

Education in the Sixth Plan

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THE political pledge of the government outlined in Vision 2021 to combat poverty, build Digital Bangladesh and move into the ranks of the middle income countries makes strategies and action in education the fulcrum of change. A new education policy adopted in 2010 is intended to set the course for envisioned change.

The sixth five year plan (2011-15) should be the institutional mechanism for resource provisions, coordination, monitoring and placing all reform and development efforts in education within an agreed planning framework -- always a challenge in the complex and multi-faceted endeavour which is the national education system.

As inputs to the process of plan formulation, background papers for different sectors were prepared under the auspices of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS). A paper on education and human resource development was prepared by a team of academics and researchers, including this writer. The background identified priorities in strategic interventions, which should be reflected in the Sixth Plan.

The priorities in objectives and strategies for education in the sixth plan indicated in the background paper are listed below, only as headlines, in this limited space.

- **Universalisation of education up to grade 8:** Eight-year UPE is achievable and must be achieved in a decade, according to the team. A coordinated upazila-wise assessment and planning was recommended as an urgent step for this purpose;
- **Equity with quality in primary and secondary education:** Recognising the reality of historically evolved multiple provisions in primary and secondary education, the task now is to enforce common minimum quality standards in physical and learning facilities, and teaching personnel across the diverse provisions, as proposed in the Education Policy;
- **Common core contents in primary and secondary education:** Strong bilingual compe-

tency in Bangla and English for all students completing the secondary stage should be a core objective -- building the foundation of Bangla competency by fifth grade and similar English skills at the secondary stage. Similarly, all students must be equipped with a foundation of math, science and computer skills;

- **Teachers as key to quality:** Bold and creative measures are needed to attract talented and inspired young people to teaching, to keep them in the profes-

sion and to create a critical mass of talented teachers in the education system. A strategic action proposed is a ten-year plan involving a hundred degree colleges for enrolling bright young people in a degree programme with education as a subject in a pre-service preparation approach linked with attractive incentives and status;



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- **Transforming vocational and technical education:** Shortage of skilled workers and unfilled places in vocational institutions, and sometimes unem-

ployed graduates, have to be addressed by redesigning the role of the public sector in vocational/technical education and training through new modes of collaboration that involve employers and NGOs in public institutions' operation and management, and also government encouragement and incentives for private sector training institutions, apprenticeship and on-the-job training. Particular attention is needed to making training responsive to market demands,

level and devise institutional models with greater academic, management and budgetary authority with accountability;

- **Literacy and NFE in a life-long learning perspective:** Literacy and non-formal education must be conceptualised as integral components of widely available life-long learning opportunities. A nationwide network of community learning centres under local government auspices with active involvement of NGOs and community organisations should be the vehicle for life-

universities, before investment is made on expansion and new institutions.

- **Financing strategy to support quality with equity:** A goal of 4% to 4.5% of GDP as public education expenditure should be the target by the end of the sixth plan. Financing criteria and principles should be established and applied to support the objectives of quality-with-equity, such as upazila-wise capitation formula and institutional control of resources. The team presented these priori-

(draft of July 19, 2010), does not measure up to the transformative actions and strategic initiatives called for by Vision 2021 and the new education policy.

Some of the text from the background paper has been lifted in the draft, but not as components of a coherent and reasoned strategy. The draft chapter dwells on secondary education, with cursory mention of other areas, such as critical issues of primary education, madrasa education, and tertiary education (was there no brief from these sub-sectors?).

Perhaps a give-away of the approach in the draft is its citation of the Ministry of Education move to "develop a system of governance within the current administrative structure." Isn't the current administrative structure at the root of many problems? In the same vein, the draft considers it an accomplishment that the woefully poor share of GDP for public allocation to education has been maintained and will be maintained in the future!

Meanwhile, there is a disconnect between major externally assisted development projects, such as the successor to the Second Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP), which MoPME and the Ministry of Finance are negotiating at present with donors, ignoring major policy planks of the education policy. The draft plan makes no mention of the new PEDP under negotiation, committing major domestic and donor resources.

If the re-introduction of the Five-year Plan is intended as a serious exercise to mobilise and direct resources towards fulfilling national aspirations, rather than a document for public relations, a more rigorous process with meaningful involvement of stakeholders, including implementing bodies, must be followed. The plan has to be owned by the main stakeholders, who will implement it. It cannot be just a planning ministry document.

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ties as propositions and offered to engage in consultation involving key stakeholders, especially the two ministries of education, in translating these priorities into workable projects. Such an exercise did not occur -- at least not involving the team.

It is reported in the media that finalisation of the plan is proceeding apace. What we have seen of the Human Resource Development Strategy chapter in the document, which lumps education, training and health together in one chapter

LEST WE FORGET

Professor A. R. Mallick

JOHN HARRISON

TODAY is the 17th death anniversary of Professor Azizur Rahman Mallick. He was one of the very first post-1947 students to take his doctorate at the School of Oriental and African Studies and to have Professor C.H. Philips, then head of the History Department, as his tutor. He arrived when Britain, shorn of empire and with a shattered economy, was seeking to fashion a new society better than the old and when SOAS was itself being transformed. But he also arrived when, after both famine and the violence and disruption of partition, a similar reshaping of state and society was under way at home, in East Pakistan.

Before the war SOAS had been a modest specialist institution, largely devoted to the study of the classical Asian languages from Arabic to Mandarin Chinese and run by a small body of erudite, eccentric and sometimes cantankerous academics. Its student body was small -- largely drawn from those who would serve the needs of British diplomacy and empire in Asia. The war, however, gave it a very different role, training men who would serve in the Arabic speaking war theatres of the Near East and North Africa and on the eastern fronts from Bengal to Japan itself. The reward was a large, quite generously funded post-war expansion of the School, in subject range and in staff. (Many of whom, like myself, had come face to face with other civilisations and had been excited by the experience).

Mallick arrived was still in the grip of rationing of food and clothing and of warmth. Opposite the School was a derelict water tank, once needed for fire-fighting, while across Tottenham Court Road was a bomb or doodle-bug-levelled wasteland. Some sections of the School were still accommodated at a distance in commandeered houses; the splendid new library was still a planner's dream. The British Library with its domed reading room had emerged unscathed, but the India Office Library was still awkwardly housed in Whitehall and inadequately card-indexed. The reading room enjoyed a coal fire but to get to the drab cafeteria involved a long walk through subterranean corridors.

But for young students coming from the then India and Pakistan, fired by the achievement of independence, there was a welcoming buzz about SOAS and in Professor Philips a tutor of vision. The qualities found in Professor Mallick's thesis: the width of outlook, the marshalling of facts, set out and footnoted with scholarly care, and the vigour and clarity of argument and expression, all testify to qualities inherent in the man, as his future career confirms, but they are also qualities which Professor Philips was well-placed to strengthen and bring out. His personal tutorials were at once encouraging and probing, wide ranging, never skimmed and marked always by an ability to reveal in one's own work, potentialities one had not yet discovered. The same was true of the departmental seminars he introduced which all postgraduates

attended. They included a term devoted to the craft of the historian - the clear defining of a subject, the questions to be asked and time scale, the searching out of appropriate sources, the use of statistics, diagrams and maps, care in footnoting and then the actual writing and the preparation of a bibliography and any appendices. This brought together otherwise isolated research students and introduced them to each other and to all the teachers of

Pakistan/Bangladesh would subsequently become familiar. And if, from Professor Mallick's day there has been the sense of a true, productive community of scholar-historians at work in Bangladesh, between them creating a fine national library and archive and a series of splendid co-operative volumes on their country's history, perhaps a little may be due to many shared experiences at SOAS. For someone who, like Professor

engine driver on the East India Railway, not a member of the "twice-born." He was not wedded therefore to their vision of the past, had no desire to see independence denied and was glad to see the energies released by freedom creatively employed. (As a leading figure in the Army Education Corp. he had actively responded to the need for adult education as a preparation for demobilisation of the British army, especially on the theme of "new

end and had a hand in the development of Khartoum University, with which SOAS had special links.

My own links with Professor Mallick were much slighter -- I was of course a fellow member of the history seminars and I was able to share and profit from working with him on draft chapters when Professor Philips was unavailable for a supervision. But I shared with him the experience of SOAS growth -- and oddly I knew Chittagong from wartime days.

I was conscripted into the army early in the second World War and when, after a salutary spell as a lance-corporal in the Yorks & Lancs I emerged as a 2nd Lieutenant, I chose to join the Indian rather than the British Army. In 1943 my Indian battalion moved to Chittagong and forward to Dohazari for the first attempt to dislodge the Japanese at Akyab. It was at this time that I first saw Chittagong port and the strange hilly landscape on which the university would be built. I also had the experience of sailing down the Karnaphuli river in three dugout canoes on return from a patrol towards the Kaladan river. I would visit Dhaka and Chittagong again in 1996 to meet Professor Mallick and other old students, to marvel at the growth of the port, the taming of the river with a major hydro-electric works and admire the now mature Chittagong University, his handiwork and one of his permanent monuments.



John Harrison (Right) with late A.R. Mallick at the latter's residence in 1996.

the department. This introduction was followed by two terms in which each student had in turn to set out his/her subject, progress and problems for discussion by the others - an anxious but invaluable experience. It was one with which a whole galaxy of gifted scholars from East

Mallick, might later be charged with the creation and running of a department, even a university, or the task of representing their country or holding high office, Professor Philips also had much to offer. Philips had spent part of his childhood in India, but as the son of an

Britain.") What he and Professor Mallick talked about in their meetings we may not know, but their common interest in scholarship and the university world was surely a part of the exchange -- the more so as Philips had toured East African educational institutions at the war's

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