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Open university

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The proposals of the Bangladesh Institute of Distant Education (BIDE) for an open university in the country is under government consideration, and with good reasons. First, such a project would presumably be extra-mural in the sense that it would be conducted by competent personnel from modest centres or offices that do not entail huge overhead expenses. Physical construction of such an university is obviously ruled out. Second, it would offer university extension curricula for adults who are usually not full-time students but are resolute about their educational choice, which is to compensate for inadequacies in earlier education. Under the system therefore only the very serious would choose to undertake courses here, so that the likelihood of such an institution degenerating into the usual white elephant is small. The dilly-dallying, time-consuming student unrest and related disturbances likewise would be, hopefully, absent.

Education is a lifelong process. When the concept of university extension courses was first developed in Britain in the mid 19th century, to be followed by the United States and other English-speaking countries, it was done so to provide opportunities to people who wanted to grow mentally at leisure. The beneficiaries necessarily had established educational appetites and joined group instruction such as formal lectures, seminars and workshops, for self-fulfilment. In other words, learning for learning's sake. Many of course also went to gain vocational, technical and professional competence.

Comparable extension courses in Bangladesh would obviously have a minority appeal. With only a handful of literates and fewer educated people around, a remedial educational enterprise at the very bottom would be more appropriate. After all, the prerequisite for all kinds of "higher" education is literacy and fundamental education.

The good of an open university, of course would not be small provided programmes are priced within the capacity of working men and women. While that is in the pipe we hope thoughts on making education at the base strong and obligatory mature into effective actions and tangible results.