

HIGHER EDUCATION

It flourishes in freedom



MUHAMMAD HABIBUR RAHMAN

TWO to three hundred years back it was often suggested that the sum of human knowledge would double every half a century. These days people may argue whether the doubling time of knowledge is eight or ten years. Presently we are witnessing an overwhelming predominance of things that are new over those that are old. We are witnessing colossal changes, cognitive, technical and practical ones in our day-to-day lives. The enormity and rapidity of these changes mean that we suffer from a kind of desiccation. Presently, we find it extremely difficult to keep in mind what happened in the past and unite all our fond memories with our present commitments. Because of these problems of adjustment we have to endure the imbalance and uncertainties that prevail in society nowadays. King Canute was wrongly counseled by his advisers and sycophants. The roaring sea did not tarry a while. But no matter how painful and insistent the problem of adjustment is we must not only endure the imbalance, we must vow that in the end we shall overcome it.

A university is not a college. It is not even a congeries of colleges. It is something more than that. It is nothing if it does not foster free thinking, innovation and research. A university functions to locate and identify problems and suggest remedies for the maladies that are bedeviling society. It may even be expected to perform certain functions that belong to the realm of governmental activities and social reforms.

The object of higher education should be not only to impart

what we think is now known but also to help students to 'learn how to learn'. This need for continued and higher and better education is growing at an accelerated pace. The importance of constantly upgrading our understanding and skills can hardly be overemphasized.

An education pundit like J Robert Oppenheimer advised us "Try to learn something seriously very well indeed. And do not just learn in general terms."

A university is a place where all thoughts regarding human beings and the universe must converge. It cannot be conceived without freedom. It should be spacious enough for all kinds of exercises of the mind and body. Academic freedom for the teachers is wider than the civil freedom. It is enough if in the teacher's activities there is evidence, in the words of Professor Edward Shils, of the "concern to teach the truth, to attain the truth and to publish the truth."

Learn as a practitioner, and learn to do a thing well. And stop while you are doing it enough to see the beauty of it. But I would not quite stop with that; I would add, "But learn something else as well that is quite different. Get some sense of the span of things human, the span of things that the intelligent man can cope with."

It's said that we now live in a "credentialed society." The extensive use of educational credentials forces the education system to be society's gatekeeper. By generous scholarships and governmental subvention systems we are, in the words of Thomas Jefferson, "to bring into action that mass of talents which lies buried in poverty for want of means of development." However, some private universities in our country have created a very sad mess. Their names are exotic and intentionally made beguiling but only for obviously fraudulent purposes. If one wants to incorporate a public limited company one has to comply with certain "do's" and "don'ts". The sad stories of sheer fraud and mismanage-

ment that circulate about some of the private universities also reflect the callousness, narrow partisanship and thorough incompetence of the government's regulatory roles. Presently, however some attempts are being made to stop some shameful and nefarious activities in this area.

Universities all over the world now flourish in close collaboration with the business world. For their expansion, for attract-

ing and engaging capable young persons, and for incorporating the new knowledge, it is incumbent on the part of business leaders to encourage and be munificent towards private universities. Let me point out a recent event the East West University hosted in collaboration with the Association of Computing Machinery, the International Collegiate Programme Contest in February 2007. Such instances of collaboration need to be replicated.

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Governance for the poor

MD ABDUL KADER

GOOD governance is not just about government, it is also about political parties, parliament, the judiciary, the media and civil society. It is about how citizens, leaders and public institutions relate each other in order to make change happen. Election and democracy are an important part of the equation, but equally important is the way government goes about the business of governing. Good governance requires three things: (i) state capability, (ii) responsiveness, and (iii) accountability. This means citizens, civil society and government need to work together to build effective state and provide better governance to reduce poverty.

People want to be governed well and to have a say in what happens in their lives. They want to be safe. They want the chance to earn a decent living for themselves and their families. And they want to be treated fairly by their government and public officials. These aspirations are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But the reality for many people in poor countries is very different. Democratic state and better governance are essential to combat poverty. States which respect civil liberties and are accountable to their citizens are more stable.

Our government's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) also gives significant importance and accords high priority to improve governance in the country. Major points stated in the PRSP for improving governance in all spheres of administration, include: expediting separation of the judiciary from the executive appointing an ombudsman, raising the police force as a neutral institution, keeping the administration free from undue influences, ensuring transparency and accountability

and undertaking proper measures to provide appropriate clientele service and reduce corruption in government offices. But not much so far could have been done except separation of the judiciary.

The PRSP, however, also identified some constraints to have good governance in the country. The first is the primordial imper-

Chronically poor people have been heavily dependent on network of patronage to secure access to land, employment opportunities and development benefits. But these networks have been rarely to their advantage, with benefits heavily skewed in favour of more powerful patrons. In order to make governance work for the poor there is a need to have intensive and integrated effort of government, political parties, NGOs, private sector, civil society, media and citizens.

ative of maintaining political capacity vis-a-vis contenders. Such preoccupations leave little room for active engagement in governance issues. The second is the pressure for responding to the electorate's demand for "development". The third critical constraint is an inherited bureaucratic culture which tends to emphasize "administering" (meaning, control the capacity to punish) rather than "governing" (meaning foster rules and norms to deepen good governance). Promoting a good governance agenda against such deep-seated constraints is easier said than done.

Meanwhile some NGOs have tried to reduce poverty through their efforts and in the process helped to have good governance at local level and further. Their success or failure is, however, relative. But it is certain that they could bring some worthwhile changes in society, specially in the lives of its poorer sections, through their respective programmes, thus reducing poverty of a significant section of

people at least. However most of them believe that without improving governance by establishing transparent, accountable and pro-people government poverty cannot be reduced sustainably. Samata, one such NGO specifically working for the landless poor has been working to have better governance from grassroots to national level in

away from an approach based primarily on increasing people's ability to demand accountability, to one which encourages greater linkages between citizens and the offices of authority. It places emphasis on including local government and other authorities and power holders as "partners" in the development and reform process. It actively implements a policy of supporting members for election to the local government bodies and other socio-political-economic decision making committees.

In this way the poor and the marginalised can have representative voice in local decision-making and can ensure that the issues which affect poor people's lives are constantly on the agenda. This is also important because it contributes to a process of more equitable decision-making. In addition, it could also make progress in growing further support for pro-poor development and influence of the landless poor apparent in decision making with regard to changes in policy amended as a result of its advocacy. It has been creating awareness on different policy issues such as the need for the repeal of existing land laws, establishing a separate land commission for the indigenous people living in plain lands, and changes in the sugarcane grinding ordinance.

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away from an approach based primarily on increasing people's ability to demand accountability, to one which encourages greater linkages between citizens and the offices of authority. It places emphasis on including local government and other authorities and power holders as "partners" in the development and reform process. It actively implements a policy of supporting members for election to the local government bodies and other socio-political-economic decision making committees.

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In order to make governance work for the poor there is a need to have intensive and integrated effort of government, political parties, NGOs, private sector, civil society, media and citizens. Building better governance takes time and has to come from within country, although international partners can help. They see the problem of poverty as primarily structural so there is a need to focus on policy reform, establish good governance and build the capacity of government of respond to be poor.

MD Abdul Kader is Executive Director of Samata.

Facing disasters with prudence

ABDUL KHALEQUE

DISASTER management, its diverse magnitudes and preparedness plans, forecasts and practical confrontation are very complex. The recent surge from water of the Bay of Bengal and its accompanying high velocity wind destroyed standing crops, marooned and rendered shelterless millions of people of about 15 southern districts, disrupted communication, cut off channels of supplies, damaged habitats, killed livestock, birds and beasts, destroyed commercial and industrial enterprises etc. The immediate impact of the disaster stupefied the survived victims for loss of near and dear ones, for want of drinking water, medicare, shelter, food etc. Instant relief was obviously difficult for want of transport, lack of foodstuff and medicine. The stupefaction was quickly overcome because of the instant availability of lots of helicopters of the defence forces and their officers and jawans for relief and rescue operations.

The first phase of rescue and life-saving operations over, second phase of rehabilitation, restoration of the productive forces in agriculture and industry and resuscitation of the educational institutions and re-setting the administration are still continuing and have become a task of immense magnitude, requiring adequate resources and appropriate planning of sustainable growth potentials of the people of the affected areas. Revitalisation of the red-crescent organisation and administrative functionaries of the districts with necessary precaution against corruption and malpractice has also become a major concern.

The sea-surge disrupted bonds of family and it is necessary to take steps to adapt the victims to the various efforts to rehabilitate them in their social structure within our own capacity, and with the benevolent help of friendly countries, NGOs and unaffected citizens.

People responding to disaster have been depicted as heroes. Bangladesh anticipates repetition of disasters but efforts made to get prepared to face the danger are not yet enough. We have now further apprehension of the danger of rising sea water consequent upon climatic change causing the snow-melting of the Himalayas. International research has placed Bangladesh among the 20 such countries in imminent danger of having a lot of its territory to be permanently below sea-level. Unfortunately, the 15 recently affected districts of Bangladesh fall within the

probable permanent sea-water disaster also. It is high time that our researchers brood over the danger and suggest safety-measures.

We feel that we would need to remove people from the vulnerable districts to safer places. And in this respect, the people would look toward the administration for measures needed for saving lives and protecting property from the threats. Governments in advanced countries have established capable agencies to develop national preparedness programmes, co-ordinating responsibilities of all agencies

including films have been made available for teachers and pupils. These endeavours and facilities have promoted knowledge, developed skills and attitudes and stimulated interest in emergency preparedness.

Bangladesh must have a more developed system of rescue and relief. People who face danger of floods, hurricane, tornado and other disasters constantly generally develop some sort of a psychological defence. The hurricane of 1970 gave the people of southern Bangladesh some kind of defence to respond to the call for shelter and protection. This is

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and industrial personages to cope with all kinds of disasters. The twenty countries in the sea-rise danger list need to organise capability to meet the danger. We must get in touch with these listed twenty countries to have first-hand knowledge of their pre-plans, design and setup in order to face the imminent danger. The Ministry of Defence may take up the pre-planning responsibility.

The rapidly growing body of data and literature on different disasters based on research and field studies of disaster-prone countries should be within our grasp for organised study. Such study will help us plan more secure and larger protection from destructive and disruptive consequences of potential disasters. It is refreshing to note that many advanced countries have used research findings to anticipate human needs and develop effective realistic preparations for disaster warning, control, relief and rehabilitation in preventing or alleviating the stress and strain and suffering of a disaster. We must not take the sea-level-rise disaster lightly. When it will happen, it will certainly create endless havoc.

Handbooks and Manuals containing curriculum suggestions and guidance on plans have been made public in disaster-prone advanced countries. Newspapers and magazines have done a lot in familiarising people with the concepts and the principles of defence in disasters. A lot of printed and visual materials

one of the major reasons why in spite of higher wind velocity in 2007 than in 1970, the casualty was much less than that of 1970 over almost the same areas.

It may be noted that in Bangladesh, people generally do not get prepared for danger. They tend to remain concerned with problems of their immediate personal life, taking a proclaimed danger lightly. The initiative to preparedness programme becomes effective if the responsibility is taken by local leaders. The hard-core elements of a preparedness programme must be socially approved. A comprehensive study of the major disasters and their potential preparedness must also be socially developed and approved to prevent or minimise the loss of life and damage to property.

The impact of a major hurricane, we believe, generates a perception that the old from of life is gone with the disaster, thereby creating possibility of innovations and changes in the social system, after the immediate problems of rescue, medicare, subsistence and shelter are solved. Such a disaster may wipe out social inequalities because all social groups get indiscriminately affected. For a time, people forget hierarchical status distinctions and this may promote a sense of democratisation of the social structure and equality. If recovery can be effected quickly, disaster-stricken society may develop higher growth and productivity capacity, because stress and conflicts of normal life are

over-looked and a "live-for-today" philosophy is developed.

The country has completed emergency rescue and relief operations in the Sidr-affected areas. The next tremendous task is rehabilitation programme. Our suggestions in this respect are as follows:

- Keep in mind the sea-rise dangers while creating shelter spots and constructing human habitats and structures of damaged institutions.
- Do not give CI sheet to landless people without giving them land at the same time.
- Keep looters and corrupt people at bay.
- Build structures for shops in the hundreds of market places and these should be allotted to needy victims who may start life in petty business with funds given by government/others.
- Call all unaffected affluent business people of the affected districts and impose upon each at least one family for rehabilitation in the local market places/give a job to at least one person of a distressed family in their business organisations. The affluent people may each spare some small patch of their land to the landless who would be able to construct a shelter there with the money and materials received as relief.
- Ask for foreign donation on specific production projects to be selected by the local administration.
- Provide extra cadre service officers, preferably defence personnel to help in rehabilitation work.
- Encourage plantation of trees and cultivation of bamboo plants and fast growing trees.
- Give the acute victims electricity and gas free of cost for some time.
- NGOs must not be allowed to charge repayment of loans and interests till the persons helped by NGOs' loan are certified as resettled in some economic foothold by the UNO.
- To keep the morale of students up, promote the students of Class I to Class IX to their next higher classes without any examination for one academic session, and build their schools to start with teachers and equipment by July.
- Hold Inter/Degree/Post-graduate exams of the disaster affected areas in June after reconstructing their institutions and organising teachers and their destroyed homes etc in the mean time.

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SECONDARY LEVEL PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Class routine must not be an impediment

RANJIT PODDER and SHEIKH SHAHBAZ RIAD

TEACHING Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project (TQI-SEP) under the auspices of Ministry of Education is the biggest project so far taken for the development of secondary education in Bangladesh. The goal of the project is to increase the quality of education of the said level by improving the quality of teaching. One of the steps the project has taken to achieve the objectives is to introduce participatory mode of teaching instead of traditional teacher-centred approach. In the traditional teacher-dominating approach, teachers are quite totalitarian. Learners are usually inactive and sometimes they are bullied to remain passive. As a result, classrooms, become joyless, tedious, monotonous, boring for both the sides, especially for learners. With a view to minimising this sort of limitations and making the classrooms joyful, interactive, and democratic, TQI-SEP is going to initiate participatory approaches at the secondary level.

Some of the characteristic features of a participatory classroom are the combination of some activities like group work, pair work, role play, acting, peer observation, panel discussion, brainstorming, pair checking, peer teaching, group teaching and so on. In a participatory teaching-learning situation, teachers are expected to talk less than learners creating learning opportunities for them through active and self-involvement. NCTB-prescribed present class routine followed in the secondary

Proposed weekly class routine for vi-viii

Subjects	Present Routine		Proposed Routine	
	No. of periods	Total time (Hours)	No. of periods	Total time (Hours)
Bangla, English, Math	6x3=18	4x3=12	4x3=12	4x3=12
G. Science, S. Science, Religion, Agriculture/Home Economics	4x4=16	2.4x4=10.4	3x4=12	3x4=12
Arts and crafts & Physical edn	2x2=4	2.4x2=4.8	2x2=4	2x2=4
Optional Subjects	2x1=2	1.2x2=2.4	2x1=2	2x1=2
	40	26.40	30	30

schools is not suitable for successful implementation of the participatory approaches. Only the first period is 45 minutes and all others are 35 minutes (6th-8th classes) and 40 minutes (9th-10th classes), respectively. These 35/40 minutes classes become 30/35 minutes classes in real situation. Usually classes are held at different places, sometimes in the different houses. Moreover it takes time for teachers to go from one class to another. With these short class periods it becomes difficult even to make the present teacher-centred teaching effective let alone proposed participatory approach.

It is not possible and sometimes not necessary to apply all the techniques mentioned in a single class period. Even though teachers are willing to practise two or three activities like pair work, group work followed by presentation, it is quite impossible on their part to make the class effective in true sense of the term. For example, 60/70 students of a class if divided into 7/8 groups for a group work followed by presentation of findings of each/some group(s), it will take at least 45 minutes (10 mnts for group work, 5 mnts for each group's presentation).

Of practical experiences as teacher trainers dealing with participatory approach, we think an effective participatory class

needs at least 60 minutes (warm up + previous knowledge testing: 2 mnts, mini lecture on the topic and explaining the next activities: 5 mnts, group work: 15 mnts, presentation of group work by students and teacher's comments: 25 mnts, formative evaluation: 5 mnts, summing up of the whole class and giving home work: 5 mnts). (But if the teachers are motivated and proactive, they can easily rearrange the class routine even following the directive of NCTB.

It is needless to mention that there are many other causes, which are great obstacles in implementing participatory approaches, such as negative attitudes of head teacher, assistant teachers, SMC members toward this approach, existing fixed classroom furniture, large classes, lack of essential materials (poster papers, signature pens) for group work, lack of coordination among HT-AHT-Ts-SMC. Without ignoring the aforesaid problems we are focusing here on present class routine. For fruitful and effective implementation of participatory approach school hours should be increased. As increasing school hours are difficult in our socio-economic and political context, we want to propose an alternative class routine with a little change of total school hours.

If the proposed routine can be

implemented in proper way, there will be positive impact on executing participatory approach. In present class routine number of periods a day is 7/8. But in the proposed routine number of periods will come down to around 5. As a result, total number of classes per day per teacher will decrease, waste of time between classes will be reduced, and burden of stopgap classes for teachers will also be decreased. Since the number of classes per teacher per week will reduce, they will get time for before-class preparation.

In the proposed routine, it is seen that total 3 hours working time per week has been increased. This can be adjusted by allotting 55 minutes for each class after leisure time. We do appreciate the epoch-making steps taken by TQI-SEP for all out development of secondary education of Bangladesh. At the same time we are also doubtful enough about achieving all the objectives unless proper measures are taken in proper time. We are optimistic that all concerned especially MoE, NCTB and TQI-SEP will find out the obstacles on the way to smooth execution of participatory approach and will taken necessary actions.

Both the writers are lecturers of TTC, Feni working in disseminating participatory approaches.