

Mahbubul Hoque – crusader in the field of education

by Sanjay Kedia

Born on December 1, 1973 to a rural family of Patharkandi in Karimganj District of Assam, Mahbubul Hoque got his MCA with a first class from Aligarh Muslim University in 2000. There were offers for lucrative jobs from abroad, but he declined those as he knew that his calling was elsewhere – to serve his own people in the nooks and corners of North East India – across hills and vales, across border villages and hamlets. He chose 'The Road Not Taken' and decided to enter and develop the yet virgin area of Technical Education to bring some relief to the unemployment problem of the region.

Mahbubul Hoque is brought up with lots of struggle since his childhood days. He lost his father when he was studying in Class VII in the year 1981 who was a govt. service holder & the only earning source of the family. Then he started to take tuitions to bear the costs of his study, he even sold home cultivated vegetables in the market. Later he also lost his mother while he was studying in Class XII in the year 1991.

His students' life at Aligarh was also full of thorns. As there was minimum financial support from his elder brothers, he met the costs again by taking tuitions. His juniors still remember & praise his kind heartedness as he used to bestow his helping hand to all the fellow students. He even spent nights sleeping in the floor of his hostel room letting them to sleep in his own bed. He was always in the forefront in case of any emergency.

Coming back to his native state, with only one computer as his support Mr. Hoque started his career as an entrepreneur by giving practical training to four IGNOU students. Besides that, he generated money by assembling computers which he invested to buy four more computers. This was all the logistic support he had when Mr. Hoque's Institute was taking shape with only fourteen students in a rented building. With hardly any response from the stakeholders in the field of education and lack of awareness in the society regarding the potentialities of the IT sector, it was not an easy task for this young and dynamic entrepreneur. But undaunted by barriers Mr. Hoque finally got his chance to run professional courses in Computer Science and Information Technology and Management Science under the distance education scheme of Sikkim Manipal University of Health, Medical and Technological Science. The result — **Central IT College (CITC)** — was established in the year 2001. Slowly the dream grew, to include more professional courses. Today CITC is proud to be rated as the NO. 1 centre in North Eastern India & 2nd ranked in the country by SMU. It has also been selected as the Nodal Centre for the entire North Eastern region to conduct Biotechnology practical. More than 5,000 students have so far passed out from CITC and found gainful employment in India and abroad.

It was very painful time for him when nobody was accepting him that he will be capable of running institution. He was searching rental house for residential purpose & no owner was ready to offer rental to him because it was their idea that he had no means of income . Any way later on he decided to stay itself in the college premise at night & used to slip in the sofa set kept on reception room. He took his food from the hotel for long period. After few days one of his friend have offered their apartment to stay for few months. There are several such incidences happened during his struggle period.

That was the mere beginning, after that he did not have to look back. He continued his struggle in the field of education & succeeded to achieve milestones one after another. In order to strengthen the education infrastructure of the North East, Mahbubul Hoque set up the Education Research & Development Foundation (ERDF) in 2005 under his chairmanship. In 2007, ERDF established the Regional College of Higher Education (RCHE) – the first college in Assam under North Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Shillong which has made a niche for itself by regularly occupying the top positions in the examinations conducted by NEHU.

ERDF built the Central Public School Patharkandi and Central Public School Badarpur in 2008 and 2010 respectively with CBSE affiliation. This enabled a vastly rural population in the border areas of Assam to aspire for quality education, hitherto a dream for such people.

Regional Institute of Science & Technology (RIST) was established by ERDF in Meghalaya in 2009. This elite institute imparts education in six engineering streams and has emerged as one of the very few institutes of the region with world class infrastructure.

In 2010, the dream project of ERDF – University of Science & Technology Meghalaya (USTM) – came into being. Spread over a plot of over 400 acres, this University is unique in its own way and destined to transform the North East into a techno-savvy region.

ERDF has in the meantime created a number of R & D units, a school for career guidance and made great contribution to society by timely CSR initiatives. It has also hosted a large number national and international seminars and workshops on topics of current significance such as use of biotechnology for optimum exploration of the natural resources of the North East, strengthening of the educational infrastructure of the north East vis-à-vis Vision Document 2020 and empowerment of women through education.

Other Initiatives taken up by Mahbul Hoque :

- **Prof. Qoumrul Hoque Memorial Scholarships** : This merit cum means scholarship is introduced in the year 2009 for the students of minority community pursuing higher education in different reputed institutes in the name of Prof. Qoumrul Hoque Memorial Scholarships, the elder brother of Mahbul Hoque, who died early in tragic circumstances & who was also the founder of different educational institutions in his birth place, Karimganj.
- **Khairun Nessa Memorial Womens' Endowment** : This initiative have taken from the year 2010 only for poor & old aged widows giving cash of Rs/ 500 per month initially for 25 women from his locality in the name of **Khairun Nessa Memorial Womens' Endowment**, the late beloved mother of Mr. Hoque.
- **Prof. S. D. Phukan Science Block** : The Science Block of Regional Institute of Science & Technology has been renamed as Prof. S. D. Phukan Science Block after his death who was the former Principal of JEC; Director of NERIST; Technical Advisor of NEC & finally devoted his last part of life till death for the promotion of ERDF Institutions.
- **U. Tirot Singh Boys' Hostel** : The Boys' Hostel of Regional Institute of Science & Technology is named after U. Tirot Singh, the renowned freedom fighter of Meghalaya.
- **Prof. Qoumrul Hoque Park** : An amusement Park with fountains, natural streams, ponds with fishing facility amidst scenic beauty in the lap of nature in the hilly campus of Regional Institute of Science & Technology is being developed for the recreation of the resident students as well as staffs & outsiders which will be again named after his late Brother.
- **Fakaruddin Ali Ahmed Centre for Coaching & Guidance** : Mr. Hoque has taken bold initiative to introduce coaching classes for IAS & NET. Coaching for other competitive examinations will also be introduced in phased manner. Shri H. N. Das (IAS), former Chief Secretary, Govt. of Assam has joined as the Director of the IAS Coaching Centre.
- **Free Admission to BPL students** : This is an unique initiative emerged from the kind hearted Hoque to give free Education & fee relaxation to meritorious students belonging to families living Below Poverty Line (BPL) & economically weaker sections specially from underprivileged rural areas. Already more than 500 students are availing this facility in various institutes run by the foundation.
- **33% reservation for Girl students** : ERD Foundation has been in the forefront as far as education of the girl child is concerned. This is more evident in its different Institutions mainly in Central Public Schools situated in remote rural areas of Barak Valley districts of Assam where there are lots of constraints in educating girl child as most of the families residing there

are from the minority community. More than 40 per cent students are girls presently studying in these two schools. Mr. Hoque has made a special consideration for girl students reserving 33% seats for them in each and every institution under ERDF.

- **North East Graduate Congress** : A Congress will be organized every year by the foundation under his leadership with an aim to enhance all-round development & to bring out capabilities of the future graduates through various life skill sessions which is the first of its kind in the country. This year the event was held on 29th & 30th May.
- **Career Guidance Cell** : He has also introduced an Employment generation drive under the School of Career Guidance by introducing various job-oriented courses for the educated unemployed youths of the region keeping in view the role of quality training in shaping the future of the coming generations.
- **Interest Free Loan** : ERD Foundation believes in better working environment by providing all kinds of necessary services to its employees. To facilitate the same & to boost the morale of its employees, the foundation provides interest free loan in case of emergency.
- **Welfare Activities** : Lots of welfare initiatives have been taken up by Mr. Mahbul Hoque, to name a few among them- **Emergency treatment & medical assistance for the poor & economically weaker section of the society**, distribution of food materials & cloths to poor etc. Under his patronage, the foundation has its Centre for Welfare Activities which organizes rallies on occasion of World AIDS Day, World PEACE Day, Street plays to spread awareness amongst the people on the occasion of World AIDS Day, World Environment Day, World Rose Day with the cancer patients of Dr. B. Barooah Cancer Institute, Doctors Day etc. He had also organized "PRARTHANA SABHA" (All Religious Prayer meeting) for victims affected by terrorism and carried out Relief Drives in ethnic clash affected areas of Darrang and Udalguri.

Collaborative initiatives: ERD foundation has already signed MoU's with CSIR-North East Institute of Science & Technology (NEIST), CSIR-Central Road Research Institute (CRRRI), New Delhi & Hi-Tech Education Centre, Ireland for getting more assistance in its R & D activities. Also, many leading national level organizations like Confederation of Indian industries (CII), Indian Chambers of Commerce (ICC), Amity University, Public Relation Society of India (PRSI) etc. are always associated with ERDF. Mr. Hoque happens to be one of the special invited guests of different seminars & conferences organized by these organizations.

Hoque's contribution for improving the plight of minority educational institutions got the recognition of Government of India when he was made the Honorary Coordinator of National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (NCMEI) for the North East India in August 2010. One more feather was added to his cap in 2012 when he was made a member of the National Monitoring Committee for Minorities' Education (NMCME) under the Chairmanship of Union HRD Minister Shri Kapil Sibal.

He was also unanimously selected as the Founder President of North East Forum for Technical Institutions (NEFTI), a forum for all AICTE approved technical institutions of the NE region.

Struggle for Justice :

Till date in this long journey of 11 years, Mr. Hoque had to face lots of hurdles. In this process, he had to take many bold steps & decisions. As Central IT College is spread in different blocks in different rented buildings, he had managed to buy a plot of land in the outskirts of Guwahati to make it a full fledged campus. After getting prior permission from the authority, he started the construction works, but suddenly the permission was cancelled. Due to mere response from the State Govt., ultimately he had to move towards the state of Meghalaya. Also, to get approval & affiliation from the competent authorities-NEHU & AICTE, there were lots of struggle involved. Even he had to take the legal recourse for redressal of grievances. The honourable Governor of Meghalaya had also intervened in these

issues & helped him to get justice. Mr. Hoque had left no stone unturned to get justice for the cause of Education & was never stopped by these barriers.

Many dignitaries & high officials of different national & international organizations had already visited the institutions under the foundation & were overwhelmed to see the efforts of this young man. They were full of praise for him to bring at least some change to the education scenario of this region.

Many awards have come to Mahbubul Hoque over the years. Dr Kulendu Pathak, former Vice Chancellor of Dibrugarh University, has named him as the 'Educational Entrepreneur of the North East.' A group of alumni of Aligarh Muslim University in their website has expressed the opinion that everyone praises the efforts of Sir Syed Ahmed in bringing modern education to the hitherto backward communities of the country, but if any one person has emulated the example of Sir Syed it is Mahbubul Hoque who is today working relentlessly in bringing class education to the masses and thereby he has become instrumental in the transformation and development of the North Eastern region of India.