

Campaigning for Quality Education

Rasheda K Choudhury of CAMPE talks to Sabir Mustafa

AFTER four years at the helm of ADAB, Rasheda K Choudhury took over at CAMPE (Campaign for Mass and Primary Education) in early 1997. As the director of CAMPE, which co-ordinates education activities of NGOs, Rasheda has been at the forefront of the campaign to increase resource allocation to primary education in Bangladesh. In an interview given to The Daily Star, Rasheda said unless Bangladesh increased expenditure in education to at least five percent of GDP, the goal of creating 'good citizens' out of today's children would not be realised. Excerpts from the interview:

THE DAILY STAR (DS): It has been 47 years since people of this country took to the streets to protect the mother-tongue. But what is the reality of language today? Does the literacy situation give any reason for optimism that we have achieved the goals of the language movement?

RASHEDA K CHOUDHURY (RKC): One cannot say that after 1952 there was no progress, although the image it portrays appears to be quite disappointing. Literacy does not indicate that one can sign but one who can read, write and understand a letter in a given language. According to Government statistics the literacy percentage is 51%, but our statistics reveal a lesser figure. There has been a lot of progress but not as much. A long time has passed since our independence. The question remains why even then we have not been able to reach a high level of literacy, as in 80%.

In the five-year plan the government has set this target and this is to be implemented by the year 2002. The government says that it can achieve 100% literacy rate but we are sceptical about it. Maybe numerically or quantitatively they can do it, but shall we really be able to achieve this in terms of quality? Literacy does not only include the adults involved, but all above the age of five. Even if the adults are taken into account only, we can see that this is not sustainable literacy that they are attaining. In many cases they are relating back to illiteracy. We have to note if that figure is being taken into account or not.

Secondly, we have to find out if those who are brought in at the primary level are literate. If all are literate, then the question of pushing them towards literacy does not arise. Then, everybody will be going to school. If we can get all the children into school today, five years later, there will be no requirements. What happens today in the government schools is that after completing five years of schooling, in the exam that they take for scholarship the achievement rate is only 20%.

What does that indicate? What happens to the rest 80%? We cannot achieve the desired level. It is the time of new technology, science and communication. Under the circumstances, is mere literacy enough? Primary school completion rate is 60%, while the rest drop out. Amongst this 60%, 20% are really achieving something really meaningful.

DS: Where does the problem lie? In the teaching method or in the family backgrounds?

RKC: The problem is very complex and involves a lot of matters. Earlier it was said the problem lay in poverty, but it has been proved beyond doubt that the poor want their children to go to school and get educated. We have questions relating to the teaching-learning methodology. In the primary schools the teacher student ratio is 1:70. If this is the situation, then it is very difficult for a single teacher to take seventy students to a meaningful place.

Secondly, the teachers do not have enough training for effective teaching. Also the time a



teacher gets to teach is not enough. Thirdly, we are still in the dark ages following the traditional rote-learning system. Most primary level children, excluding the privileged upper and middle class people, are first generation learners. They do not get any back up support from their families. Institution is the only means of education. That institution is not providing him or her with enough scope. When a student just memorises his work he is not learning anything. Maybe at one stage he is learning some arithmetic, but he is learning in such a manner that he will forget it when he goes home. Also, we do not have enough supporting materials at schools.

DS: What role do the NGOs have in education?

RKC: The environment is created through the process of 'gap-filling'. The NGOs started with those who have already been dropped out of the system or those who have never been to school. That is why when they first started it was widely talked about as being non-formal primary education, because they were dealing with children over eight years of age. But soon they found out that there were millions of children over the age of five who were not going to school. Then the NGOs started working for them.

What resulted is a break away from the non-formal primary education system to a formal education system. There are many such NGOs. Many may say that this is the private sector stream. But that would also bring the kindergarten schools in the category. There is a basic difference between us. We make our teaching learning process more innovative although the material and competency are dependent on the nationally set curriculum.

In January 1999, 2.7 million students were enrolled in NGO owned primary schools.

DS: How is the competency level measured in these schools?

RKC: We have not been able to establish that we are achieving too because nationally accepted evaluation process does not exist. But, there are independent evaluation processes undertaken by the individual NGO. An indicator of our success is the number of students who complete these NGO schools, join the mainstream schools and do well. We have reports that say that in their Secondary School Certificate exams, they do better than the students of the mainstream schools. The fact that the donors continue to provide money for such projects can also be seen as an indicator of our success because the NGOs must be showing them something that convince them. The fact that the government ac-

cepts our form of education and incentives is another indication that we are not doing very badly. However, a general evaluation process has not taken place yet which can accurately measure our success.

DS: Is there any possibility of a co-operative programme with the government?

RKC: There already is an established mechanism. The government has accepted the need for non-formal primary education. The government has already created a directorate of non-formal primary education. They are not directly implementing it but implementing it through NGOs. They are channelling funds to NGOs and the NGOs are implementing it. It is a direct collaborative mechanism between the government and the NGOs.

The primary and mass education division identified a few hundred non-functional and non-performing schools. These schools were registered and received subsidies from the government, but they have not been in operation. The government is inviting NGOs to take up its management. BRAC and GSS have already accepted. They have conducted surveys and are ready to go ahead with the implementation. This means that the government has accepted the fact that the NGOs are performing quite well in this particular area. The non-performing schools may be operated if NGOs intervene.

DS: The CAMPE, has conducted a survey on 33,000 households. What was the objective of the survey and what were the findings?

RKC: The NGOs have started working after independence and have made great contributions to the society in not only non-formal and formal education but also in socio-cultural mobilisation. Still, there are areas, we all know, unserved. Neither the government nor the non-government facilities are there. There are many remote villages in Bangladesh where there is not a single school. When we tried to identify the areas deprived, we found out that we didn't have enough information. Actually there are no maps that would tell us about the number of schools and their locations in different areas of the country.

We have asked the government to take adequate measures in this regard. The Local Government and Rural Development Ministry does have a map of existing infrastructure facilities but theirs is not a comprehensive one. We have faced criticism saying that we only work in areas close by and not the far out places which are inaccessible. We saw that in tackling issues in such far out

Another thing is that the teachers should be accountable to the local authority and to the parents. Presently, they are only accountable to their higher authority according to the hierarchy in the education board. In this respect, we have been able to make a difference. In our schools, the parent-teacher committee, known as school management committee in some places, monitors the teachers. If the committee reports to the NGOs that the teachers are not delivering then it is very tough for the teachers. The government does not have such a mechanism, at least we have not yet seen anything like that in the national scheme. That is why, our suggestion to the government is to strengthen the local governments and leave the education system at their disposal.

DS: You have talked of accountability in the education system and of local education authorities. If that is to be realised, it requires a major political decision. In recent times there has been an increase in the budget for the primary education sector. Does the current trend, in your views, suggest adequate political commitment?

RKC: According to the findings in our research and survey, budget allocation has certainly increased. But the question is whether the increase has been in real terms? Still, allocation for education sector is only two per cent or little more of our GDP. Whereas, even in the South Asian countries, it is four to five per cent. We need to double the allocation. Still, we have to see where the investment is going. Primary education gets lion's share of the whole investment, about 50 per cent. Ninety-five per cent of that goes for infrastructure development and teachers' salary. How about quality of education? You see, only five per cent is spent on teachers' training, teaching material development etc. We are getting stuck there.

DS: What do you expect from the finance minister in next year's budget?

RKC: The government is constitutionally obligated to provide education for all, irrespective of caste, Education in the constitution is ensured as a human right. It's the government's responsibility to mobilise resources. There should be enough political commitment to mobilise these resources and spend whatever is needed for improvement in this sector. They have to ensure the environment where every child in the country will be able to go to school. To do that they have to spend whatever is needed. Everyone in the government knows what are the impediments. We expect to see the reflection of the commitment to remove impediments and ensure proper environment for a child to receive education, and for that, we believe, there should be allocation of minimum five per cent of GDP for the education sector. Otherwise you cannot do that.

Besides, drastic measures should be taken in some areas. Although debatable, we need a real evaluation of the madrasah education. We have to assess whether the investment in madrasah education is actually giving us good return — are we really getting good citizens from that mode of education? If we are creating reactionary elements through this education, as suggested in recent newspaper reports following the attack on poet Shamsur Rahman, then we must rethink whether the public money should be invested in madrasah education. I feel we need to modernise the madrasah education.

Moreover, the incentive project for female education has done wonders. To continue with that programme, we need more money in the education sector. It's not only making the child come to school, it's also keeping him at the school. Therefore we need more investment in this sector.

DS: Thank you for your time.

FBCCI Tried ...

The US-Bangladesh Business Council on Feb 14 sought the President's intervention in the current political programmes which they apprehend may retard the pace of the country's economic development. Chairman of USBBC made the proposal during a courtesy call on president Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban. US Ambassador to Bangladesh John Holzman was present during the meeting.

... And Failed

The business leaders of the country expressed anguish and frustration as the president postponed their talks till after the Feb 22-25 municipal polls. They had wanted the president to intervene in the political disputes to solve disputes without having the country's economy. With the postponement, their efforts to prevent the hartals fell through.

High Court Acts

The High Court Division on Feb 16 issued a 'suo moto' rule directing the ruling Awami League, opposition BNP and the government to showcase as to why pro-hartal and anti-hartal activities should not be declared as cognizable offence.

In rule, the court asked the concerned bodies to explain why police should not be allowed to take action accordingly. The rule was issued under section 56/A of the code of criminal procedure.

FDI Hates Hartals

A donor agency cautioned that hartal causing 'social unrest' may divert foreign investment from Bangladesh.

Director General of SIDA, Bo Goransson, suggested that a common platform be formed for expressing views rather than using various means such as hartals, to disrupt society and damage the economy.

Environment Costs

At least \$417.89 million would be needed per year for the next 10 years as "cost of remediation" to overcome the environmental damage incurred, said an ADB study.

Kazi Aref Shot Dead:

Kazi Aref Ahmed, a top leader of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), and five others were shot dead on February 16 when gunmen sprayed bullets on the podium of a public meeting he was addressing at a border town near Kushtia.

Kazi Aref, 57, was a valiant freedom fighter and the founder member of the JSD. Till his death, he remained its presidium member. He is survived by his wife and two children.

Motahar Hossain Dead:

Veteran journalist and politician Motahar Hossain Siddiqui died of a heart attack on February 16 at his Gopibagh residence. He was 76. He is survived by his wife, three sons, three daughters and two sisters.

Short Shrift to OECF

Bangladesh refused to accept the commercial settlement proposed on Feb. 14 by the general contractor of the crisis-ridden Karnaphuli Fertilizer Company (KAPCO) which incurred a loss of US \$120M for frequent breakdown of its plant.

Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed expressed disapproval during a detailed discussion with Managing Director of the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF) of Japan, Keiichi Tango.

Tremor Takes 50

At least 50 people were killed on Feb 12 and 210 injured in a strong earthquake which struck eastern Afghanistan. The Taliban Authorities appealed for help from abroad.

MPs Prefer Jaw-Jaw

Law makers from India and Pakistan on Feb 13 called for bold initiatives to end the 51 years of bitterness and hostility between the world's newest nuclear powers.

The legislators called for bilateral talks on nuclear issues with an eye to reduce tension and controlling a possible nuclear arms race in the subcontinent.

Nine Dead

Nine people were killed and 35 injured in Feb 13 when a bus fell into a canal breaking the railing of a bridge on the Faridpur-Barisal highway.

The bus was carrying devotees from Mathbaria in Pirojpur District to Biswa Zaker Manzil to attend its four-day annual Urs that began that day.

Reaz's Party

Former foreign secretary Reaz Rahman joined BNP on Feb 15 expressing allegiance to the ideals and programmes of the party and the leadership of Khaleda Zia.

The Week in Review

Starr's Not Done Yet

The impeachment may be over, but Ken Starr on Feb. 14, said he was not finished.

There are presidential friends to be tried, a leaks case to resolve and a momentous decision: whether to indict the president.

When all that is done, Starr would tie together in a single report an investigation that covered everything from Vincent Foster's suicide and the Whitewater land deal to the FBI files matter and, of course, the Monica Lewinsky saga.



Bail Out for Bill

The US Senate acquitted William Jefferson Clinton of perjury and obstruction of justice on February 12, ending a 13-month drama that catapulted an affair with White House intern, Monica Lewinsky, into the second presidential impeachment trial in history. The vote allows America's 42nd president to finish his term in office.

Dhaka-Moscow Deal

Bangladesh and Russia signed an agreement on February 9 on Military Technical Cooperation.

Russian Deputy Minister of Trade and the Defence Secretary signed the agreement on behalf of their respective governments at the ministry of Defence at Ganabhaban.

The agreement provides for identification, initiation and expansion of possible areas of collaboration between the two countries in the field of technical cooperation.

Taliban Treat for Osama

Afghanistan's Taliban militia on Feb 10 ruled out extradition of Saudi dissident Osama Bin Laden, saying such a request was illogical.

The US had accused Bin Laden of masterminding the bomb attacks on US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania last August that killed 263 people.

It offered a reward of \$5M dollars for information leading to his arrest and conviction.

Hartal Takes Six

Six people were killed and more than 500 were injured during the 60-hour shutdown that paralysed normal life throughout the country.

The hartal, demanding their four point charter, generally disrupted communication and left most shops and businesses closed. Trains and inland water transports operated almost normal. Biman ran both international and domestic flights on schedule. Schools were closed as usual.

Good News for WRIP

Bangladesh and United States on Feb 11 signed three agreements to develop an energy information system, conduct a gas utilization study and provide technical assistance in the implementation of US company Unocal's Western Region Integrated Project (WRIP).

US government would provide \$8,800 million for the studies and technical assistance programmes under these agreements.

The WRIP is a 750 M dollar scheme that focuses on the development of the Shahbazpur gas field the setting up of a series of power plants and the building of pipelines in several regions of the country.

However, Bangladesh was skeptical about it as they believe this could result in losing millions of dollars. The world Bank has been opposing the project as well.

SEPTEMBER 1, 1980 — It was a dull day in Northern Ontario when Terry Fox ran his last miles.

He had started out strong that morning and felt confident. The road was lined with people shouting, "Don't give up, you can make it!" words that spurred him and lifted his spirits.

But after 18 miles he started coughing and felt a pain in his chest.

Terry knew how to cope with pain. He'd run through it as he always had before; he'd simply keep going until the pain went away.

For 3,339 miles, from St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada's eastern most city on the shore of the Atlantic, he'd run through six provinces and now was two-thirds of the way home. He'd run close to a marathon a day, for 144 days. No mean achievement for an able-bodied runner, an extraordinary feat for an amputee.

Terry's left leg was strong and muscular. His right was a mere stump fitted with an artificial limb made of fiberglass and steel. He'd lost the leg to cancer when he was 18.

He was 22 now, curly haired, good looking, sunburned. He was strong, wilful and stubborn. He was the Marathon of Hope, as he called it, a quixotic adventure across Canada that defied logic and common sense, was his way of repaying a debt.

Terry believed that he had won his fight against cancer, and he wanted to raise money, \$1 million perhaps, to fight the disease. There was a second, possibly more important pur-

pose to his marathon: A man is not less because he has lost a leg, indeed, he may be more. Certainly, he showed there were no limits to what an amputee could do.

He changed people's attitude towards the disabled, and he showed that while cancer had claimed his leg, his spirit was unbreakable.

His Marathon of Hope had started as an improbable dream — two friends, one to drive the van, one of run, a ribbon of highway, and the sturdy belief that they could perform a miracle.

He ran through ice storms and summer heat, against bitter winds of such velocity he couldn't move, through fishing villages and Canada's biggest cities.

Though he shunned the notion himself, people were calling him a hero. He still saw himself as simple little Terry Fox, from Port Coquitlam, British Columbia, average in everything but determination.

But here, 18 miles from Thunder Bay, at the head of Lake Superior, the coughing had stopped, but the dull, blunt pain had not. Neither running nor coughing could make it go away.

He saw the people lined up the hill ahead of him. The Ontario Provincial Police cruiser was behind him, red lights flashing in the drizzle, and cheers still surrounded him. "You can make it all the way!"

Terry could not ignore what people said to him. He listened. "I started to think about those comments. I thought this might be my last mile."

The Marathon Of Hope

by Leslie Scrivener

He ran until there were no more people, then he climbed wearily into the van and asked his friend and driver Doug Alward to drive him to a hospital.

When Terry won a place on the junior varsity basketball team at Simon Fraser University in 1976, many were surprised. He was not a gifted player. Others were more talented, though few could match him for determination, toughness, and hard work.

It had always been that way. When he was in grade 8, Terry was rated 19 on a team of 19 players and was on the court for only one minute that first season. That didn't deter him.

Two years later he was a starting player. By the time he graduated from high school, he and his friend Doug were named athletes of the year.

Aches are common in an athlete's life, but at the end of his first year of university, there was a new, alarming pain in his knee.

One morning he woke to find he couldn't stand.

A week later, he learned this was no cartilage problem, as he had thought. He had a malignant tumor; his leg would be amputated in four days. His doctors told him bluntly, because of recent advances in research his chances of survival were 50 to 70 per cent. If he'd be-

come sick two years earlier, his chances would have been 15 per cent.

The night before his operation, his high school basketball coach, Terry Fleming, brought him a running magazine which featured an article about an amputee, Dick Traum, who had run in the New York City Marathon.

And though his future was never more precarious, Terry dreamed that night about running across Canada.

"I'm competitive," Terry said. "I'm a dreamer. I like challenges. I don't give up. When I decided to do it, I knew I was going to go all out. There was no in-between."

The 16 months of follow up treatment marked Terry irrevocably. He saw suffering as he'd never seen it before. He heard doctors telling youngsters in the nearby beds that they had a 15 per cent chance of living. He heard screams of pain. He saw strong, young bodies wasted by disease. He never forgot what he'd seen and when he left the cancer clinic for the last time, he left with a burden of responsibility. He was among the lucky one-third of patients who survived.

"I could not leave knowing these faces and feelings would still exist even though I would be set free from mine," he wrote

in a letter asking for sponsorship for his run. "Somewhere, the hurting must stop... and I was determined to take myself to the limit for those causes."

It was Rick Hansen who invited Terry to get back into sports and join a wheelchair basketball team. (Rick and Terry were of the same mold; later Rick, paraplegic, would push his wheelchair around the world, and he never failed to give credit to Terry, the friend who inspired him.)

Terry faced this new challenge with his usual gusto. He made himself strong pushing his wheelchair along the seawall Stanley Park in Vancouver. Or he'd find steep mountains and push himself up unruled logging roads. He pushed himself until his hands bled.

Two years after his operation, Terry started a running program. The first half miles he ran in the dark, so no one could see him. But one of his coaches from junior high, Bob McGill, who had since overcome cancer himself, heard the steady one-two thump of Terry's good leg and the thud of his artificial leg, long before he could see his wobbly frame in the darkness.

Terry trained for 15 months, running 3,159 miles, running until his stump was raw and bleeding, running everyday for 101 days, until he could run 23

miles a day. He took one day off at Christmas, only because his mother asked him.

Once, just before Christmas, when he had run only a half mile, the bottom half of his artificial leg snapped in two pieces, and Terry crashed to the pavement. He picked up the two parts, tucked them under his arm, stuck out his thumb and hitchhiked home. There, he clamped the two parts together and ran another five miles.

When Terry told his mother Betty, he intended to run across Canada. In her non-sense way she told him he was crazy. He said he was going to run no matter what she thought. Then Betty told her husband Rolly, and he, knowing his son so well, simply said, "When?"

When Terry approached the Canadian Cancer Society about his run, its administrators were skeptical about his success. They doubted he could raise \$1 million and as a test of his sincerity, told him to earn some seed money and find some corporate sponsors. They believed they'd never hear from him again.

But Terry persevered, earning sponsors and the promise of promotion from the cancer society. On April 12, 1980, he dipped his artificial leg in the murky waters of St. John's harbour and set off on the greatest

adventure of his life.

"I loved it," Terry said. "I enjoyed myself so much, and that was what other people couldn't realise. They thought I was going through a nightmare running all day long."

"People thought I was going through hell. Maybe I was partly, but still I was doing what I wanted and a dream was coming true and that, above everything else, made it all worthwhile to me. Even though it was so difficult, there was not another thing in the world I would've rather been doing."

I got satisfaction out of doing things that were difficult. It was an incredible feeling. The pain was there, but the pain didn't matter. But that's all a lot of people could see; they couldn't see the good that I was getting out of it myself."

And the people of Canada were latching on to Terry's dream. They wept as he ran by, fists clenched, eyes focused on his disability. Children were double step and hop sounding down the highway, the set of his jaw, unflinching, without compromise. The look of courage. As a woman in Toronto, Canada's largest city said, "He makes you believe in the human race again."

He'd start before dawn every morning running in shorts and a T-shirt printed with a map of Canada. He wasn't ashamed of his disability. Children were curious about his artificial leg.

Reading of Terry's goals, Four Season's President, Isadore Sharp, was also caught up in the dream of the Marathon of Hope. He pledged \$10,000 to the marathon and

challenged 999 other Canadian corporations to do the same.

If \$1 million toward cancer research was within reach, why not \$1 from every Canadian, why not a goal of \$23 million? The money came in many ways. People wanted for hours on the roadside to watch Terry pass. Sometimes a stranger would press a \$100 bill into his hand as he ran by.

One day in southern Ontario, they collected \$20,000 on the highway. A man in Hamilton sat in a vat of banana lemon custard and raised \$912 for the Marathon of Hope. In Gravenhurst, he heard of Ontario's cottage country, with a population of 8,000, they raised more than \$14,000. A musician apparently without cash, handed Terry his \$500 guitar.

Throughout his run and even in the months before, Terry neglected his medical appointments. No one could force him to see a doctor for a check-up. He said he didn't believe the cancer would come back. Earlier, when he'd missed his appointments for x-rays at the cancer clinic in Vancouver he'd said, "everytime I went down, I was shivering and it wasn't because I was cold. I was afraid."

Doctors in Thunder Bay confirmed that cancer had spread from his legs to his lungs. He phoned his parents who caught the first plane to Thunder Bay. Terry was so weak when he tried to walk across the street to a car so they could get a bite to eat outside the hospital, he collapsed. "The day before I'd run 26 miles and now I couldn't even walk across the street," he said.