The Daily Star

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Crisis in Higher Education

In a recent article published in this journal, the former advisor for education and a well known educationist, Prof. Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, asked the question: "Should we have private universities ?" He did not answer the question except for saying that private universities may well bring in an element of competition and excellence which is now missing in our higher education.This journal, however, would like to be quite categorical in its support for the idea of private universities. We think that any attempt to bring in more investment and expertise into higher education, especially from non-governmental sources, will benefit our education system. However such universities should not become the exclusive clubs of the rich and the powerful. Access to them of talented students from all strata of our society must be ensured through scholarships, grants and study loans.

The question, however, is not one of government versus private universities, but that of the quality and relevance of our higher education in general. According to the figures provided in Prof. Siddiqui's article, in 1986-87 a total of 1,10,000 students passed the higher secondary school certificate examination. Of them 35,000 had the requisite qualification to enter honours course in our seven universities. Only six to seven thousand were able to make it. We do not know how many of these students ultimately complete their graduate and master's studies but we do know that a three years' honours course, followed by a one year M.A. or M.Sc. course, or those of our engineering or agricultural universities, take a total of six to seven years to complete due to what we now call 'session jams". After all this, the students who pass out mostly remain unemployed except for the handful who are at the top of their classes.

What an irony. On the one hand we are suffering for the lack of experts in every conceivable field while on the other, we are not able to employ the few graduates and master's degree holders that our universities are producing.

This brings us to the fundamental question of quality and relevance of our higher education. Are we producing the higher education degree holders whose expertise are necessary for our development ? Do we have sufficient linkage between the industry and the universities to know in what area we need to produce expertise and of what quantity ? Here the experience of the Southeast Asian region may serve us well if we care to learn. In the newly industrialising economies like Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia there exists a constant and dynamic interaction between universities, research bodies and the job market. The linkage is so organised that the need of one is met by the output of the other.

The task before us therefore is clear. We need to make our higher education more relevant to the development needs of our country. We also need to make it more efficient so that it can deliver at a speed and level which are competitive to, if not the world but, at least the regional standards. To achieve these we need to attract greater investment in education, which cannot come from the increasingly scarce government sources. Hence the question of private universities.

This journal feels that there is also a need for looking into how the current government subsidies to the established universities are being spent. A strong case can be made, we suspect, for a more efficient use of the available funds.

Human resource development has been identified, over and over again as the key to economic development. If we want to attain a double digit growth rate,— we must improve the performance of our higher education system.

Please Save Chandpur

Not all towns are equally important. The preeminence of Chandpur as a most important riverport is centuries-old. It only grew with the coming of the new modes of mass transport of freight and passenger. One can go to Chandpur by road or river or rail. An air connection — and it could vie with Cochin in Kerala for a spot reachable by all means of transport. Chandpur also has the best and most connections with the capital city.

This is all because of Chandpur's tremendous handling, transhipment and trading activity. Add to it the fabulous haul of the best Padma ilish (hilsa) that is packed and sent out from here plus a wonderful hinterland of rich agricultural produces that sustains Chandpur's leadership in inland ports. Centuries of such leadership has naturally developed a population very capable of carrying it out with rare competence and even finesse.

Imagine such a town being eaten up, literally, by river erosion. If you cannot, take a three-to-four hours' boat ride to Chandpur, take a rickshaw to Baro-station and head for the nation's most famous spot for seeing a most gorgeous sunset sitting on the country's biggest erosion-saving boulders. Prepare yourself for the first shock — the boulders are not there, there are only cement blocks, too regularly uniform to go with any illusion of nature. A realisation would then descend on you that it's not the place you or a lakh others have in years past sat for hours. The Meghna has eaten up whole of a half-mile deep waterfront stretching for about a mile. A substantial part of the prime lands that formed the hub of Chandpur's trading activity, namely, Puran Bazar is already under the Meghna.

The tragedy of it lies elsewhere. In the fact that the erosion is continuing without any effective steps to stop it. And in the fact that it has struck this time with a renewed vengeance. In the past week 30 shops and as many houses have gone down into the river.

The Water Development Board took up a Taka five-crore — incredible is it? — town protection scheme that resulted in 72 lakh boulders to be thrown into the riverfront at both Puran Bazar and Natun Bazar. That failed to provide much of an answer. At a much later date the waterwallahs drew up another plan, this time costing Tk 21 crore — and accordingly cement blocks and 'geotextile bags numbering to over 350,000 were placed. But other needfuls for the plan to be effective were allowed to go by default.

A country where thugs filch money by billions of taka, where towns change lights to drape itself with the colour of a Poesque premonition at a cost of tens of crore — only an utter mindlessness can result in the failure of marshalling a hundred crore taka to save a town of Chandpur's importance.

We appeal to government as well as the money that is there in plenty in Chandpur itself, please act and act soon.

ZAKAT: AN INDONESIAN EXPERIMENT

Turning Charity into Investment

by M. Zainuddin

Special to the Star

At the time of Eid-ul-Fitr, every Muslim should give his Zakat contribution either personally or to the Zakat Fund managed by the Islamic Foundation. These funds are nearly always charitable alms to the poverty stricken. Some people are, however, dissatisfied with the personal charity — the poor, they say, are there again next year. Is there no way that they can be helped to escape from poverty through the use of zakat funds? Here is report of an interesting experiment from a religious reformist organization in Indonesia called Mohammediyah which might have some relevance to Bangladesh. The author works for an Indonesian Islamic NGO.

IN 1982 I felt the need (and saw the opportunity) to use the traditional Islamic charitable tax system of zakat as a means of helping the poorest rural people to escape from poverty. Zakat is the annual yearly hand-out from the local mosque of food and clothing for the poorest members of the community. It is raised from a tax levied on those who worship at the mosque and are considered to have the ability to pay. This donation occurs only once a year and its long term result is that the same people are around the next year, still very poor. I made contact with the local branch of Mohammedtyah (a national Indonesian Islamic reformist organization) who agreed that in 1982 the 180,000 Indonesian Rupiah (Rps) that they had collected for zakat alms could be channelled through a different system — one of community organization and community development.

Sixteen mustahiq (those who are the poorest in the community and who thus have the right to receive the zakat) were approached and, after long discussions, agreed that they would form a group and would not immediately consume their share of the zakat, but would save the money together as a fund for income-generation and productive enterprises, and would help their own members to escape from their poverty. For two years this group met at my house every fortnight, discussed to escape from poverty, and started to use the zakat funds to start up small-business enterprises. Savings from these activities were put back into the common pool.

At the end of two year, the lives of the original 16 had changed in the following ways: four people had changed from being mustahiq to being well enough off be taxed in turn to give zakad (muzakhi); two people who were previously unemployed became small traders; three people who were already self-employed in a very small way increased their business by 125 per cent; four people who previously had nothing but their labour to sell bought their own sewing machines and set themselves up in business; and three remained poor and their lives had few changes.

Based on these results, I set up a project called "The Household Economy" with the expressed intention of getting away from a relief and charitable approach to the rural poor, and towards and approach which emphasized encouraging them to become self-sufficient. Klaten, the area in which the project took place, is the third most populated, but the second smallest district of Central Java. Just over half of the cultivated land is under irrigated-rice farming and encroachments are steadily being made on this land for housing, offices and roads. The population is growing and 50 per cent are landless.

One basic principle in this programme was, and is, that the target group of the rural poor are involved as much as possible at every stage of the activity, from planning through implementation and monitoring, to evaluation. The project is not something done to the poor, but something the poor, with the help of a few sensitive facilitators, do for themselves. Another principle is that problems are solved in an integrated way — all aspects of a problem are looked at and approaches to solving the problem are considered together. A third principle is to try and identify and develop local potential, local resources, and local leadership.

The first and most important activity is to raise awareness amongst the poor that their fate can be changed by their own strength. Discussions involve reflections on Islam, on Javanese traditions and mythology, and on their present state, as well as comparisons with other systems. Once a level of awareness about future possibilities is reached it becomes necessary (and possible) to increase people's knowledge and productive skills. People are encouraged to form themselves into groups which are called UBs, that is Usaha Bersama ("joint efforts"). The group works out what kind of training it needs, and LP3ES attempts to provide this. The training is usually based on the need for managing the group, basic entrepreneurship, and productive skills.

The only way out of poverty is for people to form small co-operatives, and gradually to build up into one larger co-operative. Once the small co-operatives have been solidly formed — and have a discipline of saving, investment and repayment — then they can be helped by judicious soft loans from outside. It is important that the groups depend upon their own resources at first, but it is also true that they will only be able to amass very small amounts of capital from their own resources. Once group consciousness and financial discipline have been learnt, then infusions of funds from outside can speed up the rate at which they can turn over the money, pay back their loans and increase their own incomes. Between 1984 and 1987, 104 productive groups were formed. New enterprises were started, existing micro-enterprises expanded, and jobs created, as can be seen from the table at the end.

The experiences of working together has convinced these people of the benefits of a group, and the value of savings. One of the clear benefits is that they are no longer dependent upon securing loans from money-lenders at very high rates of interest — their own group becomes the money-lenders, and they have a say in how the money is lent. In 1984, all groups could only mobilize Rps 11,700,000. By 1987, this has risen to Rps 33.5 million. And all the members of these groups started as mustahiq (receivers of zakat alms). The criteria for determining who were to be mustahiq were that they should be people who earned less than Rps 1,500 a day, had not permanent job, owned less than 0.3 hectares, and whose house was only made of temporary materials.

The next stage is for the 104 groups (representing 1606 households or about 9,639 people) to co-ordinate their business activities through an Inter-Group Coalition for Co-operation.

In time, this will become an official co-operative-an independent and functional co-operative which has bottom-up planning created from, by, and for its members. A co-operative such as this constitutes a people's movement.

Growth of Productive Activities

Type of Productive Activities	Total of the Groups			
	1984	1985	1986	1987
1. Garden cultivation	11	14	8	22
2. Roadside stalls	16	10	13	17
3. Poultry breeding	6	6	5	15
4. Cattle breeding	6	6	25	34
5. Fresh water fishery	1	14	13	15
6. Home industry food processing	-	-	3	6
7. Service	-	-	3	12
8. Beekeeping	-	-	-	1
TOTAL	40	50	70	122

The Left Gets a Big Foot in the Delhi Door

D.K. Joshi writes from New Delhi

Communist participation in the next Indian government is a distinct possibility following a decision by the Janata Dal, which led the coalition government of 1989, to link up with the left in a common platform. Such a development would be against the global political trend and a far cry from the days when Nehru was so disturbed that Kerala had acquired the world's first freely elected communist government he dismissed it.

INDIAN politics will not be the same again if the communists share po-wer in New Delhi — and that could happen as a result of the May general election.

This is because the National Front, which comprises the Janata Dal and some regional parties, has decided to share a programme and platform with the left led by the Marxist Communist Party, the CPI (M). And for the first time the Marxists have not rejected the idea.

Indrajit Gupta, secretary-general of the Communist Party of India (CPI), a junior partner of the left, has already resolved to "join a coalition government" in the centre, if the National Front and left alliance is voted to power."

At present the communists are largely confined to West Bengal and Kerala. If they get a chance to spread to other parts of India it will mark a radical departure from the trends in other parts of the world where communism is rolling back.

In any consortium of ruling parties the communists with their ideological and organisational cohesiveness will be able to dominate and determine the course of social, economic and political programmes of the government. The left had 52 members in the dissolved Lok Sabha (lower house) and expects to increase that number.

The administrative management of the left in India has been commendable. West Bengal had the most stable state government in the country and is also the only state free from communal tensions. Oxford-educated Jyoti Basu, now his seventies, is one of the most respected politicians in India.

This new political atmosphere is a far cry from Jawaharlal Nehru's days when communists were regarded as extremely dangerous. Fear of them was so great that the liberal Nehru dismissed the first democratically elected government of Kerala in 1959. Indira Gandhi, his daughter and then president of the ruling Congress Party, forced her father's hand.

The communists have travelled a song way from the pre-independence period. In 1942 the then single communist Party of India did not join Mahatma Gandhi's Quit India movement because it regarded World War Two as a people's war against fascism. When freedom came in 1947 the party called it a sham and the result of a conspiracy between the British imperialists and the Indian bourgeoisie.

The young Indira Gandhi. As Congress president in 1959 she persuaded her father, Prime Minister Nehru, to dismiss the elected Communist-led government of Kerala.

The line adopted at the Calcutta Congress in 1948 — just after independence — at the instance of Moscow described Nehru's government as "war on the people of India." In the first Lok Sabha in 1952 the CPI emerged as the main opposition, despite a vilification campaign that it had betrayed the nation in 1942.

By the time of the second general election in 1957 the CPI had become chastened. On the advice of the the Cominform it had decided to work within the democratic framework. It scored a spectacular success in Kerala where E.M.S. Namboodiripad became the world's first head of a communist government formed through ballot and not bullet.

Fighting between China and India in 1962 precipitated a CPI split in 1964 when the world communist movement divided into Chinese and Soviet camps. The more moderate CPI supported Nehru while the breakaway CPI (Marxist) said he had played the imperialist game.

The CPI (M) honeymoon with China did not last long. It ended when the Chinese supported a more radical group, the Naxalites, who staged an agrarian revolt in West Bangal.

Over the years the communists have lost their ideological fire and militancy. The CPI has lost much of its dynamism and has accepted the supremacy of the Marxist CP. The disintegration of the international communist movement and the dilution of the socialist economic order in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have forced Indian communists to look inward.

They now find themselves comfortable alongside bourgeois politicians who play on caste, communal and regional sentiments.

Besides the two communist parties, the left front consists of the Revolutionary Socialist Party, the Forward Bloc and many other splinter groups. The Marxist CP is recognised as big brother by these partners.

In the the Hindi-speaking belt, the political heart of India, the communist parties have few pockets of influence. In the 1989 general election most of the left's 52 seats were won without striking any electoral alliances. In the Hindi belt they won only nine seats out of 221.

The 1991 election provides the left with a golden opportunity to spread itself because V.P. Singh, who was briefly prime minister after the last election, has struck up an alliance to fight the rightist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress.

The communists have decided to call assembly elections in West Bengal and Kerala a year early to coincide with the general election — a sign of confidence.

They hope all this will help spread their influence to the national level. Jyoti Basu and Namboodiripad, now 81, are regarded as prime ministerial material. Once the communists win national respectability by becoming part of a left-of-centre government, they are confident they will one day take power in New Delhi.

— *GEMINI NEWS*

D.K. JOSHI a graduate of Lucknow University, joined the Bombay Free Press Journal in 1946 and later the Indian Express.

OPINION

Names

I have read the well-written artiele about names in Bangladesh, titled "What's in Names ?" by Sabir Mustaffa in your weekend magazine of April 12 with interest.

In many ways, people in different countries in Southeast and Far East Asia also face problems with their names, especially in making outsiders understand as to how they should be addressed, verbally or in writing. But they do not at least put the word. "Barrister" or "Engineer" before their names, especially in their calling cards, or add "Former Ambassador" after their names, as some of our friends here do. In this respect, people in other Asian regions are a bit more modest.

Their names raise a number of problems for outsiders. Here are a few I can think of right-away.

In Thai names, the first words serve as the surnames. Example: General Thanom Kittikachorn, a former Thai Prime Minister, was always addressed as General Thanom, although his family name remained Kittikachorn, later used by his son or grandson. Foreigners often make the mistake of addressing the Thais by their last names which, often derived from Sanskrit, are difficult to pronounce. (Kittikachorn is undoubtedly a distortion of the Sanskrit word, Kirticharan).

In Malaysia, names of Malays present a different kind of problem. They all add names of their fathers at the end of their own names. For instance : Nuruddin bin Sophiee, meaning Nuruddin, the son of Sophiee or Rafidah binte Haji Mohammad Aziz, meaning, Rafidah, the daughter of Haji Mohammad Aziz. Surprisingly, married women do not use their husbands' names at the end. (If this practice was followed here, Hasina would be called Hasina binte Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Begum Khaleda Zia would have to substitute 'Zia' by the name of her father. Politically, Hasina might then get an edge over the Prime Minister!)

Significantly enough, most Malays usually drop 'bin' and 'binte' from their names, perhaps to shorten them or to make them sound more modern. So, Nuruddin bin Sophiee becomes just Nuruddin Sophiee, while he still likes to be addressed as Dr. Nuruddin. Does he have a family name ? No. In a way, most Bangladeshi Muslims do not have a family name either.

More and more Chinese names are being Anglicised. The same is happening to Korean names. A Chinese name may be written in one way when one uses the Anglicised version, and in another way if the original one is used. Mr K. C. Lee (the Anglicised version) becomes Lee Kong Cheung. In either case, he is addressed as Mr Lee.

Most Indonesian Muslims are Malays by their ethnic origin. But their names are quite different from those of Malaysian Malays. In most cases, they are of Sanskrit origin, usually consisting of only one word. Sukarno was, in effect, Shukorno, obviously a Sanskrit or Pali word, and not a distortion of Sukrana which, thanks to its Arabic sound, was once popular with the press in Pakistan.

Indian Sikhs in Bangkok have adopted Thai names, while Chinese in Manila have made subtle changes in their names to make them sound Filipinos.

A Foreign Reader
Dhaka.

To the Editor...

Walk for health

Sir, It is a known fact that physical exercise is good for health . Of late awareness of it has increased. Today we see many people going for morning walk which, according to doctors, is beneficial for health.

Therefore, we often notice a long line of morning walkers in residential areas like Dhanmondi, Gulshan, Banani etc. Although, they happen to be only old people, but there are recently many youngsters too who have joined this team.

Well, whatever the reasons, this is no doubt a good sign that young and old we have become health conscious.

Zamain Ahmed
Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

Applicability of *'Shaheed'*

Sir, This refers to the pronouncement made by the Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina about the applicability of the term *'Shaheed'* to communities other than Muslim.

As far as we understand *'Shaheed'* is one who sacrifices his life in the struggle to establish the order of Allah in this planet in continuance of the struggle launched by the holy Prophet of Islam (*S.M.*) and bears witness (*Shahadat*) to the fact — 'There is no Allah but Allah and Mohammed (*S.M.*) is His Messenger'.

We feel that our learned doctors of religion should throw more light on this subject and also let us know explicitly the accuracy of Sheikh Hasina's remark.

Al-Haj S.M. Khalid
Chowdhury, Dhanmandi,
Dhaka.

Liver cirrhosis

Sir, A recent news item says that there is a panic set forth by the spread of Liver Cirrhosis in the district of Jamalpur. As much as three people have already died and about one thousand have been afflicted with this deadly disease.

The cause of this disease becoming widespread is that, those who become victims of it, come from extremely poor background and rarely have access to hygienic and well-nourishing foodstuff.

Thus even after they do realise how ill they are it becomes almost impossible for them to get good medical treatment because of lack of fund. So they silently suffer and die. It is really a very sad state of affair.

We only hope that in the near future it will become possible for people to avail treatment of this disease in Jamalpur itself.

Jahangir Ahmed
Gopibagh, Dhaka.