

University without a campus

IN OTHER WORDS



AMITAVA KAR

SINCE July 1, private universities of the country have been in the spotlight and mostly for wrong reasons. In the cacophony of arguments for and against them, an important fact seems to have been lost. A lot of them do not have a campus.

What is the point of higher education? Is it merely training students in the technological, analytical and rhetorical skills necessary for success in business and other professions? Shouldn't it arouse the intellectual enquiry into what kind of human beings we want to be? Do we not have a responsibility to check if universities are fulfilling that purpose?

Are we sure that we still remember that goal? If we do, how is it that most of the crimes are committed by the so-called educated class? To what extent have our universities transmitting to students the accumulated experience of social living? Have they not let many a mind become "invaded by legions of half-truth, prejudices and propaganda"—an observation Martin Luther King made about US universities in 1947?

While experts can have long, scholarly discussions about what went wrong—the curricula, the quality of teaching and learning, or commitment—let's focus on the simple fact that most private universities do not have a campus. How big of a deal that is? What do students need a campus for?

"Through open campus students will have the opportunity to come closer to nature," Shaheen Islam, Professor of Educational and Counselling Psychology at Dhaka University

says. "The richness of nature in campus will enhance peace and psychological wellness. It will help to learn and integrate human qualities and values which are naturally imbedded in our physical environment. The open campus is complementary to the goal of education to introduce minds to that vastness and encourage patience, tolerance and equality."

How can then most private universities operate without a campus? Do they not realise the importance of having open spaces with greenery where students can play, hang out or just stare at the sky? Professor Abdul Mannan, Chairman of University Grants Commission says, "According to law, a private university in Dhaka and Chittagong must have 1 acre of undivided land. In other cities it must have at least 2 acres. They have to fulfill this condition within 12 years."

What can the UGC do about it? Not much, according to Professor Mannan. "We don't have executive power. In all SAARC countries UGC has the power to take executive decisions. But in our country, the final decision is taken by the ministry. UGC needs to be empowered. My predecessor drafted a law and sent it to the ministry. The ministry sent it back with some notes. We worked on those and sent it back to them. We are still waiting."

What needs to be done to empower the UGC? "In order to give UGC executive power, the existing law has to be changed," Professor Nazrul Islam, former Chairman of UGC says. "It is high time the UGC Act was revised. Both the UGC and the government want a Higher Education Commission. The power and scope will expand. The proposal has been sent to the government. There should also be an Accreditation Council which will be responsible for the accreditation of all public



A university without a campus is like a tree without leaves

PHOTO: NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

and private universities. It will put in place a system for ranking of universities. Some private universities are ahead of public ones. It is unfair to stigmatize them all."

It is not "efficient" and "successful" people but well-rounded individuals that are in short supply. "Education is about

expanding the mind and reaching out to greater fulfillment. It is about openness and freedom of self," Professor Shaheen Islam says, emphasising the importance of campus life.

Let openness, inquisitiveness and access to knowledge define universities where "The

books stand open and the gates unbarred," as told by Seamus Heaney, Nobel Laureate and Professor at Harvard, in honour of his university's 350th anniversary in 1986.

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NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY 2016 An analysis of the draft

ARUP BARUA

YOUNG people enjoy a critical junction of life where the transition from childhood to adulthood takes place. This phase goes beyond physical transformation and enters a set of transformations such as biological, psychological, socio-cultural and political adaptation. Age is the only parameter of defining youth. But there is no universal definition of it. Definition of youth varies from national law of individual countries to international conventions. The United Nations defines youth as the age group between 15 and 24 years, but the Commonwealth defines it as 15 to 29 years of age. The Government of Bangladesh counts those between 18 to 35 years of age.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the current youth population of Bangladesh is about 52 million; more than 33 percent of the total population.

Consequently, an integrated development of this particular cohort is a grave concern and is to be addressed prudently in the policy document. While a window of opportunity is still there, strategic and visionary policy development, and implementation would be instrumental in reaping its demographic dividend and leading Bangladesh towards becoming a developed nation.

Bangladesh formulated its first national youth policy in 2003. With the passage of time that policy has not responded to needs and priorities. A revision of youth policy was expected to meet the needs of the present time. A draft of the national youth policy was published by the Department of Youth Development (DYD) under the Ministry of Youth and Sports for public opinion in April 2015. The first draft of the policy was developed by the Bangladesh Youth Leadership Centre (BYLC) which was fully funded by the Commonwealth Foundation. Later in 2015, the DYD organised several divisional and central level consultations with key different and key stakeholders.

Following a series of consultations and an online call for feedback by the DYD, a large number of recommendations/feedbacks were



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shared with the DYD by different organisations. At the end of 2015, the government's Centre for Research and Information (CRI) joined hands with the DYD through a blurred process that depleted executive/legislative authority. The CRI published a revised draft after incorporating some feedbacks from different forums including two ministries. A national level workshop titled – finalisation of national youth policy was jointly organised in July 2016 by the DYD, CRI and UNFPA Bangladesh.

The policy was developed covering almost all issues. Many of the activity level terms, however, would yield complications in developing the plan of action. Ideally, a

policy should be an indicative document which can be translated in detail while formulating the strategy or action plan to be aligned with it. The inclusion of different stakeholders' feedback has significantly improved the revised draft policy in 2016. Major recommendations have been taken into account – those shared by the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the United Nations Theme Group on Adolescents and Youth.

The policy offers a preamble which delineates the background independence of Bangladesh and the glorious sacrifices of youths during the war of independence and in other democratic movements. It attempts to establish a nexus between national

development and youth empowerment by referring to several articles of the Constitution. Some other substantial issues including demographic dividend, vision 2021, 2041 and sustainable development goals are broadly extended. As this policy will have a series of policy implications in future, it is, therefore, important to deconstruct the policy with critical understanding before it gets finalised. The key issues and challenges of youths are well articulated in general, despite diversity across the country.

The revised draft promotes gender equality and empowerment of all human beings. From human rights approach, the revised draft is much more inclusive than the previous one. The promotion of youth engagement in environmental education and protection, ICT development, green technology, good governance, sustainable development, volunteerism, youth work has been widely adapted. Furthermore, the draft policy recognises the rights of youths, which requires a multi-sectoral coordination mechanism to ensure. Needs of diverse youth groups are not identical across the country. Disadvantaged, marginalised, vulnerable youths are in need of different interventions that are laudably identified.

According to the latest Labour Force Survey (LFS), youth (15-29) unemployment rate is 8.1 percent whereas the national unemployment rate is 4.3 percent. Youths must be given the right to apply for government jobs up to that age which is the upper limit of the youth definition, adopted in the policy, without any discrimination.

The wellbeing of educated youths is, to some extent, missing in the policy. The LFS show that persons aged 15-29 with a university degree has the highest rate of unemployment — 16.4 percent. Even female unemployment rate of this group is much higher at 23.5 percent. In order to encourage youth entrepreneurship, the policy should advocate for a reform in the existing policies to ensure hassle-free access of youth entrepreneurs to financial institutions and services rather than establishing a 'youth bank'.

Considering the bulk of youth population and their needs at home, there are very limited opportunities for skill development in fostering

professional growth. Quality of education and personal development are challenges that should be addressed effectively to captivate the global job market. Simultaneously, sexual and reproductive health education and services, healthy life styles should also be ensured for all youths.

Under the prioritised areas, 'empowerment' has been sectioned in education, training, employment, ICT and self-entrepreneurship. Political empowerment of youths and their participation in decision-making are somehow ignored. It is inevitably the political empowerment of youths which could be a factor in ensuring good governance and building a just society. Till now, the policy is confined to the civic participation of youths in governance. Although secondary level students elect their representative through an institutionalised mechanism, tertiary level education institutes present dysfunctional students councils.

Attention should be given to training youths on the promotion of universal human rights, existing national laws of the country, prevention of cyber and international crimes.

The policy promotes youth exchanges among different countries but this exchange should not be limited to international exchange. An exchange between rural and urban youths should also be encouraged to promote national solidarity, brotherhood, cultural integration.

To sum up, youth population as a target group should be entitled to special attention from different ministries. The Ministry of Youth and Sports cannot alone assure integrated youth development. Ministry of Planning and Ministry of Finance will also have to play a lead role in introducing reforms for comprehensive youth development. In addition, proactive engagement of and effective partnership with the private sector, youth communities, civil society organisations and the media are vital for the process of youth development.

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CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Skilled
- 6 Baseball or hockey
- 11 Private teacher
- 12 Origami need
- 13 Let up
- 14 Occupied
- 15 Estate recipient
- 17 Pig's place
- 18 Quotation puzzle
- 22 Hammer or hacksaw
- 23 Hits the campaign trail
- 27 Gelatin shapers
- 29 Go bad
- 30 Brews, as tea
- 32 Golf target
- 33 Thought out
- 35 Toward the stern
- 38 MP's quarry
- 39 Floor-board sound
- 41 Cow feature
- 45 Briskness
- 46 Audacity
- 47 Come in
- 48 Intense fear

DOWN

- 1 -- loss
- 2 supply voices for
- 3 greek vowel
- 4 Cook's protector
- 5 Forest features
- 6 Haunted house residents
- 7 Skillet
- 8 Musical work
- 9 Take it easy
- 10 Deuce topper
- 16 " -- been real!"
- 18 Money machines
- 19 Old codger
- 20 Part to play
- 21 Spot for a driver's drink
- 24 Earth orbiter
- 25 Heap
- 26 Downhill glider
- 28 House leader
- 31 Spotted
- 34 Wide inlet
- 35 Dull pain
- 36 Football's Tarkenton
- 37 Exam
- 40 Had dinner
- 42 Dr. of rap
- 43 Longoria of TV
- 44 Warning color

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

S	C	R	I	P	F	A	C	E	S
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S	P	E	W	S	S	T	A	R	S

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