

## Shifting A University

The rather abrupt announcement, without a word of explanation, that the Islamic University at Ghazipur is to be shifted to Shantidanga in Kushtia district has taken the country by surprise. It is true that the original site chosen for this institution was Shantidanga, where, it is reported, some investment was made, some structures built. But when the present regime came to power in 1982, it decided that Gazipur, within a few miles of the capital, would be a better location. And that is where after considerable expenditure on the acquisition of land and erection of buildings, the University started to function a couple of years ago.

It is also true that a small group interested in Shantidanga has periodically been demanding the institution's transfer to the old site. A university can of course function anywhere provided certain physical conditions are met: it must have the infrastructure necessary for its work, it must have access to the outside world; and it must be so situated as to enable visitors and foreign scholars to cooperate in its activities. Rajshahi, Chittagong and Jahangirnagar universities are sited in places which used to be rural country. But they had one advantage in common: they were not too far away from important towns, and initially both students and staff could operate from such accommodation as was available in those towns while waiting for new structures to be built.

It must not be forgotten in this connexion that a university community needs more than a few buildings for classrooms and the accommodation of its staff and students. It must have an adequate supply of water and electricity, a sewerage system, provision for such essential necessities as access to markets, schooling for the children of its employees, and even such seldom mentioned things as hair-cutting saloons, tailors, laundries and a post office.

When a new university is opened in or near an established town, its organisers are spared a great deal of headaches and expense by being able to count upon such services as the town provides. Rajshahi, Chittagong and Jahangirnagar have all shown that enormous sums of money had to be invested in laying out a full-fledged township in each case, and they are still plagued, many years after their founding, by problems which are a legacy from their rural past. Likewise, the Islamic University at Ghazipur had to go through the same process, and can claim, at the present stage, to have overcome some of the initial problems.

The government may have in mind some new use for the facilities already created at Ghazipur, but Shantidanga will have to start from scratch virtually. Needless to say, the functioning of the university as a teaching and research centre will be inevitably hampered, until those facilities are recreated on new soil.

The question is: is all this necessary? The reasons which persuaded the present administration to shift the Islamic University to Ghazipur remain as valid today as they were when the decision was made, and that makes the change of mind on the government's part appear mysterious, to say the least.

The decision is particularly unwelcome in the light of the fact that the government is planning to open some new universities soon. One of these new universities could be given the Shantidanga site without detriment to its interests. There has long been a demand for a university in the Jessore-Kushtia area. But to order the Islamic University back to Shantidanga is to disrupt its work and organisation and face many local students with the agonising problem of deciding whether they or their parents could afford to incur the extra expenditure. The same problem may also confront some of the staff.

We suggest that on these considerations the decision on the Islamic University should be cancelled. It is not, we reiterate, a question of opposing a government more for opposition's sake, but a question of how best our money, energies and resources can be utilised.

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