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Opinion

On Establishing New Agricultural, Science And Technology Universities

Syed Merajul Hussain

THE government has decided to facilitate the advancement of scientific and technological higher education and spreading of computer technology at University level by establishing 12 Science and Technology Universities of smaller nature in the country.

It is learnt that the Prime Minister and the Education Minister of the government took executive decision in the cabinet to establish 12 Science and Technology Universities of smaller nature in greater districts where there is no University. The greater districts are: Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra, Pabna, Jessore, Faridpur, Patuakhali, Barisal, Comilla, Noakhali and Chittagong Hill Tracts. The government has further decided to establish 6 Universities in the first phase during 1997 to 2002. The Ministry of Education advised University Grants Commission (UGC) to prepare the Project Concept Paper (PCP) i.e., development scheme for funding from the education sub-sector of the Planning Commission. Accordingly a combined single scheme (PCP) was prepared for 6 Science and Technology Universities and the PCP was approved in an ECNEC meeting presided over by the Prime Minister on December 18, 1997. The scheme (PCP) was approved at a cost of Taka 90 crore with provision of Taka 15 crore for each of the Universities. Each University would comprise of five faculties viz, faculty of physical science, faculty of life science, faculty of agriculture and mineral science, faculty of social science and faculty of applied science and technologies.

According to ECNEC decision all those 6 universities would be established as complete entities with provision of 300 students enrollment. There is no provision in the approved scheme to convert Dinajpur Haji Md. Danesh Agriculture College and Patuakhali Agriculture College into Science and Technology Universities. In the ECNEC decision there are provisions to acquire 50 acres of land for each University and there is no provision to acquire land for the establishment of experimental agricultural farm (field laboratory) for the practical training of the students of agriculture faculty. It is learnt that during the implementation stage the political leaders of Patuakhali and Dinajpur districts apprised the concerned authority that conversion of these two Agriculture Col-

leges into Science and Technology Universities will not involve acquisition of agricultural land. It is further learnt that the authority being convinced of the said proposals of the political leaders took decision to convert Dinajpur and Patuakhali Agriculture Colleges into Science and Technology Universities without referring the issue to the concerned parliamentary standing committees (Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Education). Even a revised PCP merging the two Agril. Colleges has not yet been approved by the ECNEC.

As per executive decision of the authority concerned the Ministry of Education directed the Ministry of Agriculture to hand over Dinajpur and Patuakhali Agriculture Colleges to the Ministry of Education in June 1999. Accordingly Ministry of Agriculture (BARI) handed over Dinajpur Agriculture College to the Ministry of Education on September 6, 1999 and thereafter the Prime Minister laid the foundation of Dinajpur Haji Md. Danesh Science and Technology University in the campus of Haji Md. Danesh Agriculture College. Patuakhali Agriculture College was also transferred to the Ministry of Education on October 17, 1999.

But Ministry of Education through an administrative order dated November 11, 1999 returned back the said two Agriculture Colleges to the Ministry of Agriculture for smooth running financial, administrative and academic affairs of these colleges by the Ministry of Agriculture (BARI) till the full functioning of Dinajpur and Patuakhali Science and Technology Universities after the enactment of the respective University law (s). It is learnt that IPGMR under DG Health Services was merged and transferred to New Medical University after enactment of law even under the same Ministry of Health & Family Planning. It is very logical to run the Medical Varsity under Health Ministry along with attached hospital services for the public.

To be mentioned here that the Qudrat-E-Khuda Education Commission (1974), the present Education Policy Commission (1997) and the National Agriculture Commission (1999) formed by the Awami League governments strongly suggested to establish 6 (six) agriculture universities in 6 (six) divisions of the country by establishing new ones and by upgrading ex-

isting agriculture colleges into universities.

It is also learnt that the agriculture experts of the country have strongly opposed the conversion of the said agriculture colleges into science and technology universities and also opposed the opening of agriculture faculty in the proposed science and technology universities. Bangladesh Agriculture Institute (BAI) former Students Association under the leadership of its President Mr M.M Zaman former Agriculture Minister and Cabinet Secretary submitted memorandum to the Prime Minister on December 9, 1999 requesting the Prime Minister to review the recent government decision and urged upon the government to upgrade Dinajpur Haji Mohammed Danesh Agriculture College and Patuakhali Agriculture College into Agriculture Universities in Rajshahi and Barisal divisions respectively. They have requested to establish the Science and Technology Universities in separate campuses as per provision of ECNEC approved scheme in greater Dinajpur and Patuakhali districts. They have further demanded to upgrade Bangladesh Agriculture Institute, Dhaka into Sher-E-Bangla Agriculture University and establish three new agriculture universities in Khulna, Chittagong and Sylhet divisions.

The agricultural experts further urged upon the PM to adopt US or Indian agricultural university models integrating teaching, research, extension services & farmers, training attached to the Ministry of Agriculture.

Moreover, conversion of Dinajpur Agriculture College into Science & Technology University will not help to save land because the present 45 acres have been completely utilized for construction purposes to meet the requirement of Haji Md. Danesh Agricultural College as well as for the proposed Agriculture Faculty of Dinajpur Science & Technology University. Similar situation prevails in the campus of Patuakhali Agricultural College. So it would be more logical to upgrade these two agricultural colleges into two separate agricultural universities as it has been done in case of the Institute of Postgraduate Studies in Agriculture (IPSA) in greater Dhaka district (Gazipur) to Bangabandhu Agricultural University, Sylhet Veterinary College may be upgraded as an University of Veterinary Medicine.

Only a completely new agriculture university is to be established in Khulna Division (Jessore).

Several agriculture experts opined that the proposed agriculture university of Chittagong division should be established in greater Noakhali district on the campus and infrastructure of Noakhali Agriculture Training Institute, Begumganj as it has been done by utilizing the facilities of Dinajpur Agriculture Training Institute for Haji Mohammad, Danesh Agriculture College in 1988.

In a meeting of Thakurgaon Science and Technology University and Dinajpur Haji Mohammed Danesh Agriculture University Implementation Committee, Thakurgaon held on February 23, 2000 it was fully endorsed the demands of the BAI former Students Association to upgrade Haji Md. Danesh Agriculture College and Patuakhali Agriculture College into agriculture universities attached to the Ministry of Agriculture and other demands as well. The meeting further reiterated its previous demand to established the Science and Technology University as approved by ECNEC and committed by the Prime Minister (February 28, 1998) earmarked for greater Dinajpur district in the fallow lands of Shakurgaon Sugar Mills farms for the advancement of scientific education and research in the backward greater Dinajpur district. Thakurgaon is the centrally located district among the three districts of greater Dinajpur with good rail, road and air communications.

We draw the kind attention of the Honourable Prime Minister, Hon. Education Minister, Hon. Agriculture Minister, Science & Tech Minister, Planning Minister, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, Chairman and members of the National Education Policy Committee (1997), National Agriculture Commission (1999) and Chairman and members of UGC for favourable consideration of our suggestions for the advancement of agriculture education research and extension service and science and technology education and research in the country.

(The writer is Member secretary, Thakurgaon Science & Technology University and Dinajpur Haji Md. Danesh Agriculture University Implementation Committee.)