

০০১

# Open Islamic University In Iran

A new experiment is under way in Iran to try to bridge the gap, at minimum cost, between the number of applicants for university admission and actual places available under the present system. Called the open Islamic University (Danishgah-e-Azad-e-Islami), the scheme is noted for its flexibility and convenience and is aimed at making education available to all segments of the population. The only criterion for the selection of students is their enthusiasm for learning.

The present university system offers only 40,000 places for a total student population of more than one million. Though the open Islamic University cannot fill this enormous gap immediately, its method of teaching is geared towards fulfilling the needs of the people as well as the demands of the industry, but at a fraction of the cost of traditional Universities. The open Islamic University is different from traditional universities in a number of ways. The Persian term Azad does not imply no tuition fee. In fact, it is in the traditional universities that education is free. The open Islamic University is 'free' in the sense that it does not have a formal, bureaucratic set-up. And it is free from any of the other requirements and regulations which apply to traditional Universities.

For instance, there are no age or qualification restrictions for admission. The only requirement is a reasonable degree of common sense and understanding determined by an admission test, administered by the University once a year. Nor does the University have a fixed location. It is nowhere and everywhere—in unused buildings, schools, mosques, factories, offices and even the spare capacity of existing Universities and colleges.

### TWO-TIERED SYSTEM

The University offers a two-tier system of education. The first system—a formal programme like other Universities—is based on courses in various subjects. Students can enroll for either a two-year technician's diploma course or a four-year degree course. At present the open Islamic University offers degree and diploma courses in electrical, civil, mechanical and electronic engineering, industrial management, accountancy, mathematics, physics, chemistry, agriculture and Islamic culture and ideology. Other subjects will be added as teaching staff become available and the demand increases.

The other system is based on students attending lectures in

a less formal manner. Attendance is flexible and students can build up units at their own pace.

The new University started in 1983 with seven centres around the country. By September 1984, another 11 had been added to the list, mainly in those cities and towns without Universities at all. Other centres can be opened if the people of the locality put in a request. In return, the university asks local bodies and charitable organizations to come together in providing a building and sharing the expenses.

The idea of the open Islamic University was immediately popular not only with the almost one million students eligible for University education but also with the ordinary people. In the first year, 30,000 people appeared for the entrance examination. In 1984, the number went up to 50,000. The University has accepted about 10% of all applications from each year for its regular diploma or degree course. A year after its inception, the University already has 8,000 students on its list. This is one-fifth of the total intake

of all other Universities in the country. According to Dr. Abdullah Jasibi, president of the open Islamic University, the aim is to equal the enrollment of all existing Universities within three to five years. In the less formal and flexible system, there are 20,000 additional students attending lectures in different centres.

As part from its people-oriented approach, the open Islamic University's lack of a formal structure is also deliberate. "We do not want to become another bureaucracy," explained Dr. Jasibi. "Similarly, we do not have an established budget. And we are not a burden on the government treasury." The new University mobilizes existing resources and works towards involving people in order to meet its needs. For instance, in cities with Universities and colleges, the University utilizes their spare capacity during the day as well as evenings. In some localities, the Bunyad-e Mustazafeen (Foundation of the oppressed) has provided buildings under its control, which are not otherwise used, to hold classes. Factories, offices, & mosques are all potential classrooms to be utilized