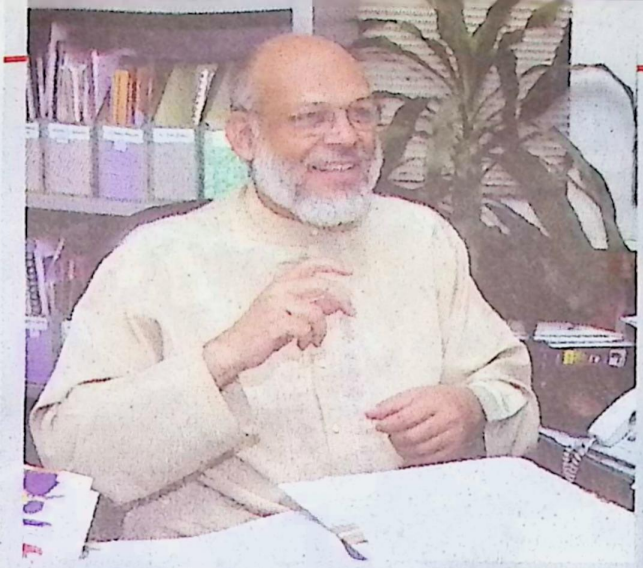


About the Visionary

Kazi Rafiqul Alam was born on November 14, 1948. He did his masters in education from the University of Lancaster, UK and an LL.B. from the University of Dhaka. He has 35 years of experience in Management, Policy Planning and Training of Trainers. He is well recognised for his contribution in spreading education for children and adults within and outside the country. At present he is the President of Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) and Vice-Chairman of the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE). He is one of the Members of the Executive Council of Asia South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education, India. As a Resource Person of UNESCO he has conducted over 71 Regional and International training programmes especially in the Asia Pacific Region on various aspects of Education for All. From 1976 to 2004 he was the General Secretary and Executive Director of Dhaka Ahsania Mission, when he was elected the President of the organisation. Under his leadership, Dhaka Ahsania Mission has earned Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC and Operational Relations with UNESCO. As the Chief Executive of the organisation spreading all over the country and undertaking multi-dimensional activities, he is responsible for overall planning, management, implementation and monitoring of all programmes and activities undertaken by Dhaka Ahsania Mission. He is to initiate innovative thinking in all fields of operation for continuous quality improvement and expansion of the programmes and adding new dimension to the activities. Dhaka Ahsania Mission under his guidance established several institutions and organizations like Ahsania Mission Cancer Hospital, Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology, Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah Teachers Training College, Ahsanullah Institute of Information and Communication Technology and Ahsania Mission College.

Under his leadership DAM got many national and international awards and prizes including Independence Award-2002 of the Govt. of Bangladesh, UNESCO International Literacy Prize-2003, Global Development Network Award-2003, AGFUND International Prize for Pioneering Development Project on Environment-2004, ACCU (Asian Cultural Centre for UNESCO) Grand prize 1996, UN ESCAP Human Resources Development Award 1994, Dhaka City Corporation Nagar Padak - 2004, Dr. Ibrahim Memorial Gold Medal - 2006, Anjuman-e-Mufidul Islam Award 2004, National Literacy Award 1998 etc.

At this stage, DAM, in collaboration with Plan Bangladesh, a global NGO, embarked upon a new innovative project titled, 'Bikash'. Under the project, children were given nursery education while their mothers were provided with parenting tips to rear up children. Children of distressed families lacking the funds to go to formal primary schools are enlisted and provided with pre-primary education.

In government primary schools, we frequently find children who do not get necessary support from parents. They lag behind in their classes ultimately ending up as dropouts. DAM provides two-fold support to these students. Those who do not progress satisfactorily in class-1 and 2 are given extra coaching after school hours. DAM calls it 'camping'. Soon, children's performance improves, turning them into frontbenchers. Similar type of coaching is given to the backbenchers of class-3 to 5 under 'Camp.' An all-out support, moreover, is provided to them to continue their secondary education.

One of DAM's latest endeavours is to teach 88,000 students through 2,680 classes in collaboration with the European Commission (EC). Students are now being organised in community learning centres called 'Ganakendra.' Here they get to read newspapers and newsletters of its library. In several centres, they learn to use the computer.

Previously, the only reading material available was very limited. Alam, with help of his colleagues in DAM, developed education materials for different age groups in the form of books, puzzles, cards, maps, informative ludo, charts as well as games. DAM also developed multimedia education materials on CD ROM that are very attractive to children. The materials are full of illustrations that grab their attention.

Even then Alam is not satisfied. He has a dream to establish a self-sufficient children's city (comprising 10 villages of children) for 10,000 street children and orphans. According to his vision, at this city, each child will get motherly care, education up to SSC/HSC level, acquire skills through professional training courses and micro-credit support for self-employment. At each village the older children (supported and trained by professionals) will prepare the food. The inmates will be nurtured as worthy citizens of Bangladesh. It is undoubtedly a gigantic task. It is too difficult to find a suitable land for the purpose. But Alam is determined to fulfil his dream. He rushed to Panchagarh, a northern district, where lands are still cheaper than anywhere else in the country. He purchased 30 acres of land; the total requirement is 750 acres. He has made an appeal in this regard to the government for generous help. Any individual or organisation such as Bangladesh Sugar Mills Corporation, Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation, Bangladesh Railways, Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) or communications ministry may extend help by providing their unutilised or abandoned land to establish the children's city.

If Alam's visionary project comes true, he intends to set up a similar city in each administrative division of the country. The success of this project will considerably decrease the number of street children across the country.

-ZAM Khairuzzaman is a working journalist at The Daily Star.