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'The Five Questions On Open University'

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REFERRING to Mr. A.K.M. Masud Rana's letter to the editor 'Answer to the fine questions' dated September 7, 1991 I feel that a brief clarification is required on my article 'Five Questions on Open University' on which he has commented. Mr. Rana comments that an Open University is Open to all and later in the same paragraph states that in Finland only those who have completed 60 credit units are eligible to transfer their education to an Open University. This observation clearly demonstrates that it is open to those who have completed 60 credit units. This is a minimum requirement stated by him, which consequently shows that it is not open to all and qualifies his terminology "all". The moment a minimum standard of requirement is expected the question of selectivity and eligibility comes in. He only cites the example of Finland, so I feel that it would be more appropriate to relate to Open Universities of both developed and developing countries. A comparative study will demonstrate that each Open University has specific requirements. For further information on the subject I refer to the Open

Universities of Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Thailand, China, India and United Kingdom.

The main differences between a Conventional University and an Open University are:

1. The Open University utilises print and also multi-media technology.
2. It is basically distance education.
3. The clientele group is distributed all over the country.
4. It has an unusual timetable.
5. The Open University follows a credit based system.
6. It is an innovative system and requires academics, managers, computer specialists, counsellors, media experts, researchers and others.
7. In an Open University the students do not meet together and do not live in permanent campuses.

In the national Workshop on Bangladesh Open University held on 3-4 August 1991 in Dhaka it was established that an Open University is quite different from a conventional one. Let us recall what was said by Dr. Ram Reddy, Vice-President, The Commonwealth of Learning, and Team Leader and Expert ADB

Project, Open University Bangladesh, and previously Vice-Chancellor of several Open Universities in India. He said that an Open University, unlike a conventional one is a distance teaching university and an innovative institution. This is a fact accepted by all experts on the subject.

The third comment concerns the feasibility of expensive electronic media in a third world country.

This question has already been answered in my article on "Bangladesh Open University" published in this paper on August 29, 1991. Due to resource constraints print material will be the most important medium in the teaching learning process and thus major emphasis will be placed on the print media for low cost education.

The fourth comment concerns the literacy rate of Bangladesh, which incidentally is not 22 per cent but 29.2 per cent (1991). As mentioned earlier, the significance of this Open University will lie in its ability to provide opportunity for education to the less privileged sections of society.

It may be mentioned that the

question of establishing an Open University in Bangladesh arose of a necessity to address the human resource requirements to meet the vast gaps between demand and supply and to provide an opportunity to the disadvantaged groups. To cite an example, 28,250 students applied for admission to the University of Dhaka in 1990-91 against 3,635 seats and as a result only 12.87 per cent applicants were admitted. Rural women and the poor are unable to enter into a conventional university. Thus the Open University attempts to address the problem of human resource requirements as the existing facilities are incapable of meeting the needs of society, labour market demand and the 'needs' of the disadvantaged groups.

I request Mr. Rana to go through my three articles on Open University published in this newspaper and also the articles on Open University published in this newspaper and also the article by Dr. Motilal Sharma, Senior Education Specialist for the Asian Development Bank, which was also published in this newspaper on 16th and 17th of August, 1991.