

# Thoughts on Education Day

QUAZI FARUQUE AHMED

TODAY is Education Day. The 1962 education movement of students in the then East Pakistan culminated on this day. The day reminds us of the killing of school student Babul, bus conductor Golam Mostafa and domestic worker Waziullah and repression on many others who raised their voices of protest in support of the students. I participated in the movement as an activist as the General Secretary of Dhaka College Students' Union.

Two chief characteristics of this movement deserve special mention: firstly, the movement was initiated by the students alone without any outside influence. Secondly, the central student leaders could not foresee that such a huge movement, based on academic issues and problems faced by the students, was possible. The movement subsided eventually when opposition leader H. S. Suhrawardy came to Dhaka from Karachi during the last leg of the movement. He met East Pakistan Governor Golam Faruk and persuaded him to defer implementation of the Sharif Commission Report.

Since the establishment of Pakistan, a policy of disparity and step-motherly attitude was followed towards East Pakistan, where 56% of the population lived. The number of educational institutions started to decrease and the dropout rate increased within a short time.

Prior to partition of the subcontinent, East Pakistan was much ahead of the then western part of Pakistan. In 1947-48 the number of primary schools in East Pakistan was 29,633, which came down to 26,000 within a span of 5 years in 1954-55.

The Pakistan Army Chief Ayub Khan hatched a conspiracy with Governor General Iskandar Mirza to topple the coalition civilian government headed by Prime Minister Feroz Khan Noon, and imposed martial law for the first time. Martial law was promulgated on October 7, 1958. But in less than 3 weeks Iskandar Mirza was removed and Ayub Khan became self-appointed President of Pakistan and Chief Martial Law Administrator.

Two months later, the government announced for-

mation of a committee headed by Secretary, Education of West Pakistan and Ayub's one time teacher at Aligarh University, S. M. Sharif. In the 11 member-commission, 4 educationists were from East Pakistan. They were Dr. Momtaj Uddin Ahmed, Vice Chancellor, Rajshahi University, Dhaka Secondary Education Board President Abdul Haque and 2 teachers -- Professor Atowar Rahman and Dr. Abdur Rashid from Dhaka University and Dhaka Engineering College respectively.

The commission submitted its interim report on August 26, 1959.

Some features of the Sharif Commission report, which was published in 1962, provoked students' agitation in East Pakistan. To mention a few among them: (1) The concept of free primary compulsory education is Utopian, (2) to introduce a Lingua Franca for Pakistan, Roman script should be introduced and for that Arabic should be given priority, (3) Urdu should be made the language of the people of Pakistan, (4) education should not be available at minimum cost and at a "cheap price," (5) there is reason to see it at par with investment both in industry and education, and (6) the 2 year-degree course should be upgraded to 3 years for improvement of quality at the higher education level.

The Global Campaign for Education (GCE) -- the coalition of Teachers' Unions, Child Rights Activists, Civil Society Movements, NGOs working in more than 100 countries to achieve free, quality public education for all -- met in its 4th General Assembly in Paris in the

last week of February this year. The Assembly discussed: (1) Act on girls' and women's education -- fighting the barriers at every level,

(2) early childhood education -- the route to equality, (3) the learning challenge -- addressing the professional teacher gap, class sizes and securing good outcomes for all, (4) funding education for all -- national budgets to tackle marginalisation and secure rights, among others.

It may be mentioned here that the GCE acknowledges education as a human right and gives priority to "Gender Equality in Education" in conformity with the 2008 GCE Assembly resolution. It notes with concern that the acute shortage of qualified educators, coupled with high levels of teacher attrition, represents one of the biggest hurdles to reaching EFA goals. It notes that 9.1 million teachers need to be recruited to reach UPE by 2015. It reiterates the importance of promoting and protecting the rights and freedoms of all teaching personnel as defined in the 1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Teachers.

It urges governments and all education authorities to focus greater policy and decisions on improving teacher salary levels, comparable with other professions. It reiterates that governments should recruit and retain teachers, especially female teachers, in rural and remote areas. It calls upon governments to ensure that all teachers receive pre and in-service training of good quality, update curricula according to the challenges of

the contemporary world, technology, materials, and new models of teaching.

This year, on Education Day, many issues on education are being discussed due to some initiatives taken by the government in the implementation of the Education Policy-2010, like free distribution of textbooks at the primary and secondary levels, commencement of public examination at the post primary level, appointment of about sixty thousand primary teachers and almost cent percent admission in primary schools with larger number of girl students.

On the other hand, there is disappointment of the non-government teachers due to non-realisation of their long due demands, including promotion, time scale, medical allowance, festival bonus, house rent and other financial benefits. The Education Policy stresses on human development, introduction of pre-primary education, common core subjects like mathematics and science, Bangladesh studies, and environment and climate change in all streams at the primary level in general education -- English Medium, Technical Schools and Madrasahs.

The Education Policy also has recommended establishment of a permanent education commission to review the policy from time to time and incorporate required changes, enactment of Education Law accommodating rules, bye rules and Codes of Conduct for teachers, students, guardians, effective management of educational institutions, introduction of separate pay scale for teachers from primary to university level to attract merit and talent in teaching, and teachers' training to teach better and ensure their professional, moral and ethical accountability.

However, many prefer to wait and see how effectively the implementation of the Education Policy is managed and the acute problems are duly addressed. The many challenges have to be faced with both courage and vision, involving all concerned with education as far as possible. After all, education is a national concern.

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## Literacy and manpower development

M. ASHRAF ALI

PERHAPS nobody can deny that education unlocks the door to modernisation. It has been found through research that there is a positive correlation between the rate of literacy and per capita income of a country. It is obvious that now we are feeling the pinch of neglecting the education sector. No country can be expected to make headway in its efforts for development with 70% of its people being illiterate.

Some vital national programmes, such as population control and family planning, increased food production, etc are greatly hindered due to lack of participation by the general masses, who lack the minimum awareness needed for voluntary participation in these programmes. In order to involve the general people in nation-building activities, education is urgently needed to raise their level of awareness.

Manpower development does not mean only the development of high-level manpower. It also means the development of the capabilities of every citizen for meaningful utilisation. In order to achieve this it is essential to gear up primary education and organise adult education on a massive scale. It has been proved that sporadic efforts by voluntary organisations cannot be sufficient to educate 120 million illiterates. Nationwide planning and mobilisation of resources, both financial and material, are essential for such a gigantic endeavour.

Basic education, which includes both primary and adult education, was never taken seriously in this country. We had heard of introduction of universal primary education in the country even during the Pakistan days, but in reality very little progress had been made toward achieving it. Adult education also met the same fate. Many people believe that learning the alphabet and being able to sign one's name is enough education for the adults. It is clear that in these days of technology literacy of this standard will never be useful and functional in order to participate in the development programmes. In order to be useful and functional, the standard of literacy should be of the standard of Class-V of the primary education level. Since this factor was totally ignored and literacy of a very low standard was imparted to the illiterates, they reverted back to illiteracy within no time, resulting in

no progress in adult education.

We talk of democracy, but it is not understandable how democracy can function in a country where 70% of the people are illiterate. There is, however, the other side of the coin, which means that an educated citizenry can cause trouble for those who engage in exploitation. Why are we not assigning the proper priority to the education sector, particularly to basic education which is vital for raising the level of awareness of the masses? Since it has been proved that spoon-fed and paternalistic development approach has failed, the only remaining alternative is to let the people fend for themselves by providing the basic knowledge and skills required for survival.

For achieving this goal the following strategies are suggested: It is necessary to determine the learning needs of the rural people before a programme is launched, to ensure that proper type of knowledge and skills are provided to the illiterates. Different types of literacy programmes by different organisations without clear-

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cut goals are most undesirable;

A suitable curriculum has to be prepared, which should be aimed at providing the needed awareness as well as skills that can generate some income for the rural poor. Appropriate textbooks and supplementary reading materials should be prepared by specialists who are experienced in writing for adults;

There is a notion that anyone can teach a literacy class. This is far from the truth, and is probably the reason why literacy efforts have failed in the past. Training of special type is needed to teach adults, and such training should be undergone by all persons engaged in literacy programmes. In this regard the experience of Brac, which has been engaged in literacy work, may be very useful, although it has no literacy programme at present. It remains unexplained till now why Brac discontinued such a vital programme; Preparation and implementation come next. They

involve proper mobilisation of manpower and financial resources to launch the programme on a nationwide basis. Appropriate management systems and monitoring and control devices should be established in order to ensure positive results as well as quality of the programme. An intensive course of six months to one year may be enough to make the literacy level quite functional for the participants;

Unless proper follow-up materials are prepared and supplied the literacy newly attained by the participants may not be retained by them for long. In order to prevent this, supplementary books with useful content should be supplied to the neoliterates for enrichment of their level of education through self study. In this case, the media can play a very effective role. Regular programmes may be broadcast through radio and TV, which would be very useful for raising consciousness and enrichment of the level of learning of the neoliterates. It is a pity that a costly medium like the TV is being used mainly

for entertainment of a minority of urban people. It would be highly advisable to open education channels of the TV entirely for the purpose of educating the rural people. For this, TV sets should be distributed free of cost to every village and should be located at a suitable places for the viewing of the people. TV can be highly useful in literacy teaching, family planning and all types of rural development education;

Finally the question of funds. There is no doubt that the proposed nationwide programme on literacy will involve a huge amount of money. The government may mobilise funds from all sources to finance the programme because the return from such investment will be manifold in the long-run. It would be advisable to make the investment. In this case, the Chinese proverb "If you give me a fish you feed me for a day, but if you show me how to fish, you feed me for ever" should be remembered. Finally, it must be realised that time is running out very fast. Unless things are done on a priority basis, problems will multiply and may surface in a colossal manner, defying temporary solutions, and lead to chaos and confusion of the most undesirable type.

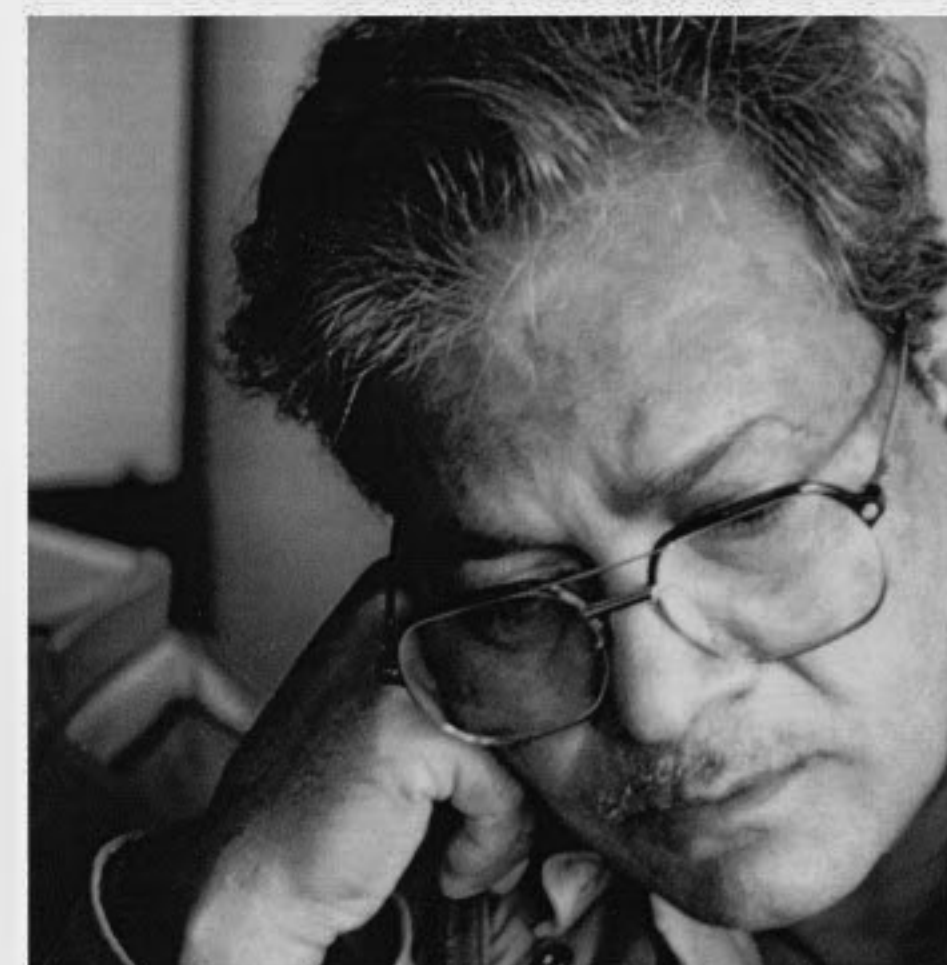
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### LEST WE FORGET Nitun Kundu: Our role model

THE true spirit of creativity and leadership never dies. Perseverance and hard work yield unbounded rewards. These are just some of the things we remembered on September 15, 2011 as we marked the 5th death anniversary of Nitun Kundu -- an artist, sculptor and an ideal of a successful entrepreneur.

Nitun Kundu's story was of one man's interminable desire to be the best of who he was and contribute via means of what he truly loved -- sculpting and painting. During Bangladesh's struggle to become a sovereign nation in 1971, Mr. Kundu's involvement in the liberation war took the form of posters, banners and slogans encouraging our fighters to free Bangladesh from the clutches of Pakistan.

Nitun Kundu's versatility as a creative individual can be seen in his works placed in various parts of the capital and the country. His vision of a Bangladesh that knows no bounds can be felt in all that he created. His work as an artist, sculptor and a



successful entrepreneur has been substantial. From a small investment of Tk. 5,000 and a studio workshop in Shukrabad in 1975 to one of the largest successful furniture manufacturers and retailers, Otobi is a 36 year old testament to Mr. Kundu's pure genius and ardour.

Combining his knack for creativity and futuristic outlook Nitun Kundu paved a path for Otobi from its inception, which is still being followed -- continuously exploring, innovating and striving to be the very best. His courage and talent taught everyone at Otobi to foresee the future while growing in the present. For Nitun Kundu triumph was inevitable -- that is what he had nurtured during his life and instilled in those around him.

Today, Nitun Kundu is not here yet his dedication and resilience are reflected in all that he has left behind. The passion, ideals and fortitude with which he started Otobi have, over the years, grown to become the ethos of this organisation and its people. It is through today's Otobians that the spirit of Nitun Kundu lives on eternally. He created something magnificent from virtually nothing, and never marked an end to how far his creation can go, and now it is the honour and duty of those associated with Otobi to take it further.

By an Otobian.