

## FOCUS

## Dhaka-Calcutta Bus Service Engenders a New Beginning

by A H Jaffor Ullah

THE bus from Calcutta appropriately named the "Soudharya," finally rolled into Osmany Memorial Hall compound in the evening of June 19, 1999. This marks a new beginning in the Indo-Bangla bilateral relationship. We hope the common people of both Bangladesh and India would be benefited by the bus service. This inauguration of the bus service between the capital of Bangladesh and the main city of West Bengal, Calcutta, was truly a media event because the Prime Ministers of both the countries and the Chief Minister of West Bengal were there to greet the bus.

This highly publicized event received wide media coverage; consequently, the Internet was abuzz with reports coming from four corners of both India and Bangladesh. This inaugural event gave an ample opportunity for Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to acknowledge one more time the contribution India made in 1971 to free Bangladesh from the clutch of an occupation army.

The inaugural ceremony did not go without a hitch. The Indian government did not include notable West Bengal literary giant Mr. Sunil Gangopadhyay in its delegation, for reason unexplained. If restoration of cultural flow between two Bengals, which was damaged during 1965 war between Pakistan and India, was indeed one of the prime reasons for opening the bus link, then, exclusion of Mr. Sunil Gangopadhyay from the delegation was a monumental mistake.

The other sore spot in festive Dhaka was the presence of a group waving black flags to renounce the presence of Indian Prime Minister in Bangladesh soil. This group and others like them had long harboured the view that the present administration of Bangladesh is too cozy with Indian administra-

tion, and they had equated this wrongly with the notion that the sovereignty of Bangladesh had been compromised severely. The religious party, the Jamaat, is at the forefront of this anti-Indian propaganda. Ironically, this is the same party who opposed the creation of an independent nation-state, the Bangladesh in 1971.

The largest opposition party in Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) did not join the fringe parties to denounce the bus link between Dhaka and Calcutta. If I recall correctly, Begum Khaleda Zia, the leader of BNP, was very much opposed to the idea of this bus service as late as January this year. Good judgment had prevailed and Khaleda Zia decided to maintain mum about the whole thing.

It is to be hoped that this bus service should continue for a long time to come and the bilateral agreement that allowed this bus link to be established will not be revoked if a new party is elected to run Bangladesh in the next election. The political philosophy of any particular party in Bangladesh, in my judgment, should not dictate the bilateral issues between Bangladesh and her neighbours.

Now that a viable bus service is in place between Dhaka and Calcutta with blessings from both the governments, the common people will reap the benefit. In the last twenty-eight years of existence, Bangladesh's sovereignty was never before in jeopardy and nor will it be in the future. The Dhaka-Calcutta bus service is not the 'wolf in sheep's skin' as some opponents would lead us to believe. Instead, they should join others to build a civil society in Bangladesh that we need desperately now and through the coming millennium.

The author, a PhD, is a senior research scientist in the USA.

THE government of Bangladesh has identified 53 terminal competencies for the Formal Primary Education (FPE) cycle, the aim being that the children will have achieved those competencies after completing their primary education.

Besides the government itself, the responsibility of providing primary education to the children of Bangladesh is also shared by the private sector and the NGOs. BRAC, like several other NGOs, is operating a Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) Programme. Starting with 22 experimental schools in 1985, the programme has scaled to approximately 35,000 schools till date. BRAC's target group includes those children who never got an opportunity to attend school, and those who dropped out from formal schools due to poverty, gender discrimination, and a variety of other reasons. Consequently, BRAC is performing a commendable job in complementing the government's primary education programme.

BRAC values primary education not only because it is a fundamental human right but also because it is believed to be an effective development strategy. BRAC has been running two models of schools, one for 8-10 age group, the second one for older children of 11-14 age group (Basic Education for Older Children), with particular emphasis on female children. Currently, BRAC NFPE has started its phase-III.

Some of the salient features

of this phase are the expansion of curriculum in all NFPE schools to cover the current compulsory five-year formal primary school cycle in four years and the introduction of a decentralized quality control system supported by the creation of an educational support unit to provide required expertise to develop quality materials. Thus, one of the main objectives of NFPE programme is mainstreaming with formal education.

Initially the aims and objectives of NFPE programme were quite different from the aims and objectives framed by the government. But at present, with the demands of the changing academic scenario of the country, the programme is going to match the formal level of upper primary education and it is expected that graduates of this programme will be admitted in the secondary level at grade-six. In this context, a pertinent question may be raised: how far the existing NFPE programme is fulfilling the specified terminal competencies of primary education cycle identified by the government? On the other hand, the government may also raise the same question particularly in respect to admission of the BRAC graduates in different secondary schools of the country.

This study project was undertaken and conducted in the month of April this year, and is an appraisal of the materials used by the BRAC NFPE programme in respect to the termi-

nal competencies identified by the government. The three-year curriculum and related materials were reviewed and analysed in order to determine how well these were covering the specified terminal competencies. Three types of materials were

of which is related with the terminal competencies. Therefore, studies on the achievement of terminal competencies at primary education cycle are very much desirable particularly with the changing educational scenario of the country.

Another important issue related with the concept of competency is the learning needs of the students. According to Bloom's taxonomy learning outputs can broadly be divided into three domains:

a) Psycho-Motor (physical activities, habits, skills and performances etc.); b) Cognitive (knowledge and thinking); and c) Affective (belief, faith, outlook, attitude and interest etc.).

iii) Evaluation Materials, consisting of NFPE Achievement Test (NAT) as well as the recorded evaluation system of the schools.

The term 'competency' has a variety of meanings like capability, efficiency, proficiency and so forth. In education, it is used in a different context. Competencies are specified in terms of educational objectives in one hand and learning needs of a particular level of education on the other. There are various components of any educational programme, viz curriculum, contents, teaching, evaluation and also the teacher training and supervision, each

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These domains are separate but connected, and can be differentiated in terms of behavioural expressions. In our common practices we emphasize much on the areas of knowledge and thinking i.e. cognitive domain of learning. Actually this area influences both the psycho-motor and the affective domains of learning. Psycho-motor domain is also emphasized giving importance to learning different types of physical activities, habit formation skill development, performance and so forth. This domain also directly or indirectly influences the cognitive

domain. Learning in affective well. The overall three-year NFPE programme has fairly covered almost all terminal competencies on an average specified for Formal Primary Education (FPE) Programme of the government.

If the findings are broken down in further details, Text Materials and Curriculum Transaction Materials are covering 12 and 18 of the 19 psycho-motor type. 24 are of cognitive, and 10 are of affective type. These were coded accordingly, and a two-way content analysis was done of the above-mentioned three types of materials by the three kinds of competencies. The coverage was qualified in terms of well-covered, fairly-covered, and not-covered competencies.

As mentioned above, almost

hundred per cent emphases are

generally given in achieving the cognitive competencies, that is the acquisition of knowledge, at any level of education. Primary education is no exception in spite of its diversified types of terminal competencies. But as far as BRAC's NFPE programme is concerned, the findings reveal that the three-year programme of BRAC's NFPE is not only dealing with cognitive competencies with much coverage of but also covering other two types of competencies fairly

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