

Address the issues long plaguing JnU

Proper academic, residential facilities vital for students' welfare

It is heartening to see the authorities respond positively to the demands of the protesting Jagannath University (JnU) students. The decision to involve Bangladesh Army in constructing the university's second campus in Keraniganj, while not an ideal one, meets a key demand of the students who, since Sunday, have staged a hunger strike, held sit-ins in front of the Secretariat Building, and enforced a campus shutdown. The army's expected involvement in constructing steel-based buildings at Bani Bhaban and Habibur Rahman Hall for temporary accommodation also meets another demand. While these steps only partially address JnU's long-standing infrastructural challenges, they should provide sufficient incentive for the students to lift their shutdown for now and return to class.

However, the students' call for written assurances is also reasonable, given the chronic nature of these issues as well as earlier instances of unfulfilled promises. For too long, JnU—now in its 20th year, having been upgraded from college status in 2005—has had to cope with inadequate facilities and spaces that are, frankly, unbecoming of a public university. Over 17,000 students are currently enrolled across 38 departments and two institutions. Despite this, there is only one residential hall for female students and none for male students. Eleven halls of the erstwhile Jagannath College in Old Dhaka remain occupied to this day, despite years of protests and legal efforts. The university also has no playground, and no common room for male students. The absence of adequate residential facilities means that many students must undertake gruelling commutes daily, leaving them physically and mentally exhausted.

These are just some of the problems plaguing JnU and its students. It is unfortunate that the decision to set up a second, more spacious campus in 2016 has taken so long to gain traction, which only shows how badly the ousted Awami League government handled the infrastructural and accommodation challenges of this institution, with corruption, mismanagement, and inefficiency all playing a role in this crisis. The lack of sound academic planning, necessary for the transformation of a college-turned-university, also contributed to this. Going forward, it is imperative that the authorities proactively address all these issues—not just the ones raised by students—so that this institution can fulfil its potential.

We, therefore, urge the authorities to undertake a comprehensive review of the present state of JnU and formulate an action plan prioritising the establishment of necessary facilities and amenities as well as the reclamation of old, occupied halls. For now, they must properly engage with the protesting students to ensure that academic activities are resumed without delay.

Bring perpetrators to book

Police should use technology to track down all the accused

We are disturbed by the news of the gang rape of two teenagers by a group of men in Cumilla's Nangalkot upazila. Among the alleged perpetrators was a leader of Jubo Dal, the youth wing of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), according to locals. However, BNP denied any link to the person. According to a report by this daily, the crime occurred on January 9, with a case being filed on January 12. As of this writing, only one person has been arrested.

Reportedly, the perpetrators held the girls captive in a sawmill for over four hours, subjected them to horrific physical abuse, and filmed it to blackmail them into silence. Clearly, these individuals felt they could get away with it, not only committing a gruesome crime but also keeping evidence of it. This sense of security, one can imagine, was partly nurtured by societal tendencies to shame rape survivors, coupled with the failure of law enforcement to make arrests and the country's extremely low conviction rates for sexual assault. Although the complainants in this case named several suspects, police say they could not arrest anyone because of the three-day delay in filing the case, which supposedly allowed the accused to flee. However, reporters from at least two dailies managed to contact the sawmill owner, one of the accused, by phone.

During the previous regime, we often saw how political connections shielded rapists from accountability. Now that the Awami League has fallen from power, we expect all political parties to learn from past mistakes. They must disassociate from criminals, if they belong to their party and take punitive action to demonstrate their commitment to upholding ethical standards within their ranks. This is not only vital for their credibility ahead of the upcoming elections but also for the integrity of their organisations.

As for the police force, they have an opportunity to restore their tarnished reputation by efficiently performing their duties. If rapists can use technology to blackmail victims and their families, law enforcement agencies should be equally adept at using technology to track down criminals and secure convictions.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



Persian Gulf War begins

On this day in 1991, the Persian Gulf War, triggered by Iraq's occupation of Kuwait in August 1990, began with a US-led air offensive against Iraq that continued until a ceasefire was declared on February 28.

How education enhances human development



Selim Jahan
is director of the Human Development
Report Office and lead author of the Human
Development Report.

SELIM JAHAN

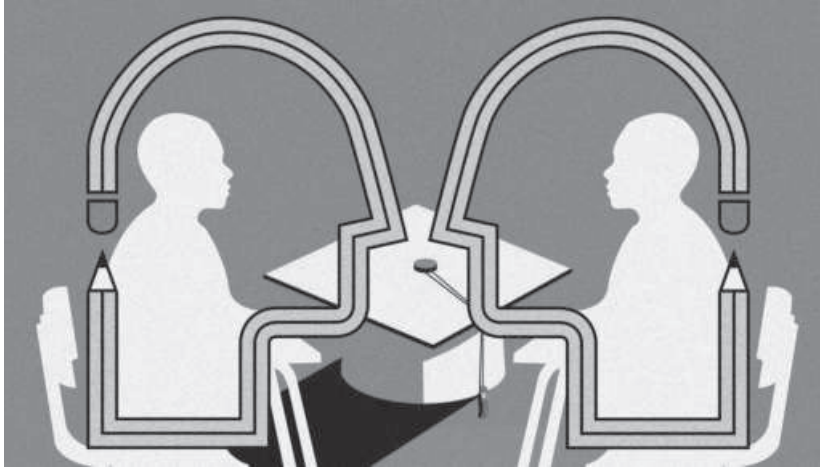
The notion of human development encompasses dimensions that refer directly to enhancement of human capabilities and also contexts conducive to improving such capabilities. Dimensions like leading a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable, enjoying a decent standard of living, etc refer directly to human capability enhancement, whereas dimensions like participation, human security, environmental sustainability, gender equality, etc provide the contextual atmosphere conducive to such enhancement.

Education is valuable for human development for three fundamental reasons. First, education is intrinsically valuable as it contributes to cognitive development, develops knowledge dimension, and provides people with confidence and self-esteem so that they can, to paraphrase Adam Smith, interact in public without shame. Second, it is a critical element in direct enhancement of human capability—through human resources development, building up human capital for effectively contributing to the production process and economic growth. Education, therefore, provides us with the necessary skills for productive employment, earning a living, and enjoying better living standards. Third, education also influences the contextual aspect of human development, through providing people with the means to participate effectively in social and political life.

In measuring human development—whether in terms of human development accounting or the composite index of the Human Development Index (HDI)—the role of education is clear and concrete. Educational indicators, whether they measure outcomes or represent inputs, are part of human development accounting. Thus, literacy rate, as an outcome measure, belongs to human development accounting; so does public expenditure in education, as an input measure. From a different angle, it contains both stock variables (e.g. out-of-school children) and flow variables (e.g. enrolment ratios). All these are part of human development accounting, because directly or indirectly, they contribute to education and knowledge to build

up human capabilities. In the HDI, however, education's role is even more sharply focused. Educational attainment enters the HDI to reflect the knowledge dimension of it. Two indicators—mean years of schooling and the expected years of schooling—represent the educational attainment variable. A couple of observations may provide more insights into the issues concerned.

A review of educational strategies in countries that attained high human development and where education made a difference clearly indicates at



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

least five common elements: vision and long-term strategic planning; content and orientation of education; policies; resources; and institutions. Educational attainment cannot be significant or sustained, nor can it contribute to human development enhancement, if there is an absence in vision and a lack of strategic planning. This is because education has multidimensional tangible and intangible benefits with linkages to various aspects of human lives, and its gestation period is quite long.

Of course, vision becomes meaningless if there are no long-term strategic planning to realise it. Part of the strategic planning also involves priority setting among various levels: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Primary education is a basic human right and there should be universal access to it, irrespective of economic or social justifications. Primary education also provides people with basic literacy and numeracy,

which are prerequisite for further skill development and thus are the foundation stone for human capital formation. Furthermore, it has often been argued that the rate of return from primary education accrues over a longer period of time compared to other levels of education.

Thus, in a longer-term vision for human resource development, policies and resources must be geared towards ensuring universal primary education for all. In all countries, irrespective of income levels, both the private and social rates of return to primary education have been found to be the highest. Secondary education has been argued, both in analytical and empirical work, to contribute most to form the content and nature of any specific skill formation. If primary education is fundamental to cognitive development, secondary education is basic to skill formation. The importance of secondary education has increased as countries

The critical point is not to follow a path that represents an unbalanced priority and structure and does not take into account the linkages among the three levels. For example, if countries put all their efforts into primary education and neglect the secondary level, then after five years, pupils coming out of the primary level will find an inadequate secondary education system. Similarly, if universities are built without strengthening the secondary system, they will have empty classrooms.

If education is to make a significant contribution to human development, the content and orientation of education are critically important. In today's world, secondary and tertiary education has to be linked to meet the new challenges of the network age—in terms of taking advantage of the opportunities it provides and also to manage its risks. In fact, the process must start from the primary level. In order to achieve the target of linking education with the new challenges, it is argued that the contents and modus operandi of the education system at every level must be rethought. Some of the elements in the rethinking process would be: computer penetration and school enrolment; digital literacy and digitalisation of literacy through computerisation of schools and school-nets; digital literacy of teachers; and virtual universities.

In terms of content and orientation, education reforms have been placing new emphasis on helping people adapt to the new skill demands that come with shifting employment patterns, particularly in advanced economies. Lifelong learning or continuous training is considered a key to developing human skills in the context of rapid technological change. As countries become more sophisticated, pressures are building upon governments and firms to provide effective education and training.

In the area of education content, one burning issue is the quality of education. Low quality of education has adverse impact on several fronts. First, it disturbs the flow of education; low quality secondary education leads to low completion and then low university enrolments. Second, it produces low quality skills. And third, it destroys the potential for taking advantage of the opportunities presented by network age.

Hence, it is critical to set the right vision that is aided by long-term strategies, formulate pragmatic policies, provide resources on time, and design the correct content and orientation so education has the optimal impact on human development.

Rural women must be recognised for their contribution



Md. Al-Mamun
is social scientist at BRAC Institute of
Governance and Development (BIGD).

MD. AL-MAMUN

Gender discrimination in rural areas across Bangladesh continues to be a formidable barrier to both social and economic development, particularly in the agricultural sector. Despite their critical roles in farming, processing, and post-harvest activities, rural women face entrenched inequalities in wages, opportunities, and recognition. As Shahnaz Begum, a farmer from Khulna, poignantly states, "We work just as hard as men, but the pay is never the same. While men often earn up to Tk 200 per day, women receive Tk 70 for similar work."

This wage disparity reflects a broader trend in which rural women are disproportionately affected by social, cultural, and economic inequalities. According to a 2023 report by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), gender pay gap remains a significant issue in rural areas, with women in agriculture earning an average of 30-40 percent less than their male counterparts for the same work. The report further emphasises that women in rural Bangladesh perform up to about 60 percent of the labour in agriculture, but remain largely invisible in leadership and decision-making roles.

Despite their significant contributions to the agricultural economy, rural women are often marginalised. They are excluded from access to land, credit, and technology—resources that are essential for improving productivity and achieving economic independence. According to a 2022 Oxfam study, only 13 percent of rural women in the country own land. This lack of access to land and resources limits women's ability to invest in farming and start their own businesses. "I've never been able to buy land or take a loan without my husband's signature," shares Laila, a rural entrepreneur from southwestern Bangladesh. "Without access to resources, how can we grow our businesses or improve our lives?"

Sexual harassment in rural workplaces is another pervasive issue that compounds these challenges. A 2021 study by ActionAid found that 45 percent of rural women in South Asia, including Bangladesh, experience harassment in the workplace. However, many women remain silent due to fear of retaliation and lack of support. One such case is Ayesha, a farm worker from Satkhira, who was forced to quit her job after facing harassment from her supervisor. "I

couldn't keep quiet anymore, but no one supported me," she recalls. "I had no choice but to leave." This type of harassment not only undermines women's well-being, but also has long-term economic consequences, as they are forced to withdraw from the workforce.

The implications of such gender-based discrimination are far-reaching, not just for individual women but for the economy at large. According to McKinsey, closing gender gaps in labour markets could add \$12 trillion to the global economy. In Bangladesh, where agriculture employs over 40 percent of the workforce, advancing gender equality in rural areas could significantly boost national productivity and reduce poverty. As Hasina, a leader of a rural women's cooperative in Satkhira, says, "If we had equal opportunities, we could improve not only our families but also our communities." Women's economic empowerment can lead to the development of rural economies, better health outcomes, and improved quality of life for all.

Addressing these inequities requires robust policy interventions. The government must prioritise wage transparency and enforce equal pay for equal work in rural sectors. Furthermore, rural women must have equal access to land, credit, technology, and training to improve their productivity and economic independence. "We need financial independence," says Rina, a small-scale farmer from Jashore. "Only then can we break the cycle of poverty." Providing women with access to microfinance and ensuring

that they can take out loans without the need for male co-signers would empower them to invest in their farms or start small businesses, ultimately improving their families' living standards.

Encouraging women to take leadership roles in rural cooperatives and agricultural enterprises is another vital step in addressing gender inequality. As Salma, a rural cooperative leader, aptly puts it, "Gender equality is the foundation of a prosperous Bangladesh. We cannot afford to leave women behind." By addressing gender discrimination in rural workplaces, Bangladesh can harness the power of its women to drive sustainable economic growth, reduce poverty, and improve the quality of life for all its citizens.

Furthermore, addressing the issue of sexual harassment in rural workplaces is crucial for creating safe and supportive environments for women. The government must establish and enforce clear legal frameworks to prevent harassment, ensure women's safety, and encourage reporting of such incidents without fear of retaliation. Local authorities and rural development programmes must work closely with women's organisations to create awareness and provide support for victims of harassment.

By addressing gender discrimination, we can unlock the potential of millions of women, enabling them to contribute to a more equitable, prosperous future. Gender equality in rural Bangladesh is not merely a goal—it is a necessity for the nation's development.