

National Professor Dr. Nurul Islam: Architect of The National Drug Policy 1982

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National Professor Dr. Nurul Islam was a great South Asian cosmopolitan. He elevated his motherland to the world assembly simultaneously as a medical genius, educationist, researcher, scientist and social activist. He was the trust and indestructible leader in expanding medical studies in Bangladesh. One of his greatest contribution to the nation was formulation of National Drug Policy (NDP) in the year 1982. It was an epoch making event in the health sector of Bangladesh and was acclaimed all over the world. National Drug Policy in 1982 which helped Bangladesh eliminate unnecessary drugs dominating the pharmaceuticals market earlier due to the absence of administrative structure and specialists. These unnecessary drugs had infiltrated the market after the Liberation War to fill the vacuum left by drugs previously brought from West Pakistan, which was up to 60 to 70% of all drugs available in Bangladesh market. In 1973 and again in 1982, Professor Dr. Islam led the committee of specialists responsible for drug policy recommendations. The National Drug Policy 1982 was acclaimed both nationally and internationally for being an effective example of how to break free from the monopoly of multinational pharmaceuticals in under developed countries like Bangladesh and providing a foundation for local pharmaceutical industries to flourish.

In 1982 before the launch of the Drug Policy the production of medicine in the country was undirected. In 1981, 177 licensed pharmaceutical companies produced only 25% of the country's requirements while 8 multinational companies marketed the remaining 75%. No control over importing raw materials from various sources at unregulated prices resulted in instability of costs. In that drug policy, a method for price fixation was clearly defined, like the purchase of raw materials through worldwide

tender, collecting competitive prices from authoritative sources recognized by the WHO and ensuring local production of packing materials. The policy contributed to the expansion of the local pharmaceutical industry, thereby curbing the need to import unnecessary medicines. It also imposed restrictions on multinationals thus protecting the interest of the developing country Bangladesh. The Drug Policy of 1982 set up the production of essential medicines by the local companies. They implemented modern technology and by 1992, 80% of the total production came under the control of the local companies. In 1991 the pharmaceutical companies produced medicines worth Tk. 5.5 billion - showing a growth of 318%. In 1999 the value of medicines produced rose to about Tk. 2000 crore. 95% of the Bangladesh's demand is now met locally with 252 licensed companies producing medicine worth another Tk. 60 - 70 billion. Fulfilling local demand helped export medicines to other countries and created a huge opportunity for earning foreign currency. Moreover, employment opportunities were also generated due to expansion of national pharmaceutical industries. The first National Drug Policy, 1982 led to reinforce the drug safety, quality and control of drug prices in the time of anarchy after liberation war. Implementation of the policy has led Bangladesh Pharmaceutical sector to attain a glorious image in the international arena. It was also praised by WHO and other international organizations at that time. Professor Dr. N. Islam mentioned the NDP as "Nothing Less Than Remarkable".

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