

The system of education issues—III

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The existing system in Bangladesh is mainly handicapped by three formidable problems of imbalance: bifurcated structures of madrasa and modern education; overemphasis on humanities leading to huge wastes of resources and unemployment-creation; and poor development of science and technology. International cooperation from Western and Islamic countries should assist us solve these difficult problems along with the problems of illiteracy. The initiative in designing programmes and activities will, of course, lie with our Ministry of Education. First, a long range view of development prospects and designing a long range educational strategy are indispensable in our situation. Second, we should think of a different kind of emphasis on humanities development as course of study for future citizens; such courses will be based on Islamic values as a core programme and may fit in the basic and preparatory stages of the proposed four-tier system. Third, books and reading material have to be specially prepared and published for the purpose. Fourth, unification of the bifurcated system with reorganised courses, with adequate emphasis on science, has to be undertaken as an emergency. Fifth, commitment of resources without rationalised decisions on priorities like free distribution of uniforms and starting music classes in all primary schools should be avoided.

It appears, we have necessarily to think of the education system in this country as an integral part of a comprehensive socio-economic system, conceived within the meaning of a systems approach. This implies that a master system is first conceived and put in the position of control for all other subsystems working with their co-ordinations. The master system in our case has to be constructed with the composite demands of a value system (including those of 'economics of permanence') and those of the objectives of development. On the value system, it is obvious that Islamic rationalism (with roots on Islamic spiritual, ethical values) will be the right choice for representing the predominantly large masses of the people; and alternative religious values for other religious groups can be also chosen. And on the objectives of development, we have to use our vision to determine and design the socio-economic long range goals for building an exploitation-free society of a reasonable degree of economic security for the vast population steeped in poverty. These two elements would constitute the

'objective function' of planning social change and would guide and control as a master system all other subsystems which can now be the areas of reforms (e.g. political institutions, administrative system, education system, land system, industry system, science and technology system, rural development system, planning system etc.). Only then we can aim with a new system of education to build a 'work-oriented' literate society that would bear the stamp of a distinct and respectful national identity. The whole concept demands a simultaneous venture in many directions which cannot be easy for any government or leadership, particularly in the Third World poorest group of countries (including Bangladesh).

In principle, the four-tier education system announced by the Ministry of Education seems to be satisfactory in relation to the elements of the 'objective function' of educational planning. But to my mind, very serious institutional and programmatic adjustments will be involved in providing substance to the intentions. The supporting programmes, vital for the success of the proposed changes, are mainly: unification of madrasa and modern education; abolition of private commercial type education at low levels (play group, kindergarten, missionary and other); improvement of teacher training; improvement of teaching methods; improvement of examination systems; emergency measures for elimination of the carryover of postponed examinations in the universities; introduction of methods of control for the prevention of over-admission after determining norms of requirements of admission in view of the employment market; reorganisation of studies and courses at all levels in view of the evolving demands of the employment market; reduction of liberal education facilities (e.g. humanities, arts, music, sports, etc.); expansion of courses and schools for regular education in science and technology; expansion of training facilities on science and technology to meet demands (internal and external) organisation and installation of adequate laboratory facilities for ensuring qualitative improvement in technical training; rationalisation of the existing vocational and technical institutions into a consistent system; adequate expansion of all facilities for the production of the right type of textbooks inside the country to reduce and finally to eliminate imports of textbooks; application of educational technology (of radio,

television etc.) where impact is assured; general motivation facilities for promoting character-building and discouraging corruption; reorganisation of the universities with adequate specialisation in fields necessary and so on. Some broad comments are given below on the components of the system.

Basic (or Primary) Schools: The foundation of the whole system is to be constructed with the five-year period training of the future generations of the nation as children worthy of the future name and identity of Bangladesh. The principal issues to be resolved before beginning to set up such 'Basic Schools' are mainly: the emphasis is to be laid and consistently ensured on maintaining the master key of motivation through books, demonstration and dedication of teachers; production of required books and teaching material on the two key elements of the value system of society and long range goal of social change; determination of jurisdiction of one school so that at least one school must be working in a village with possible additional schools for meeting the demands of large villages; using the mosques in villages (and also in towns and cities) for providing adult literacy training, especially to include parents of enrolled children as a strategy of influence and motivation for prevention of dropouts from Basic Schools; work-orientation to be provided both in class teaching and in field work demonstration relating to agriculture, cottage industry and other kinds of work in the vicinities etc. This stage of education should earn the confidence of the people in substance rather than for political goodwill; if the substance is ensured, the latter will naturally follow. That attitude can be reflected in providing free education, first in the form of free-of-tuition-fee education and low-priced textbooks and limiting the number of books to be purchased. Imposition or distribution of free uniforms should be delayed for the second stage of enough environment of confidence and motivation. Female teachers, recruited and trained, should receive preference to male teachers for classes upto III.

Preparatory Schools: This stage, intended to cover 5 year (Classes VI to X) will constitute the formative stage of creating the general and vocational/technical aptitudes in students, mainly to enable them to cultivate a sense of human and civic responsibility and also a sense of belonging to society to enrich it and themselves by entering classified vocations, professions and

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careers in active life in future. The preparation is, as I visualise, general in the beginning, maybe 3 years (Class VI to VIII) and specific for the last two years (Class IX and X). In the process of general preparation, the motivational role of the 'objective function' should continue in suitable one or two requisite courses. In these courses, designing the syllabuses and production of books through organised effort should receive careful and priority attention; value of character formation and role of ethics need be reflected in the reading and teaching material which will include selected biographies of national, international and Islamic personalities. The ideas of the desired long range social and economic goals should also be indicated in other materials and books. In the second part of the stage, emphasis on vocational and technical orientation has to be maintained. The vocations and technical fields, selected on the basis of requirements of entry into the next stage of higher secondary education, have to reflect two purposes: producing a lower secondary level vocational and technical skills (with S.S.C. certificates) and producing the right kind of inputs for the higher stage of training. Special Institutes (Vocational and Technical) may be set up for taking care of the special problems of dropouts from the lower secondary and primary stages.

Higher Secondary Schools: This can be the third stage of education, providing the main source of supply of vocational and technical skills for the middle level technical, scientific and technological jobs (which usually bear the brunt of responsible field work in projects and programmes of the modern sectors). The normal type of such schools need engage in two year training (Classes XI-XII) with suitable groupings and specialisation, in branches like: (a) Higher Vocational; (b) Technical/Scientific; and (c) Social sciences and arts. The products of these branches should be so trained that they can be both suitable for useful employment after passing this stage and can selectively be qualified for University education. To that extent, it will be Pre-University Education. In meeting needs of more specialised nature where 3-year training, with Diploma may be appropriate, Special Institutes should be organised to support the development subsectors like: agriculture (general, livestock, fisheries, forestry etc.); rural development (including rural industries); small and medium industry (modern methods and

problems); health (nursing, public health engineering); technologies (textiles, leather, fertilizer, gas, irrigation etc.).

University stage: University education has to be normally based on course-credit system, with required courses or prerequisite courses, as necessary to satisfy adopted standards of equivalence; and it should aim advancement of knowledge and training mostly to produce graduates and post-graduates in defined scientific, technical, medical and technological areas in specialised designated Universities or specialised institutes of diversified Universities. Existing colleges offering sciences and arts towards a graduate degree are required to be merged with the reorganised University System (which should contain inter-disciplined organisation of professional high-level training and research e.g. Agriculture University with engineering relevant to Agriculture, Engineering University with relevant Industrial and Infrastructural planning etc.). The present system of maintaining Pass Degrees and Honours Degrees for two different types of undergraduate training is vicious and wasteful — vicious because of arbitrary stratification unsuitable for meeting the demands for skills and terribly wasteful for duplication of facilities and absurd proportions of success in the Pass courses, as evident even in the latest 10 per cent and 13 per cent for B.Com., B.Sc. and B.A. examinations. This anomaly should be removed by unification of the duration and syllabus of the Bachelor degree studies; and de-emphasis of humanities will need a radical reorganisation of existing facilities for non-University undergraduate studies. Full rationalisation and reorganisation may take stages of change: and the retention and improvement of Degree Colleges may become necessary along with similar degrees in the Universities, but courses, syllabuses, teaching and reading material as well as examination standards should be uniform. Such Degree studies should be re-designed to contain the orientation of technical, scientific and technological skill-formation. In the Universities, graduate and post-graduate studies should aim improvement of the quality of teaching and adequate exposure to practical and relevant high-level training so that reliance on foreign universities for advanced training can be greatly reduced; and foreign assistance grants should be negotiated to cover opportunities of graduate and post-graduate work while enrolled in our universities under mutually agreed programmes. In particular, creation of opportuni-

ties of appropriate R & D effort for technical and technological innovations should receive priority attention in this regard. Specialised high-level Institutes or Institutions, to suit special needs should also be fitted into the jurisdictions of the relevant Universities (e.g. Business Administration Institutes, Industrial Research Institute, Agricultural Research Institute, Atomic Energy Institute, Nutrition Institute and others).

Plainly speaking, we have to conclude that we, in the process of undertaking national-

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