

POSITIVE
BANGLADESH

Education altered, for the better

APURBA JAHANGIR

There was a time when Rakib's parents, farmers by occupation, had decided to involve him in farming, since they could not afford a proper education for him. It was not until the teachers at the Basic School System (BSS), a school for drop-outs in Tangail, discovered Rakib Rahman and urged his parents to admit him in the school, that he finally began a new and confident chapter in life. Today, he is a student of class 5 and loves to design and build furniture in carpentry class. "I want to be an interior designer when I grow up," smiles the young wood enthusiast.

In 1978, Dr Muhammad Ibrahim, a celebrated professor of physics, established the Centre for Mass Education in Science (CMES), and later on established the Basic School System (BSS) in 1981, as a part of CMES. Dr Ibrahim's idea was to have young dropouts return to school and grow an interest in science and general education, including vocational training. "I came up with the idea of BSS mainly to address the needs of adolescent dropouts," says Dr Ibrahim. "So far, the response has been tremendous. The mission is to educate each and every child in

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



A learning centre for dropouts under Basic School System, an innovation of Dr Muhammad Ibrahim, left. Students here receive general education as well as training on carpentry, farming techniques, electrical engineering, computer science and methods to run small business.

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FROM PAGE 16

the country successfully -- and I believe we are not far from our goal."

BSS's primary goal is to blend major components of the general primary education curriculum along with practical learning. Thus, the system of education here is altered and delivered in a student centred and life oriented manner. Here, a student is an active agent in learning and applying competencies in immediate livelihood practice. For example, they receive training in

carpentry, farming techniques, how to run a small business, electrical engineering and computer science.

"The complete training provided by BSS actually changed my life, for the better," exclaims 30-year-old Rafat Khan. Rafat's father and his uncles are all farmers, and initially, he too was expected to be one. However, the dynamic curriculum at BSS encouraged Rafat to take a step forward and use his skills in the market. A former student of

the Basic School System in Tangail, today he is the branch manager at one of the local Walton showrooms. "It is because of the proper training and education that I received at BSS that I can now work independently and earn enough to feed my family."

Today, the Basic School System has evolved into a vibrant opportunity for education in 23 rural units with 20,000 or more students at a time, in different parts of the country.

According to a 2011 study by the US Agency for International Development, the number of children dropping out of school at an early age in Bangladesh has increased by an alarming 47 percent. However, with schools like the Basic School System, where the curriculum is specialised and created to suit a large section of underprivileged children in the country, it will not be long till we can increase the rate of literacy in the country.