

Knowledge-based society



and democratic values, and that it is all encompassing and integral to the vision of a knowledge-based society."

Moreover, the demerits of globalisation and the immense potential of information and communication technology (ICT) have put a premium on flexible and lifelong learning opportunities, enabling learners to adapt to demands for new knowledge and skills. As such, lifelong learning (LLL) now encompasses informal, formal and non-formal education. Lifelong learning is no longer confined to adult education, literacy and other non-formal education programs. Synergy is the key word in LLL. Transformation of the education system has to embrace the entire system to fully realise the power and potential of LLL.

The National Education Policy 2010 is the first step towards achieving the goals of education and human resource development as enunciated in Vision 2021 of the present grand alliance government and the election manifesto 2008 of Bangladesh Awami League. The policy has covered almost all aspects of formal education and provided guideline for implementation of some areas of education system.

The highlights and key features of the education policy recommendations are:

- Universal primary education up to grade 8;
- Multiple delivery mode in basic education with common core curriculum and standards;
- Literacy and non-formal education;
- Quality improvement in tertiary education;
- Student assessment to discourage rote learning;
- Teacher's status, incentives and training;
- Governance and management measures;
- Enhanced education resources.

There are other Vision 2021 goals pertinent to educational development, namely, building digital Bangladesh through extensive use of and capacity development in digital technology, creating gainful employment opportunities for millions of skilled workers, and ensuring equal status for women in all spheres of society and the state.

So far so good, but the national education policy 2010 did not mention anything with regard to lifelong learning leading to learning society and ultimately establishing a knowledge-based society. In other words, the paradigm shift in education for the twenty-first century and the accumulated knowledge and international wisdom in this respect remained outside the purview of the education policy formulated for the country.

The chapter on literacy and non-formal education (chapter 3) of the education policy would have been the proper place to define lifelong learning and learning society. The policy statement on literacy and non-formal education in chapter 3 of the national education policy emphasised a literacy program to eliminate adult literacy by 2014. Non-formal education is seen as a means of providing a "second chance" to those who drop out of

formal schools and appears to be separated from the "literacy campaign."

The chapter is also sketchy with regard to strategic planning and implementation procedures for launching a program for eliminating illiteracy (51% of the population above age 15) from the country by 2014. The guidelines provided for the literacy program are also very general in nature and repeat the previous efforts made in removing illiteracy from the country with little success.

But the absence of the concept of and provisions for lifelong learning according to the needs and motivation of citizens and skill and knowledge requirements of the society, leading to a learning society, is no doubt an unfortunate lacuna in the national education policy.

It can, however, be redeemed to some extent by taking literacy and non-formal education as integral components of widely available lifelong learning opportunities through a nationwide network of Community Learning Centres (CLC) with support from local governments and active involvement of community organisations, NGOs and other stakeholder. This network should be connected with the spread of digital information technology.

These community managed lifelong opportunities can be the vehicles for lifelong learning along with the formal education sector. Otherwise, the good intention of the government to eradicate illiteracy from the country by 2014 -- the basic condition for laying the foundation of lifelong learning leading to learning society -- may remain elusive.

The International Forum of Lifelong Learning, held in Shanghai on the occasion of the WORLDDEXPO 2010 in China, was organised to "strengthen the momentum for building lifelong learning into practical action for building lifelong learning system." Besides identifying the key measures for further development and promotion of lifelong learning, the Forum report stressed that "lifelong learning is not an option any longer, and it is not just a necessity, it is an obligation that has to be made collectively by all."

The national education policy implementation committee recently constituted by the government has been entrusted with an important responsibility. We believe that the committee will rise to the occasion and prove worthy of the trust reposed on them by the government and fulfill the aspirations of the people. Along the way, the committee is expected to find reasonable space and opportunities for accommodating the conceptual framework of lifelong learning leading to learning society with the ultimate goal of establishing a knowledge-based society. And, hopefully, the enlightened future generations will build a truly democratic and secular society in Bangladesh based on equity, equality, human dignity, truth and justice.

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How to go round the bend

A British friend was booking a holiday that would take her to several Asian cities. "Shall I bring my driving license?" she asked on the phone. I replied: "Sure. And I'll organise the funeral."

Europeans should never be allowed to drive in Asia unless they have medical proof of Total Invulnerability, i.e., they need a birth certificate proving they were born on the planet Krypton.

You see, in England, if a car flashes its lights at you, the message is: "Do go first, please; I couldn't possibly take precedence."

If a car flashes its lights at you in Asia, the message is: "Get outta the way! I'm coming through! Banzaaaaa!" And that's a direct quote from my grandmother, whose Morris Minor Traveller was the world's first Weapon of Mass Destruction.

Road travel in Asia is bizarre. If you are in a country where people drive in a careful, orderly way, like Japan, cars have a special seatbelt for every bodily protuberance.

But if you are in a country where vehicles ricochet around like wrecking balls ripping up condemned estates (i.e. India), many cars have no seatbelts and some don't even have doors.

This column is being written while bouncing in the back of a taxi in China, a country with a very Asian code of driving.

Bicycles give way to motorcycles which give way to cars which give way to trucks which give way to tanks which give way to presidential vehicular entourage.

Pedestrians give way to everybody, all the time.

Some roads in Beijing are so uncrossable that entire communities live and die without ever managing to get to the other side. It's like Moses gazing on the Promised Land.

In Asia, traffic lights have the same colours as elsewhere on the planet, but the meanings differ. Green means go. Amber means go faster. Red means put your foot flat on the floor and go through at twice the speed of light, because then no one can see you.

Anyway, I gave the Englishwoman the "Unwritten Rules of the Road for Drivers in Asia."

Rule 1: There are no rules, except the golden rule: Cows get priority.

Rule 2: All traffic drives on the left, except for traffic which drives on the right and traffic which drives in the middle.

Rule 3: All drivers are obliged to help break the record for largest number of vehicles abreast on a two-lane highway.

Rule 4: Signalling before you turn is considered bad form, since surprises are more fun.

Rule 5: When driving at night, headlights should be kept at full beam to blind oncoming drivers, or switched off (see reference to "surprises" in Rule 4).

She asked: "If you are overtaking, which side do you go on?"

I told her: "You should only overtake on the right or the left, or under, or over."

She said that her neighbour had told her she would be safer in a car, because vehicles often went on the pavements.

I told her this was true. "Yes, but most drivers are careful to follow the law, which says: Avoid running over pedestrians unless necessary."

For more rules on driving, visit our columnist at: www.vittachi.com

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ABU HAMID LATIF

"LEARNING from cradle to grave" is an age-old maxim. Human beings continue to learn throughout their lives from surrounding environments and experiences, and acquire necessary knowledge and life-skills for survival through informal and non-formal education. So, the concept of lifelong education is not a new discovery. But the conceptual framework of lifelong education/learning has undergone a tremendous change since 1970s.

The Unesco-International Education Commission Report (Faure), 1972, laid stress on two fundamental ideas -- lifelong education and the learning society -- and appealed to all nations of the world to reorganise their educational systems so that all agencies in a society become providers of education, allowing the citizens take advantage of the

opportunities leading to lifelong education and learning society.

The idea was further strengthened by the Unesco appointed Education Commission Report, (Delors) 1996. The report, enunciating the vision of education for the twenty-first century, stated: "The concept of learning throughout life is the key that gives access to the twenty-first century. It goes beyond the traditional distinction between initial and continuing education. It links up with another concept, that of the learning society, in which everything affords an opportunity for learning and fulfilling one's potential."

The sixth International Conference and Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) 2009, held at Belem in Brazil, affirmed that "lifelong learning from cradle to grave" is a philosophy, a conceptual framework and an organising principle of all forms of education based on conclusive, emancipatory, humanistic

Australian election: Balancing act

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GENERAL election 2010 in Australia was held on August 21, and neither the incumbent PM Ms. Julia Gillard nor the opposition leader Mr Tony Abbott could gather an absolute majority in the lower house. In other words, the outcome was a hung parliament.

With the support of independents or the Greens Party, one of the leaders will form a minority government in a week or two. The horse-trading, well and truly, began immediately from the night of August 21. It has been an unprecedented outcome in the history of the Australian federation since 1901. The last hung parliament was seen in 1940, in the middle of WWII. With this outcome in 2010 Australia has certainly been thrown into a political minefield and economic uncertainty.

Australia came into the world radar after 1970, when the Australian Labour Party (ALP) leader, Gough Whitlam, came to power and changed the face of Australia forever by abandoning the "White Australia" policy. Like most western nations Australia had also its darkest days, having a discriminatory migration policy (e.g. Australian land is for white people only) for nearly 70 years (1901-1970).

Historically, Australia was a British colony for more than a century before the federation was formed, which made this nation a home for people of pre-

dominantly Anglo-Saxon background originating from mother England. Also, immediately after the WWII, this country was an attractive destination for migrants from Ireland, Scotland, Italy and Greece.

However, after winning the 1970 general election, Whitlam abolished White Australia policy and opened the doors for Asian migration, including Chinese, Indians and other races from Southeast and East Asia. Whitlam recognised that Australia was a part of the Asia-Pacific and was not a European nation. This policy worked.

Australia currently has more than 22 million people, with net migration intake of more than 200 thousand per annum and huge investment coming from Asia, including Japan, Korea and China/Taiwan.

Ms. Gillard (the first female prime minister), the incumbent PM, belongs to Whitlam's ALP. Between 1970 and 2010, the governments from both sides of politics (ALP and coalition of Liberals and Nationals (L/N)) had been keen in bringing skilled migrants from Asia (bipartisan), including Bangladesh, based on a universally applied point system that is now adopted by almost all migrant nations on earth.

40 years of open-door policy has made Australia well and truly a multicultural society. The nation has anti-discriminatory laws in place, and violation of those is punishable in the court of law.

Certainly, this nation has come a long way over the last 40 years and, recently, Newsweek placed Australia among the top 10 nations on earth in terms of economy, politics and quality of life. In fact, the survey found Australia to be the fourth top nation behind Finland (top), Switzerland (second) and Sweden (third). Indeed, Australia's rise has been overwhelming over the last four decades.

With respect to relation with Bangladesh, we certainly have very fond memories of working together. Australia was one of the first five nations that recognised Bangladesh -- immediately after India did in December 1971. The then PM, Gough Whitlam, was instrumental in recognising Bangladesh. He came out of the US influence during those days and supported us without reservation.

While the government of Indira Gandhi had been gathering world support for our independence against the wishes of the US and China, it was Australia which strongly supported our cause in the UN body. As we know, a few Aussies even joined hands with our liberation fighters and fought against the Pakistan army.

Australians, though not as mad about cricket as those of us in the sub-continent, have been great supporters of our cricket and its development over the years. To the ordinary Aussies, Bangladesh is now known as a true cricket-loving nation since they witnessed Australia going down against Bangladesh in the one-day version of the game.

In recent years, particularly, with the climate change issues, Australia is one of

the keenest sympathisers of Bangladesh, which suffers because of global warming without contributing significantly to the global CO2 emissions.

For professional interest, the author is currently working with some top ranking Bangladesh government experts on climate change with the support of Australian universities. In the last UNFCCC conference in Copenhagen (COP15), the former prime minister Kevin Rudd was instrumental in establishing the \$10 billion global fund over three years in order to support least developed nations of Africa, the small island nations of the Pacific, and Asia -- where Bangladesh is a major contender.

Moreover, at government-to-government level, the Australian aid agency (AusAID) has been playing a major role over the last 40 years in providing educational support and support at the time of national emergencies like floods and cyclones.

If we look at the Bangladesh diaspora within Australia, as a young nation of only 40 years, Bangladeshis have their fair share of professional presence here as university teachers, doctors, engineers, agriculturists and so on. What is more important and interesting to learn is that these professionals, including the second generation and other migrant workers from Bangladesh, are known as very hard working and law abiding citizens to ordinary Aussies.

Certainly, the relations between Australia and Bangladesh have been growing stronger and stronger over the years with Bangladesh gradually maturing into a parliamentary form of democracy.

Indeed, while the 2010 election outcome in parliamentary democracy in Australia could contribute to some



political uncertainty over the next three years, there is no denying the fact that this nation has been travelling smoothly during the time of global financial crisis (GFC). It has a good economic record.

Unlike other OECD nations, Australia is only the single member nation which escaped recession during the GFC with low unemployment (around 5%), low interest (around 6%) and low inflation (around 3%). This was possible only due to the fiscal stimulus package the incumbent government introduced over the last two years. Why then did the government fail to gain absolute majority, which it perhaps deserved?

There were two main reasons -- internal party political chaos within the ALP and the government's about-face on climate change commitments it had made to the electorate in the 2007 election. Certainly, the climate change issue was a major factor since the latest results show that the Greens (centre left party) won balance of power in the upper house and got a first ever member in the

lower house, who will be instrumental in forming the next government.

Recently in the UK, the Tories (conservative right) formed a government with the unusual support of the Liberal Democrats (centre-left). It remains to be seen in Australia whether the centre right (L/N and independents) and centre left (Greens) go hand-in-hand, or whether the ALP and the Greens form the government. Indeed, it is a very interesting time ahead for Australian parliamentary democracy.

It certainly appears that the well-celebrated and publicised first female incumbency of the ALP paid off little with the female voters. Moreover, the ALP, immediately before the election, made another female leader the president of the party for the next three years. It remains to be seen whether it was a policy for drafting more and more female voters in the ranks or a coincidence.

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