

The Importance of Academia

by Syed Nageeb Ali

An atmosphere hostile to academic knowledge is bound to sway some individuals to the private sector where ideas are deemed more productive. So in a sense, this leads to a problem of *adverse selection* where the individuals who remain in academia are not as eager to necessarily create knowledge that has direct social benefits.

OFTE TIMES, those who see the poverty of the third world are skeptical of the utility of academic knowledge. After all, much of scholarship seems esoteric, and terribly trite to those who witness poverty continually. With each passing year, as my aspiration of becoming an academic furthers, I see a greater dismissal of this enterprise amongst certain Bengali communities. Discarding academic knowledge simply because some of it is trite, I believe, is tantamount to throwing the baby out with the bath water and herein, I will thus indicate how academic knowledge could benefit our country.

The function of a democratic government, as far as I see it, is to help individuals achieve their conception of the good. Indeed, if a society is not about the lives and choices of its citizens, it is about nothing. For some of us, our conception of the good is tied to helping our parents the best we can; for many, it is tied to being entrepreneurial and making money; for others yet, it is tied to the acquisition of knowledge; and for many, it is tied to following the commandments of our Creator to the best of our abilities. Arguably, it is the duty of society to help individuals pursue their conception of the good, within certain bounds. Thus, instead of forcing individuals to pursue one conception of the good, we must give them rights and means to strive for a diverse set of goods.

Now oftentimes, we are called upon to decide whether what we are doing is giving individuals those rights and means. At a pragmatic level, we face this when judging the efficacy of rural development programmes and microfinance institutions. Now this is far from being a simple question. Evaluating whether persons' lives are better requires us to take a broad view of their lives, and is encapsulated neither by income nor consumption standards (though the standard of living may be positively correlated with these). Rather, we are forced to devise indicators of health, look at literacy rates, study nutrition patterns and employment. We have to estimate how policies will affect the environmental base and those whose livelihood are dependent on the environment. Thus, our "to do" list is immense.

To make matters tougher, governance is often done in the presence of trade-offs. Not only do we have to understand how certain policies will help some, we have to examine how it will hurt others. When deciding on a policy, thus, the government must take into account the deep causal connections that run through our society. This requires keen analytical insight complemented by sound ethical reasoning. Formal analysis thus, is a prerequisite to the decision, for without it, our ethical judgments would be based on an inaccurate information set.

Allow me to illustrate how formal reasoning can go beyond intuitions with an example. This is a macro-level issue that strikes at the heart and stomach. I should add of individuals — famines. It is the *horrid* nature of famines that leads our intuitions to believe there must be some abnormality or idiosyncratic event that precipitated this gullotine of life. It would indeed seem counterintuitive that there is something *systemic* in the causation of famine. Thus, what would seem to be the intuitive way to study famines is to look at food availability per capita. One of Professor Sen's many contributions to development eco-

nomics is his putting forth a view that goes beyond this intuition. People don't starve simply because there isn't enough food, but because they are unable to obtain food. This broadens our informational base as it compels us to not only consider how much food is available, but look also at what individuals can acquire. By studying this problem formally, we can understand famines that arise from causes other than natural disasters; we can see the effects of government policy or ill-distribution on nutrition. Thus, technical reasoning takes us further than our first impressions.

Of course, the question raised by the cynic is whether the academic's knowledge here is ever called upon. While I would be sympathetic to the cynic's suspicion that at times, government policies are made in an opaque and insensitive manner, I think to deem all government policies as such is unwarranted. There have been occasions where policies in the rural areas have been done with the counsel of academics. Furthermore, microfinance institutions globally have not been insensitive to formal research on poverty alleviation nor have international institutions such as the World Bank. And to a lesser degree, academics write articles and publish books, some of which hopefully have some influence.

An advantage of academia is that the knowledge that it produces is public and not private. When something is published in a journal or a book, the ideas therein are open to application, critique and extension. This is a far cry from knowledge in the private sector where the structure of commerce treats ideas as *private goods*. Now there is nothing wrong in itself treating some ideas as private goods; after all, it would be folly not to see the financial incentives of innovation that this institutional structure creates. Yet, there are certain ideas that we should not leave to the private domain, and this is where the public creation of ideas in academia is beneficial.

I have pointed in the direction of some of these already — the study of development and well-being. Being a country of severe destitution, Bangladesh could not afford to have information pertinent to individual well-being remain private. Keeping this knowledge private would ensue in tremendous misallocation of resources; a society that attempts to cope with hunger would be unable to do so if the signal of hunger were not public. Likewise, if analyses on how trade affects the environmental base were not made available publicly, government policies would be unable to account for externalities, and thus, in effect would subsidize export products. Furthermore, if we gained knowledge of how to reduce poverty in certain parts, we would want to make that information available easily; to share that information only at a market price would be unethical and go against our commitment to well-being.

Of course, the matters are not always so clear as to which domain knowledge should be created. This dilemma is particularly salient in health economics. At one end, we impute a certain urgency to the needs of health, and do believe that all individuals should have access to the knowledge that would cure them in spite of being penniless. At the same time, many initiatives to produce and market medical research stem from the operations of the private sector. The trade-offs, thus, are incredibly hard; thankfully the literature spawned by this

question has been public.

Now, let us take a look at the consequences of dismissing academia. On the supply-side, individuals are dissuaded from participating in the creation of academic knowledge that is useful to society. An atmosphere hostile to academic knowledge is bound to sway some individuals to the private sector where ideas are deemed more productive. So in a sense, this leads to a problem of *adverse selection* where the individuals who remain in academia are not as eager to necessarily create knowledge that has direct social benefits. Additional problems of moral hazard rear their ugly heads: if one expects that one's ideas will be dismissed, one would have little reason to attempt to produce non-esoteric knowledge. Thus, an atmosphere that dismisses academia will in some sense create a self-fulfilling prophecy.

To clarify, I am not arguing that ideas that do not have direct social consequences are necessarily in vain. We rarely do know the effects one's ideas will have; for example, Lagrange when devising concepts of maximization in studying optics over a century ago could not have known that his ideas would be instrumental in studying economic dynamics. Furthermore, there is a usefulness in knowledge itself that should not be ignored. Formalization, as part and parcel of good academic work, makes notions explicit in a way that allows them to be tested, rebuked or supplemented. Notwithstanding, there

is still a separate value for knowledge that directly benefits developing countries, and thus, I argue that it is a social problem if less knowledge of this form is made publicly available.

Now here I have made economic arguments for the knowledge created by social sciences. All I've attempted to show is that despite the triteness of some academic knowledge, not all of it should be discarded. I will grant that there is a large body of academic knowledge that perhaps is not as useful to society as a whole; for example, Godel's Incompleteness Theorem or for that matter, the mind-body problem, both of which have occupied the minds of many a philosopher. By that very same token, some economists could be criticized for devising complex mathematical models that often have little to do with the world. Yet a few bad apples need not make one burn the orchard, nor should the aspiring academic who hopes to make a difference in society heed Dante's warning, "Abandon ye hope, all who enter." Spinoza had once said that poetry is a net with which to catch reality; the goal of good social science is to do precisely that. It would be folly on our part to throw that net away.

The author, an economics-mathematics double-major from Brandeis University, works in Charles River Associates, an economic consulting firm.

Goals of the Journey to Asia

by Bill Clinton

President of the United States

With one-fifth of the world's people, with its traditions of democracy, with its embrace of economic openness and scientific progress, South Asia has the potential to be one of the world's biggest success stories in the next half-century. But it still faces enormous challenges — and dangers. In no other region, do so many critical issues converge so dramatically: promoting economic growth, expanding trade and easing poverty; averting regional conflict and preventing nuclear proliferation; defeating terrorism and fighting drugs; averting climate change and conquering infectious disease.

THIS week, I am traveling to South Asia, to visit Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. In the article I want to discuss the reasons for my visit and what I hope to accomplish.

With one-fifth of the world's people, with its traditions of democracy, with its embrace of economic openness and scientific progress, South Asia has the potential to be one of the world's biggest success stories in the next half-century. But it

still faces enormous challenges — and dangers. In no other region, do so many critical issues converge so dramatically: promoting economic growth, expanding trade and easing poverty; averting regional conflict and preventing nuclear proliferation; defeating terrorism and fighting drugs; averting climate change and conquering infectious disease. I am convinced that strengthening peace, prosperity and freedom in the 21st century will depend in good measure on America's

ability to forge partnerships with South Asian nations, by advancing the interests we share and resolving the differences that remain.

America has learned in recent years, especially from Russia's troubles and Japan's economic difficulties, that it is the weakness of great nations, not their strength, that threatens our vision for the future. We are safer when other great nations are at peace with their neighbors and with themselves. We do better when other countries rise from poverty to become our partners in trade and investment. Our freedom is more secure when others have a chance to shape their destiny.

That will be my message in all three countries, particularly in India. We want India to be strong, secure, united — a force for a safer, more prosperous, more democratic world.

In its 52 years since independence, India has brought about a remarkable political, social and economic transformation. With 17 officially recognized languages and 22,000 dialects, it is a place of extraordinary diversity, that is teaching the world how to live with difference. Hundreds of millions of Indians choose their leaders in free elections and determine their affairs through local governing councils. India's economy is one of the 10 fastest-growing in the world, its thriving high-technology sector one of the brightest spots in the new global economy, expanding 25-fold in the past decade.

There now are more television channels available in Mumbai than in most US cities. Meanwhile, Indians are pioneering innovative new sources of clean energy and new ways to combat epidemics of disease.

The United States and India share common values and common goals. More 1.5 million of our citizens were born in or trace their ancestry to India, and they are an extraordinary success, ranking at the top in education and income among all of America's ethnic groups.

After 50 years of missed opportunities, it is time America and India became better friends and stronger partners.

America and India should work more closely together to advance political freedoms and protections against persecution. We should find common ground in opening the global trading system in a way that lifts the lives of rich and poor alike. And we should be able to agree that prosperity and growth in the new economy depend on keeping children in school and protecting the environment. As the largest emitter and one of the fastest-growing emitters of the greenhouse gases that propel global warming, we can improve cooperation for clean energy, so we do not leave a planet in peril. We also can intensify together the struggle against deadly diseases like tuberculosis, malaria and HIV/AIDS.

I also seek a deeper partnership between the United States and Bangladesh, a Muslim nation of 120 million. It, too, is making great strides, lifting citizens out of poverty, raising the status of women, strengthening democracy standing against terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.

Pakistan is also important to the United States. The Pak-

istani people are our long-time friends. We want them to enjoy the benefits of democracy, to build a strong economy, to be free of terrorism and live in peace. Some say I should not go to Pakistan, because of the military coup that overthrew the democratically elected prime minister, Nawaz Sharif. But engagement with Pakistan does not represent endorsement. Staying away only would strengthen hard-liners in Pakistan who want their country to turn away from the world.

In my meeting with Pakistani leaders, as well as with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and other Indian leaders, I will address directly our serious concerns. The 1998 nuclear tests by India and then Pakistan shook the world, intensifying global worries about the spread and potential use of nuclear weapons. Only India and Pakistan can decide how to protect their security. As they do, I hope they will ask themselves: Are they safer today than before they tested nuclear weapons? Will they benefit from expanding their nuclear and missile capabilities, if that spurs their neighbors to do the same? Can they achieve their goals for economic development while making a sustained investment in both nuclear and conventional military forces? Will they be better off at the end of what could be a long, unpredictable and expensive journey?

I am determined that the United States ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, because it will strengthen our national security. India and Pakistan should sign the Treaty, as they have committed to do, for the same reason. As the United States and Russia move toward deeper cuts in our nuclear arsenals, South Asia should not be headed in the opposite direction. Narrowing our differences on nonproliferation is important to realizing the full potential of our relationships.

I also believe India and Pakistan will not achieve real security until they resume dialogue to resolve their tensions. I am not going to mediate the dispute between India and Pakistan. America cannot play that role unless both sides want it. But I will urge restraint, respect for the Line of Control in Kashmir, and renewed lines of communication. Both India and Pakistan have legitimate security concerns. But neither can achieve its aims in an escalating contest of inflicting and absorbing pain.

Finally, I will speak directly to Gen. Pervez Musharraf and to the Pakistani people about the steps we believe are important to building a hopeful future for Pakistan: an early return to democracy, a crackdown on terrorist groups, restraint on nuclear and missile programmes and a real effort to create the conditions for dialogue with India. If Pakistan takes these steps, we can get back on the path of partnership.

I can imagine a future for South Asia where the people of each nation choose their own democratic destinies, where tolerance is embraced, the threat of regional war is a thing of the past, and countries cooperate for better education and health and prosperity. The region is not there yet. But I know most South Asians share this vision. The United States wants very much to help make it a reality.

En Route to Beijing+5

by Judy Aita

MORE than 40 non-governmental organizations and foundations, along with the US government have been working for several months to plan a wide array of events and play host for the thousands expected to attend the Special Session of the UN General Assembly in June on the subject of "Women 2000: Participation, Development and Peace in the 21st Century."

The events, scheduled for the first week and a half of June, will review the progress made in the last five years to meet the many goals for women set out in the so-called "Platform for Action" adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995. More than 150 delegations are expected to attend the UN General Assembly session from June 5 to 9, also referred to as "Beijing+5." Thousands more NGOs are also expected to attend as members of official delegations or in New York to attend the parallel events of the NGO Forum, which begins on June 2.

At a press conference at UN headquarters March 15, Ellen Chesler, co-chair of the Beijing+5 Host Committee, said that "a variety of nongovernmental organizations are planning celebrations that mark the progress that has been made and other events to hold governments accountable for the historic commitments they made at Beijing."

Preparations have been underway for a number of months. The Beijing+5 Host Committee is composed of more than 40 NGOs and foundations. It is working in partnership with the government and the private sector and collaboratively with the NGO Committee on the Status of Women.

Representatives of the US Government, New York State Government and the City of New York want to make certain that not only the members of the official delegations but also the many women from NGOs around the world can take part in the celebration. "This is really about bringing together local and national and international women's groups in support of this platform," Chesler said.

Committee members said that because of the tremendous visibility of Beijing and with regional meetings held all over

the world in the years since, there is likely to be interest beyond accredited delegates from the 188 UN member states. They admit that they don't know precisely how many people they will be hosting but estimate that there will be between 6,000 and 20,000.

In 1995, the committee pointed out, 6,000 official delegates from 189 countries attended the Beijing conference. In addition, some 30,000 women participated in a parallel NGO Forum to discuss the goals of the Platform for Action and returned to their countries to work for the empowerment of women.

"As the host committee, it is our goal to make sure that there are facilities for everyone," Chesler said. US Ambassador Betty King said that as the host country, the United States welcomes its role and has every intention of fulfilling its obligations and making sure that everyone who comes to New York will be able to take part in the historic event.

King, who is the US Representative to the UN's Economic and Social Council, told the committee preparing for the session March 3 that "the United States and our NGO partners believe that there will be more guests for this session than can be accommodated in the United Nations building at any one time. While it is very unclear how many people will be in New York, we are working hard to be sure that all who come to New York, particularly from long distances, feel a part of this important UN event."

For example, "plans are also under way for a satellite conference to connect the UN activities to women around the world on the morning of Thursday, June 8," King said. The Beijing+5 Host Committee is working with UN officials to have an event on opening day outside the UN to accommodate a large number of participants, Ambassador King said. During the special session, the United States Customs House, which is located a few subway stops from the United Nations, will be open for participants. United Nations televised proceedings will be piped into its auditorium that can accommodate 350 per-

sons. There are also meeting rooms at the Customs House, which also will have a cyber-cafe. Newly refurbished, the historic building houses the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian.

King also mentioned a few of the other events being planned. US Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, the chief US envoy to the United Nations, will host a reception for delegations at the Hayden Planetarium, a new annex to the Museum of Natural History, on June 6. An opening reception will be held on June 2 co-sponsored by the Conference of Nongovernmental Organizations (CONGO), and a celebratory event will be held at the Immigration Museum on Ellis Island in the New York Harbor on June 8.

A full list can be found on their website at www.beijingplus5hostcomm.com which will be up a running by the end of March.

Promita Sengupta, coordinator for the Beijing+5 NGO Host Committee, said that the website, in addition to listing a myriad of daily events—that will begin June 2 and run through the end of the conference on June 9—will also have links to other websites on the conference.

As they did in Beijing, the conference of NGOs will coordinate workshops, roundtables, panels and cultural events by NGOs from around the world. As at previous conferences, the NGO events are expected to draw experts, celebrities, and public figures to promote their concerns. Each group finances its own events and participation.

For example, NGO fora on emerging issues at universities and other centers in Manhattan will include one on Women and Human Rights, June 4; The Girl Child, June 4; Women and Science and Technology, June 5; Women's Economic Empowerment, June 6; Women and the Media, June 6; and Women and Health, June 7, King said.

"Visitors will be hosted by New York City NGOs at their centers or organizations including crisis centers, women's microcredit and employment projects, health programs, etc. There is a richness of NGOs in New York City that touch on

virtually every area of the Platform for Action," King said.

Sengupta also said that the NGO Committee is also "committed to helping NGOs be more effective in the process whether here [at the UN] or in their home countries."

Working for the empowerment of women is "not just limited to one week in New York," she said. "We are very committed to ensuring that governments know that NGOs are prepared and understand what is going on and that when governments go home they are going to be held accountable."

At a large conference such as Beijing+5, the co-ordinating committee will undertake additional activities to "make sure that the NGOs around the world who wish to participate in the process in some way shape or form are properly informed, said Rebecca Nichols, CONGO executive director. "Daily briefings, supporting documents both official and unofficial, all parallel caucuses will be available to NGOs," Nichols said.

US Ambassador Linda Tarr-Whelan, head of the US delegation to the preparatory conference, said that "NGOs are having an increasing influence" on the work of the conference, especially from the perspective of the US delegation.

Several American NGOs will be members of the official US delegation. In addition, the United States plans to hold daily briefings for NGOs, Tarr-Whelan said.

Since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, NGOs have played an increasingly visible and effective role at UN conferences. In 1994, hundreds of NGOs took part in the International Conference on Population in Cairo as members of delegations, activists, and lobbyists, providing much of the language for the its program of action, the committee said.

Since 1995 the NGOs' role has expanded even more. Governments and UN agencies realize that sustainable development and improving the status of women can never be achieved through a top-down model, but needs to be driven by forces within society. Individuals, NGOs and other parts of civil society as both policy makers and crucial players, the committee said.

—USIA Feature

TOM & JERRY



By Hanna-Barbera

James Bond



Bangladesh Shipping Corporation
 Dhaka
International Freight Tender
Notice for Transportation
of Crude Oil

Offers are invited from vessel owners/agents/brokers for transportation of 100,000 metric tons (5% more or less supplier's option) Arabian light crude oil from Rastanura, Saudi Arabia to Chittagong under lifting laycan Rastanura, Saudi Arabia 23 April, 2000 on Account of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC). Freight tender schedule (detail terms and conditions) may be obtained from the following addresses during office hours on or before 30 March 2000 on payment of Tk 200.00 (two hundred) only:-

1. Chartering & Tramping Department, Bangladesh Shipping Corporation, 28/1, Toyenbee Circular Road (4th floor), Motijheel Commercial Area, Dhaka.
2. Accounts Department, Bangladesh Shipping Corporation, "BSC Bhaban", Saltgola Road, Chittagong. Freight tender Closing 1000 hrs (BST) On 02 April, 2000.

General Manager
 (Chartering & Tramping Department)
 Bangladesh Shipping Corporation,
 28/1, Toyenbee Circular Road,
 Motijheel, Commercial Area, Dhaka.

GD-272

Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority
 Administration Department
 222, New Eskaton Road, Dhaka-1000

No BEPZA/Admn 65/89 Dated: 22nd March, 2000

Employment of the Local Consultant

Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority a body entrusted with development and operations of Government EPZ in Bangladesh with a view to strengthening its Security Department, seeks to recruit Consultant in the following position:

- Name of the post : Local Consultant (Security)
- No of post : 2 (two)
- Tenure of : One year (Subject to Renewable) employment
- Educational : Consultant shall be retired army personnel in the rank of Major. Experience in the field of security management will be treated as added qualification.
- Fees : The monthly fees to be paid to the local consultant shall be Tk 15,180/-
- Age limit : No person below the age of 33 shall be eligible to apply.
- Place of work : CEPZ, Chittagong/DEPZ, Savar, Dhaka.
- Closing date of : 13.04.2000 application

BEPZA would welcome response from Bangladeshi nationals with detail CV, two recent passport-size photographs and attested copies of certificates relating to academic/professional and experience to the following address:

Secretary
 Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority
 222, New Eskaton Road
 Dhaka-1000

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