

Programme of educational visits

MANIKGANJ PRIMARY TRAINING INSTITUTE

The Primary Training Institute Manikganj is one of 47 similar institutes in Bangladesh training primary school teachers. The trainees, who number nearly 200 in the proportion 4:1 male to female, demonstrated their opening activities each day beginning with a recitation from the Holy Quran, followed by the raising of the national flag, the oath of allegiance, and the singing of the national anthem. Following this, the students, under the direction of their Physical Education Instructor, performed a number of exercises. In one of the science classrooms a demonstration lesson on the germination of seeds using an overhead projector was given by an instructor. Nursery rhyme books, pictures, charts, models and other teaching aids prepared by the trainees themselves were also on display.

MANIKGANJ MODEL PRIMARY SCHOOL

The model primary school has a mixed enrolment of 500 pupils. It functions in shifts. There are 11 teachers on the staff of whom two are female. Because there is surplus accommodations, girl students have been put in separate sections.

SAVAR NATIONAL MONUMENT

The National Monument at Savar is dedicated to the honour of the martyrs of the liberation war in 1971. The monument is still under development and will eventually form a large and impressive memorial. Participants placed a floral wreath at the monument.

PEOPLES' HEALTH CENTRE, SAVAR

This is a voluntary organization started in 1972 as a private health centre following the liberation war. But the organisation has extended its activities to include programmes such as primary and adult education (both formal and non-formal), health education training for paramedics so that they can work independently as village and family planning workers, agricultural extension projects. Most interesting and encouraging are some of the income generating programmes for the benefit of poor destitute women and girls. These include furniture construction, masonry, bag making and shoe making.

JAHANGIR NAGAR UNIVERSITY, SAVAR

Prof Zillur Rahman Siddique, the Vice-Chancellor, together with several of his senior professors, received the group and briefed them about the objectives and functions of the University. The visiting group were also entertained to lunch in the Vice-Chancellor's residence.

VILLAGE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTRE, SAVAR

The centre was established in 1977 with assistance from UNICEF and officially inaugurated in July 1978. Its purpose is to help various rural people and groups to achieve self-reliance by designing and producing equipment and materials appropriate to their resources. While producing educational aids from bamboo, wood, and paper, the centre is running a primary school for disadvantaged children where they are trying to follow their own curriculum. Pottery, screen-printing, fish farming, solar cooking and drying equipment are some of the interesting and useful innovations devised by the centre.

UPE PILOT PROJECTS IN MEHER UNION, COMILLA

To reach the project the participants travelled by bus, launch and bus for four and a half hours.

The group was taken to three of the 22 feeder schools and two of the eight government primary schools which make up the UPE project. The group also visited a few of the Swanirvar (self-reliance) co-operative projects.

The Meher Union is composed of 24 villages with a population of 16,400 and is divided into seven blocks. Each block has an education committee responsible for two, three or four feeder schools which pass on their students to the government primary schools. The feeder schools contain pre-class one, together with class one and sometimes class two. The primary schools begin with class two or three. The Union Education Committee is responsible for overall supervision of the project.

Each feeder school has two teachers with a minimum of eight years of education but no formal teacher training, and one year (female helper). Half of the teachers are women. Salaries are much lower than those paid to government primary school teachers but these teachers are enthusiastic and happy with their salary and the honour they receive from the local community. Teachers are paid 50% extra if they teach a double shift. Overall, slightly more girls were enrolled in the feeder schools than boys. The project provides the students with all the school books and supplies, an annual medical inspection and medicines.

From the schools visited, the participants got an idea of a typical feeder school. The school buildings are small, about 15 feet by 45 feet, with clay floors, woven bamboo walls and thatched roofs. They contain a table, a blackboard and a lockable steel cabinet for storing teaching aids. The teaching aids seen included charts, pictures and small cards with pictures and matching words for teaching reading. Each student brings his own small mat to sit on. In each school-room two classes of up to 50 pupils are held simultaneously. The teachers teach for two-shifts per day.

In the course of their journey through the villages the delegates also saw some of the Swanirvar activities. A deep tube-well has enabled the production of up to three crops per year and there are many well-kept fish ponds. There is a Mother's Club where women were seen knitting, sewing and making jute handicrafts. At a small factory, improved low-cost sanitary latrines are made from concrete (the widespread use of these has greatly improved the health of the people) and pipes for culverts to improve drainage. There is also an electric powered rice mill. At the project's main building there are offices including one for Zero Population Growth, a library and room where the feeder school teachers meet for training, and a bank. Nearby were workshops for maintaining machinery owned by the project.

After lunch there was a meeting of the UPE personnel and the seminar delegates. The Director, Project Officer, and Deputy Project Officer of the project explained how the project arose and how it worked. In reply to questions from the visitors, the project personnel gave the following information:

(a) One serious problem has been that money for teachers' salaries sometimes arrives five months late.

(b) The Government is in the process of evaluating the project using local records.

(c) The pupils are not followed up after they leave the feeder schools but continue in the primary schools. The first batch of feeder school students to complete grade 5 will graduate from the Block I primary school in December 1980.

(d) The essential ingredients for achieving UPE in Bangladesh are felt to be total commitment to the idea at the top national level and utilisation of local support and involvement.