

Institutionalising Women's Studies

P LANNING for introduction of Women and Development Studies in Dhaka University officially began in 1986. Women's studies as a formal area of teaching and research in the country emerged around 1987, more or less simultaneously, in three departments under the faculty of social sciences at Dhaka University — the Departments of Public Administration, Political Science and Sociology. During the 1990s, the initiative received further impetus with the introduction of women's studies courses in some other departments like International Relations and Anthropology.

Other universities in the country, e.g. the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), has a separate course on Gender and Development, which includes courses on women's studies. Apart from these formal courses, research on women's issues and problems have begun since the 1970s. Today, there are many centres and organisations for research on women in the country. There are also numerous scholarly books and journals dealing with various dimensions of women's concerns. In addition, there are several non-government organisations (NGOs) which are involved in development programmes/projects aiming towards socio-economic empowerment of women.

Among various development issues, women in development is recognised as a priority issue by the government. The National Policy for the Advancement of Women and the Fifth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) both emphasise the need to mainstream women's development to achieve the goals of poverty alleviation, gender equality and gender equity. The National Action Plan for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action provides a comprehensive action programme translating the PFA into national priorities and realities. In view of the government's commitment to mainstreaming

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by Dr Nazmunnesa Mahtab

women in development, WID focal points have been identified in 46 ministries to undertake programmes and projects for women's development at the national level. This has been extended to the field level with the establishment of WID co-ordinating committees at the district and thana levels.

Like the government, there are several NGOs who have responded with a great deal of vigour and commitment to increasing contribution of women to the development process. Multiplication of women's organisations, growing number of conferences, seminars and workshops devoted to women's issues and networks that have emerged over the last decade and a half do display dynamism and active orientation towards women's development. New women's organisations have been established and older ones have increased their levels of activism and assertiveness in support of strengthening women's position in the country. A number of individuals, high-profile women have emerged in such areas as education, research, politics, law and business as conspicuous leaders in articulation of women's concerns and establishment of gender consciousness.

Although women have received substantial support from the government and donor agencies many of their efforts have encountered a broad range of stumbling blocks. Women in the country, even the most articulate and well known, have limited 'real' power to exert the political pressure required to bring about translation of their recommendations into effective

policy and action. In addition, there has been a tendency to focus upon limited areas of research and projects on women's issues, rather than upon a formulation of a consistent, detailed, objective-oriented framework covering all aspects of women's lives. The efforts of the government and NGOs do not adequately address women's issues. Although undergraduate courses and seminars are offered in the different departments of the university, a principal problem is lack of co-ordination, which leads to the duplication of effort. While informal relations between some academics have generated a few collaborative projects, generally each department offering courses on women's studies functions in isolation, struggling for integration and legitimisation within its own department. Thus far, most courses in women's studies are introductory and at best consciousness raising efforts for general studies. This makes it difficult to educate specialists to bring forth further development.

In Bangladesh, although seminars, workshops, conferences, discussion sessions and dialogue on different aspects of women's issues are being continuously held throughout the year, academic recognition for women's studies as a discipline is still pending. What is important rather is that women's studies need to be developed within the academic curriculum.

Women's studies occupied a significant place at the Beijing Conference in 1995 and there were many sessions on this particular issue. In fact, an important

aspect of the conference was the academic recognition for women's studies as a discipline. Bringing women to the forefront of academic analysis and reconstituting its priorities has been felt to be valid and crucial.

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The goals of women's studies in the country are varied:

- Consciousness raising, especially creating an atmosphere favourable to discussion on the need to study women and about their subordinate status;
- Encouraging, conducting, documenting and publicising research on women and gender issues in Bangladeshi society and culture;
- Providing information needed to better women's situation through introduction of new laws, services, and social and cultural programmes;
- Raising women's and men's consciousness about gender relations, identities, and related issues, especially as regards women's equality, identity and specificity;
- Training and advising women with an aim to promoting their participation in community life; and

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• Advising government agencies that define policies and programmes for women;

Women's studies is an interdisciplinary field of knowledge that offers the opportunity to examine women and gender divisions in the society from a variety of perspectives. It is the pursuit of a more comprehensive, critical and balanced understanding of social reality. Students will explore women's lives in the past and present and analyse theories, which seek to explain their social positions.

The Department of Women's Studies will require greater co-ordination and co-operation between researchers, curriculum planners, policy makers and implementers. The programme consists of a Four Year Integrated BSS (Honours) course followed by a one-year Master's Degree. The department will also offer MPhil and PhD.

The Department of Women's Studies will maintain links with all departments under the faculty of social sciences and arts, and different departments of other universities, both at home and abroad, where courses are offered either at the undergraduate or graduate level.

As women's studies is a multidisciplinary and inter-disciplinary course, any other resource persons from other faculties and departments may also be invited to offer courses in their respective field of interest within the scope of women's studies.

Thus concerted effort from all the faculties and departments are essential and important so that the women's studies could be addressed in an integrated and holistic manner. It is also very crucial for providing effective co-ordination for smooth operation of all the plans and programme that will be undertaken within the purview of the department.

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UN Conference Focuses Importance of Education for Children

There is a strong view that the children should not be punished for the lack of sensible policies. The Dakar UN Conference on Education For All has rightly focused the importance of education for children. It provided a framework on which the rich countries will be able to fulfil their promise to the children of the world made 10 years ago.

by Harun ur Rashid

An important and far-reaching event had taken place in Senegal in last week of April which seemed to have escaped the appropriate attention of the international media. What I am referring to in this case is the UN Conference on Education For All which was held in Dakar, the capital city of Senegal.

The Conference was attended by 181 countries and the main UN bodies. The outcome appears to be significant in that the major players, the World Bank and other international bodies committed to spearhead the funding of the new global initiative for education in the developing countries.

Education is as much a right as food and drink. One has to realise that the first priority for eliminating poverty is education. As we enter the information age, education is an essential part in accelerating progress and development. Human resources development is a sine qua non for growth and prosperity and education of the younger generation is the start of it.

The best interest of children is to provide education which is necessary for his/her well-being for the future. Yet the majority of the millions of children live without schooling in the developing countries, especially in the sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. This is a

massive problem for the developing countries to handle without an effective cooperation from the international community. It requires a healthy dose of budget allocation for infrastructures, teachers, teachers' training and books and other materials.

It may be recalled that 10 years ago international leaders committed to the children of the world education. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of Child promises a lot for the children. What is the record of these commitments? Very poor indeed.

It seems that the leaders have been provided another chance to redeem their pledge

during the conference. The 14-point declaration that came out of the conference included the statement that priority for education assistance should be given to the developing countries. The World Bank promised to increase substantially its \$2 billion funding for education and would be happy to press for debt relief to be used for education.

The US government said that it would increase immediately by 50 per cent its funding of basic education in the developing countries and would push the Group of Seven leading industrialised countries at their next meeting in Japan to rally round education as they did for world debt last year. The UN

bodies were reported to have said that the conference was a 'milestone' for education. They believe that huge pressure is coming on politicians from the grassroots to do something in this area.

However, a different perspective was sounded in the conference by the British Development Minister Ms Clare Short. She maintained that money was not the root of the problem and contended that sound policies should be in place first and should be a pre-condition for aid. She also argued that country-by-country approach to education was better than global initiative to lump all countries together.

Although there appears to be merits on her arguable position, they tend to ignore the fact that many debt-ridden developing countries do not have sound policies because of circumstances beyond their control. There is a strong view that the children should not be punished for the lack of sensible policies.

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The writer, a barrister, is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva

Policy Dilemma: India has Difficult Choices Ahead

The Indian policy is one of non-intervention, but officials hasten to add that the situation in Sri Lanka is a fast evolving one. New Delhi claims that it has got assurances from all the major powers that Sri Lanka would not be allowed to be broken up.

John Cherian writes from New Delhi

In the first week of May, with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) advancing towards Jaffna and the Sri Lankan government sending an SOS to New Delhi, India's foreign policy functionaries were caught in a dilemma. New Delhi's initial assessment was that the fall of Jaffna was imminent and that the Sri Lanka Army was in retreat. The government's decision in early May was that it would not intervene in any way in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka. At the same time, New Delhi made it clear that there could be no solution outside the framework of a united Sri Lanka and that there should not be any third-party intervention.

The gloomy assessment in New Delhi about the military developments in the Jaffna Peninsula later gave way to cautious optimism with news coming in that the Sri Lankan troops had stabilised the situation on the war front. According to Indian government sources, the late-1980s experience involving the Indian Peace Keeping Force was not the only restraining factor behind the cautious Indian response. The Indian government does not want a situation to arise in Jaffna that could precipitate a refugee influx into India or impact adversely on the political situation in Tamil Nadu.

External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh acknowledged in Parliament that India had received some requests from Sri Lanka and that it was according them urgent consideration. There were reports in the Sri Lankan media that the country's government was buying arms from a host of countries in the wake of the defeat at Elephant Pass. At the top of the Sri Lankan shopping list were long-range guns and 130 mm artillery equipment. Indian officials say that Colombo has virtually become an arms bazaar and that among the major arms suppliers have been Pakistan and China.

The LTTE, according to Indian sources, is equipped with artillery guns with a range of 17 to 20 km. An entire field ordnance unit of the Sri Lanka Army fell into the LTTE's hands during the hasty retreat from Elephant Pass. This was being put to good use by the LTTE in its all-out offensive, according to information reaching Delhi.

Jaswant Singh told the media after a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) in the first week of May that there was no "formal" request by Colombo for assistance. The Sri Lankan Foreign Minister had told reporters after his meeting with the Indian Prime Minister and the External Affairs Minister that the Indian government had been specifically invited to come to Delhi to overcome the latest crisis.

Jaswant Singh said India was "ready to contribute to the return of peace to Sri Lanka". At the same time, he ruled out any "military intervention" by the Indian forces. The Indian government said that it would resort to "humanitarian measures" to mitigate the hardship of civilians but the External Affairs Minister refused to elaborate on what exactly this meant.

In reply to a question, the Minister said that it was not India's responsibility to help Sri Lanka to evacuate its troops from the embattled Jaffna. Jaswant Singh said that the question of evacuation was a hypothetical one in any case. "Sri Lanka has not asked for evacuation — the situation has not arisen," he said.

The Sri Lankan government said that it was planning a counter-attack against the LTTE. Officials insisted that the situation was not as hopeless as was being made out in the international media.

Restricted Choice

THE government's stand that it would provide humanitarian aid to the Sri Lankan government was evidently not to the liking of some of the allies of the Bharatiya Janata Party, such as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) and the Marumalarchi Dravidar Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK). The DMK was angry that its senior representative in the Cabinet, Murasoli Maran, was not invited to the CCS meeting, which was attended by the Prime Minister, the Home Minister, the External Affairs Minister, the Finance Minister, the Defence Minister and the three Service chiefs.

Jaswant Singh admitted that not inviting Maran was his "fault", but said that Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi had been specifically invited to come to Delhi to overcome the latest crisis.

in view of what had happened in the past. "We should not tie the hands of the government, but we should not forget the past," the Chief Minister said. Karunanidhi was silent on the issue of humanitarian assistance.

Only Tacit Support

SENIOR Indian officials acknowledge that the developments in Sri Lanka are "very serious" from the country's security perspective. There has been an in-depth review of the situation and Foreign Ministry officials say that there is complete support from the constituents of the coalition for the decisions the government has taken so far. "The government has to take into account the danger of a refugee exodus from the island to Tamil Nadu. Besides, the sentiments of a section of our people are involved," said an official. The official admitted that India was caught in a dilemma. He said that Colombo would have liked India to help Sri Lanka face the difficult situation it finds itself in, but its own experiences and the situation on the ground precluded Indian intervention. The Indian government was also of the view that a military intervention at this juncture would not make much of a difference. The loss of Jaffna should only be considered as a battle lost in a continuing war. The best option is a ceasefire, otherwise a very large number of troops could be trapped in Jaffna — this is the considered thinking in government circles in Delhi. The LTTE does not like to take prisoners, and in case prisoners are taken, they may be treated

more as hostages.

New Delhi has sounded a few countries as part of its efforts to find a solution to the conflict. The response has been lukewarm, though some efforts are going on in London, Paris and Washington to bring the two warring sides to the negotiating table. The Norwegian peace initiative is already in place, but the LTTE has indicated to Oslo that it would only start talking seriously after the fall of Jaffna.

The Indian authorities seem to have discussed the crisis in Sri Lanka with the US administration. Indian officials say that Washington is fully supportive of India's current hands-off policy.

But US Assistant Secretary of State Karl Inderfurth had said during his last visit to Colombo that the US was willing to mediate a settlement if all the parties involved wanted it to do so. The joint Vision Statement issued during President Clinton's visit to India said that "in the new century, India and the US will be partners in peace with a common interest in a complementary responsibility for ensuring regional and international security". At the same time, India has told the Sri Lankan government that outside forces will not be allowed into Sri Lanka. Colombo had appealed to countries as diverse as Israel and Pakistan for help.

After India turned down the Sri Lankan plea for assistance, Colombo announced that it was restoring ties with Tel Aviv broken off more than 40 years ago. Israel has sold four

Kfir fighters to Sri Lanka. According to Indian sources, only three of them are operational. Sri Lanka desperately needs fighter planes in order to stem the LTTE onslaught. According to Indian officials, Colombo has given an assurance that it would not invite forces from a third country.

After taking over as the Defence Minister in 1998, George Fernandes had expressed his "personal opinion" on Sri Lanka. "What is happening in Sri Lanka is a civil war and India should not have got involved... We should make all efforts to bring peace to Sri Lanka," Fernandes had said.

Indian officials concede that "Eelam" is not in the interests of India but said that a unilateral declaration of independence by the LTTE was not "imminent". New Delhi is hoping that the new devolution proposals being prepared by the Sri Lankan government will find more acceptance among the Tamil groups. Most observers of the Sri Lankan situation are however of the opinion that the Tigers are unlikely to settle for anything less than a separate state at this juncture.

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AS of now, the Indian policy is one of non-intervention, but officials hasten to add that the situation in Sri Lanka is a fast evolving one. New Delhi claims that it has got assurances from all the major powers that Sri Lanka would not be allowed to be broken up. But the fear remains that the LTTE would assume a Taliban-like status of a "state actor" and destabilise the entire region with its brand of politics and terror.

Besides, there has been no articulation of India's strategic interests in Sri Lanka. After Pokhran-II, senior Indian government officials had spoken of

India's security concerns "beyond our region". The Indian armed forces are understood to have advised the government against direct military intervention in Sri Lanka. No "stand-by" orders have been issued to the armed forces. The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal A.Y. Tipnis, started a six-day visit to Sri Lanka on May 7. He may utilise his visit to assess the situation and suggest a possible Indian response.

Prakash Karat, member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) Polit Bureau, is of the opinion that India should be naturally concerned about the military situation in Sri Lanka.

"We should play a role in finding a solution. Otherwise, other forces will intervene. We should respond to Sri Lanka's request to help find a peaceful solution."

The Congress(I) has said that it supports a peaceful settlement of the conflict within the framework of the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. Congress(I) spokesman Ajit Jogi said that his party would like the government to take Parliament into confidence before it initiates any major steps.

At an all-party meeting convened by the Government on May 8 in New Delhi, the participants endorsed the Government's stand against any military intervention. Speaking to mediapersons after the meeting, Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee said: "We will continue to work for a peaceful, negotiated settlement within the framework of the Sri Lankan Constitution." India would be willing to mediate if it was asked to do so by the two sides in conflict. As of now, he said, neither side had asked for India's mediation.

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A Concept Made Easy for Both Students and Entrepreneurs

BOOK REVIEW

Sangathanik Acharan (Organisational Behaviour)

by Iqbal Ahmed

Publisher: Textbook Division, Bangla Academy
First Edition: March 1998
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cated this useful volume to his "co-freedom fighters", has laboured hard, indeed, to find out and use the appropriate Bangla words for typical and technical English terms.

The author says, in so many words that the concept of organisational behaviour happens to be one of the latest additions to the discipline of management. It also comprises a mixed and complicated process of attitudinal aspects of management. This is a result of progressive thinking and consciousness, which provides guidance to the members of an organisation with a remarkable unanimism. This, in turn, helps the management to take the right decision at the right moment.

Just as an organisation cannot achieve its goals without a proper team of workers, similarly its leadership without the proper personality and far-sightedness cannot ensure long run, prosperous existence of the organisation. The combination of the right kind of organisational behaviour on the part of the workforce and the proper, enlightened leadership, therefore, is the key to success for any given organisation.

The author, who has dedicated

his life to the cause of the people, has