

# A University For Universal Education

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THE concept of open university which has become very popular in recent years, widely differs from what used to be known as education in the open air as has been in existence in our country in the form of 'muktabs' or 'tols' holding classes under shades of trees or the canopy of the heavens. The muktabs and tols were at the primary stage. Instances of such institutions at the higher level are also found in the subcontinent. The historic universities of the Buddhist monks existed at Nalanda in Bihar and at Shalban Bihar at Mainamati in Comilla. In the recent past, the great poet Rabindranath Tagore founded the Bishwa Bharati at Shantiniketan in West Bengal. But a open university is not an educational institution of this kind and it does not hold classes in the open air. It is a system of distance teaching through printed materials, electronic communication, like radio and television, audio and video cassettes and tutorial services.

The Bangladesh Open University as an alternative education system to meet the requirements of greater number of people, particularly those belonging to less privileged groups in the villages, comes into being with a big promise.

A university for universal education, the BOU offers a wide variety of formal and non-formal programmes for people of all walks of life and different age groups who are otherwise deprived of formal learning in conventional educational institutions.

The main objective of the Bangladesh Open University is to develop human resources and create a trained work-force by providing access to a wide range of educational programmes and vocational training for all levels of people, so that they can find self employment and thus contribute to the development of economy and quality of life.

Unlike other conventional universi-

ties, BOU intends to offer need-based courses from secondary to degree levels. Tentatively, the University has decided to introduce certificate programmes in Mass Education, English and Arabic languages, Health and Family Planning, Education and Secondary Education. It proposes to introduce diploma programmes in Agriculture Extension, Business Management, Disaster Management, Computer Science and Bangla and English languages and degree courses in Nursing and Education.

The University has already admitted over eleven thousand students in Bachelor of Education programme in two sessions. Another 1300 students have been enrolled in the certificate programme in the English language.

Preparations are now on to introduce SSC programme for school drop-outs. With the introduction of this programme, housewives, workers and other less educated men and women in service hitherto deprived of education, will also get an unprecedented opportunity of receiving education at home.

With the start of this and other programmes, the number of enrolment of BOU will run into several hundred thousand which will be much higher than the total enrolment of all other universities in the country.

BOU Vice-Chancellor Dr M Shamsher Ali says, by extending education facilities to women in the villages, the proposed SSC course will bring about a revolution in dissemination of knowledge and information. The women, in turn, will fill in the gap of teachers at the primary level and help build a conscious citizenry in and around their surroundings.

While endorsing the course at the recently held meeting of the Board of Governors, a member suggested the

opening of a foundation course to cover those who end off with primary school education.

The board meeting also suggested that of the six schools of BOU, three namely, the Open School, the School of Education and Management and the School of Social Sciences, Language and Women Studies be made functional at the moment. The remaining three schools — the School of Health Services and Population Studies, the School of Agriculture and Rural Development and the School of Open Technology be made effective later with the fledging of the University.

The Bangladesh Open University expects to make a significant contribution to informal education through the provision of courses and programmes of general value to the community at large in such areas as environment protection; health and hygiene, sanitation, family planning, women-in-development and poverty alleviation.

A countrywide educational needs survey to assess the requirement of various programmes of BOU is nearing completion and its report will be available soon. It is for the first time that a survey of this kind has been conducted in the country by a university. Basing on the report of the survey, the University will decide what other programmes are to be introduced at different levels.

The infrastructure of the University with its administrative unit and other necessary physical facilities including a modern media centre is being developed at the former venue of the Islamic University, at Gazipur, some 25 kilometres off Dhaka. It may be mentioned here that a portion of erstwhile Islamic University has been given to the Open University and the other portion to the National University. Temporarily, the BOU administrative unit is func-

tioning at a rented house at Road 2, House 16, Dhanmondi Residential Area, and its programme implementation unit at the Dhaka Teachers' Training campus.

A five year project, financed by ADB and the Government of Bangladesh, the BOU will be completed in 1997 at an estimated cost of about Tk. 170 crore.

As its support service the BOU will have 10 Regional Centres and 80 Local Study Centres spread over the country. The Regional Resource Centres will be located at Dhaka, Mymensingh, Comilla, Barisal, Jessor, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Bogra, Chittagong and Sylhet. They will pass on all information about BOU programmes, liaise with educational institutions, NGOs and private sector institutions and will supervise and coordinate the work of the Local Study Centres. The RRC will also admit students, appoint part-time counsellors and maintain resources including library, reading room, audio video and TV facilities. Sites for most of the Regional Resource Centres have been selected and work on their construction will begin soon.

The Local Study Centres which will be the nerve centres of BOU will have direct contact with the students, provide them with all facilities of study, attend to their problems, arrange tutorial classes for them and evaluate their assignments.

So long as the proposed study centres have not been set up, the BOU will continue to organise the Bachelor of Education programme through 12 Teachers' Training colleges, NAEM, the Secondary Education and Science Development Centre in Dhaka and NAPE at Mymensingh and the Certificate in English Language Programme through 26 government and non-government colleges. Students are attached to a centre of their own convenience.