

## **A progressive madrassa in the heart of UP-Abu Zafar**

Breaking the stereotypes associated with madrassas , a 50-year-old Islamic seminary in UP teaches subjects like personality development and home science, runs an elaborate teacher training programme, has a higher girl enrolment ratio and has students who are no less active on social networking websites than their counterparts in the metros.

Welcome to Jamiatul Falah, a madrassa in Bilariyaganj town of Uttar Pradesh's Azamgarh's district that has kept pace with modern education. The 4,300 students who come here from across the country are taught subjects like personality development, economics, political science and home science - subjects which are rarely taught in Islamic institutions.

Jamiatul Falah, which means University of Eternal Success, also started a mini Industrial Training Institute (ITI) and a public hospital earlier this year.

The institution now wants to start paramedical courses for students.

"Now the madrassa people across the country recognize that there is a need to train teachers because they play a key role in any educational system," Falah manager Mohammad Tahir Madani said.

"The modern subjects are helpful to understand the religious commandments and create confidence among our students," he added.

"If our students don't know other languages, then they won't know other cultures. Nowadays, if they don't know English they may feel an inferiority complex," he explained.

More than 50% of the students in the institution in higher classes are comfortable with the Internet and most have a Facebook account.

Shahid Habib, a student, has 425 Facebook friends. "I access the internet easily, send e-mails and get information," he said.

Of the 4,300 students, around 2,600 are girls and most of the outstation students are from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra and Nepal. The girls' enrolment ratio in higher classes is even more.

"Educating the girl child is necessary to empower them. The ratio of educated girls has increased now. The poor girls can also get education here," Falah headmistress Salma Jaleel said.

"If someone is poor, then they don't have to pay. We will educate them as it is our responsibility," Madani said.

Falah, which has a monthly fee of less than Rs.100, provides free education, accommodation and meals to at least 30% of its students.

The institution's alumni are pursuing research in various universities in India and abroad.

Its hospital, Al-Falah Hospital, offers allopathy, Ayurveda, Homeopathy and Unani treatment.

It serves at least 100 patients daily and provides free service to poor irrespective of race, cast and religion.

Azam Beg, an alumni of Falah hailing from Rajasthan, went on to study Unani medicine from the Aligarh Muslim University and was twice elected students' union president.

"Falah is a junction of both curricula, old divine and modern education. I have learnt a lot from here and it is enough to open my heart and mind," said Beg, who now runs 12 schools and colleges and four madrassas in different parts of Rajasthan.

Stressing on the necessary changes in the educational system of the madrassas, Madani said: "There is an old style of teaching in madrasa system and certain changes are needed in the syllabus."

"The teaching pattern in madrassas depends on books, not subjects; we have to change it now," he pointed out.

Falah has a panel to check the quality of education and also conducts a parent-teacher meeting every three months, a rare practice in madrassas.

One can see several wall magazines in different languages like Arabic, Urdu and also English at Jamiatul Falah.

Mohammad Arif, a doctor of Unani medicine in Al-Falah Hospital, thinks that the madrassas should provide the lead to the community in every field. "There are large numbers of people who follow the madrasa teaching. If the madrassas play such kind of role, then the thinking of people about madrassas would be changed," Arif said.

- With inputs from IANS

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