from Benapole Land Port on January 13, 1998 on their friendship tour through India and Nepal for more than two months. The manufacturer of Wheel Laundry Soap, Lever Brothers Bangladesh Ltd has extended its co-operation and support to the "WHEEL on wheels" tour by providing the two young cadets with financial and other necessary supports.