

'Establish SA varsity to help address regional issues'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Educationists at a discussion yesterday underscored the need to establish a South Asian University, which will be a centre of excellence and expertise and help address regional issues.

Such a university would help promote regional harmony, cultural integrity and a sense of participation among the people living in the region, they said.

There are many regional issues,

which never attract the attention of the experts and educationists who can study those to give specific recommendations and find out a permanent solution to the problems, they pointed out.

The university should be supported by both public and private sectors and monitored by an inter-governmental body comprising representatives from all member states, the experts said.

They also underscored the need to develop a sense of ownership and

participation of member states in the proposed university.

Gowher Rizvi of Harvard University presented the keynote paper at the discussion jointly organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and the South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (SACEPS) at Cirdap auditorium in the city.

The experts observed that most bright students who come out of top universities in South Asia leave their countries to serve the developed world. As a result, the regional coun-

tries are being deprived of latest technological know-how.

They urged the policymakers to take effective measures so that the bright students do not leave their own countries after completing study.

About the location of the university, the educationists said such a university can have campuses spreading across the member states.

Some speakers said the proposed university should offer only postgraduate courses as there are many universities for graduate level studies in the region. But some others said the institute should offer both graduate and postgraduate courses.

Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury said Bangladesh is ready to contribute what is necessary to establish such a university.

The issue would be raised in the upcoming SAARC summit, he said.

Underscoring the need to explore intellectual capabilities of the people in the region, he said the people of South Asia have certain 'values' which should be promoted through this type of institutions.

Pointing out the advantages for Bangladesh in this regard, the adviser said, "We have already shown that a simple idea like micro-credit can create a profound impact on society and the economy."

In his paper, Gowher Rizvi gave a detailed description of the proposals for establishing the university.

The primary aim of the university is to draw students from South Asia with a view to giving them a shared experience and an opportunity to better understand each other while engaged in their academic pursuits, he said.

He, however, pointed out that one of the real challenge for the new university would be to devise a curriculum that will be innovative, imaginative and reflect the changed circumstances of the 21st century.

He also suggested forming a regional steering committee consisting of eminent personalities in the field of education, public service, business and philanthropy for translating the concept into a reality.

Former vice-chancellor of Dhaka University Prof AK Azad Chowdhury proposed establishing the institution somewhere near Dhaka.

He also suggested that such a university should give emphasis on research activities.

Another former VC Prof Emajuddin Ahmed said such an institution should not be a conventional one. Its students should study the tradition, culture, religions and heritage of the entire south Asia region, he added.

Prof Khan Sarwar Murshid said

the university should focus on study on science for peace.

The issues of conflicts in the region should also be studied, he said, adding that other universities in the region should be affiliated with this institution.

Prof Shamsher Ali underscored the need to give top priority to science studies. Besides, subjects of common interests in the region such as marine, mountain, underground water and environment should also get priority.

He said an international committee of experts should select the best students for enrolment in the university. At the same time, poor meritorious students should also be given opportunity to study in the institution, he added.



PHOTO: STAR

Gowher Rizvi of Harvard University speaks at a discussion at Cirdap auditorium in the city yesterday. On his right are CPD Chairman Prof Rehman Sobhan, Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury and former education minister Dr Osman Farruk.



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Former chief adviser to a caretaker government Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman speaks at a national consultation meeting on 'Right to Transparent Governance: Bangladesh Perspective' at Cirdap auditorium in the city yesterday. On his left is SAHR Bangladesh Chapter Coordinator Hameeda Hossain and on his right is former adviser Dr Akbar Ali Khan.