

Nurturing students in an engaged academy

DR. SYED SAAD ANDALEEB

THE academy, one would expect, is a place of ongoing scholarly activity. For superior scholarly activity to take place requires an engaged academy -- one where there is a constant churn of events designed to generate, disseminate, and use knowledge to advance not just academia, but overall society as well. There are many components of the engaged academy involving its many stakeholders. Here I shall focus on the students for whom academia ought to play the role of nurturer so that they can build themselves as responsible citizens to shoulder the task of nation-building.

Unfortunately, the student body as a whole appears to be a disjointed entity, as if cut off from its moorings. It does not get the quality of guidance or involvement it needs. Far too often the students are left to their own devices, bereft of help from anyone other than their parents (for the lucky ones) or a few close friends. And the academy to them seems a desolate place from which a student is merely expected to emerge with a piece of paper called a degree. It is deplorable when a student from a premiere institution of the country reflects, "I have been cheated out of four-years of education, and hence, four years of my life." Bereft of guidance, lacking in fraternity, and reeling from the dismal apathy shown to them by their teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders, it is little wonder that many go wayward. Hooliganism, violence, and uncivil behaviours creep into their lives largely from outside influence, and the chances of building an active academy falls by the wayside in a regressive cycle of decay. Is there a way out?

Perhaps there is and we ought to study what goes on at other universities. To make things easy, I began looking where it was the easiest -- The Pennsylvania State University. I found quickly that problems exist here too: The students have their share of fights, brawls and disagreements, there are physical and sexual harassment issues, cheating on exams evokes concern, cases of drug abuse or drunken behaviour are not unusual, race and gender issues inflame passions, and there are even cases of rapes and other serious incivilities that make life on campus nerve wracking at times. But I also noticed that there is a deep awareness within the academic community about these problems and a constant vigilance to thwart irresponsible and uncivil behaviour in any way possible -- some proactive, some reactive, but mostly swift, punitive, and self-correcting. If one strays from the rules of engagement, the price is hefty. And these measures, on the whole, bring a sense of order and stability on campus that allows everyone involved to pursue his/her academic goals without constantly feeling insecure. Unfortunately, for many students in Bangladesh, there is a growing feeling of fear and insecurity that

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develops into a hollow feeling of helplessness. Left unattended, matters will only worsen and it is imperative for the academic community, one that often blames the government or the opposition as scapegoats, to take proactive steps and engage more vigorously to take on the role of nurturing seriously.

I will reflect briefly on some proactive measures at Penn State that might well be emulated as a starting point at the institutions of higher learning in Bangladesh with the ardent hope of seeing these campuses flourish again with the intellectual and social sparkle that once earned one of them the distinction "Oxford of the East."

Before arriving on campus, each freshman at Penn State receives a personal letter from the President -- Dr. Graham Spanier -- welcoming them. This year Dr. Spanier wrote in the opening paragraph, "Your entrance into Penn State is a step on a wonderful journey of personal growth. In addition to the intellectual development that is the primary purpose of college, I hope your Penn State experience also will promote the development of character, conscience, citizenship, and social responsibility." Clearly, the President understands that students do not arrive on campus equipped and programmed with these qualities and that these qualities need to be nurtured.

The administration also understands that students need to be guided and provided the basic rules of behaviour on campus in a bid to manage expectations. Hence, along with his personal message, the President of Penn State also enclosed the rules of engagement -- *The Penn State Principles*. I share these with academia in Bangladesh hoping that some will at least consider them, while true aspirants will attempt to put them to practice. Here are the four principles that incoming students are expected to internalise and demonstrate in their behaviours with guidance, support, and a strong commitment from the wider academic community to help uphold them:

+ I will respect the dignity of all individuals within the Penn State Community: The University is committed to creating and maintaining an educational environment that respects the rights of all individuals to participate fully in the community. Actions motivated by hate, prejudice, or intolerance violate this principle. I will not engage in any behaviours that compromise or demean the dignity of individuals or groups, including intimidation, stalking, harassment, discrimination, taunting,

ridiculing, insulting, or acts of violence. I will demonstrate respect for others by striving to learn from differences between people, ideas, and opinions and by avoiding behaviours that inhibit the ability of other community members to feel safe or welcome as they pursue their academic goals.

+ I will practice academic integrity: Academic integrity is a basic guiding principle for all academic activity at Penn State University, allowing the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner. In accordance with the University's Code of Conduct, I will practice integrity in regard to all academic assignments. I will not engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception because such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the University community and compromise the worth of work completed by others.

+ I will demonstrate social and personal responsibility: The University is a community that promotes learning; any behaviours that are inconsistent with that goal are unacceptable. Irresponsible behaviors, including alcohol or drug abuse and the use of violence against people and property, undermine the educational climate by threatening the physical and mental health of members of the community. I will exercise personal responsibility for my actions and I will make sure that my actions do not interfere with the academic and social environment of the University. I will maintain a high standard of behaviour by adhering to the Code of Conduct and respecting the right of others.

+ I will be responsible for my own academic progress and agree to comply with all University policies: The University allows students to identify and achieve their academic goals by providing the information needed to plan the chosen programme of study and the necessary educational opportunities, but students assume final responsibility for course scheduling, programme planning, and the successful completion of graduation requirements. I will be responsible for seeking the academic career information needed to meet my educational goals by becoming knowledgeable about the relevant policies, procedures, and rules of the University and academic programme, by consulting and meeting with my adviser, and by successfully completing all of the requirements for graduation.

There are only four major principles here. I hope the academic community in Bangladesh will adapt and adopt the core values,

communicate these values effectively, and inspire the students by example to inculcate these values. While I suspect some of these ideals do exist in some form or other in many institutions, the issue at hand is how best to operationalise them. I stress the word "operationalize" because academia today seems reluctant to engage with the social reality confronting them. It must find ways to put these principles to practice, imbuing students to choose right over wrong, truth over falsehood, justice over treachery, responsibility over irresponsibility, and so on. Where they are being practiced, the institutions must be applauded.

I might add that the Penn State President's message and proactive stance is an attempt not only to influence the students by laying out the ground rules; subtly, it is also directed at the entire academic community to heed. It is imperative to understand that students will only inculcate character, conscience, and the rest when the environment in which they are placed promotes these qualities. That means when teachers, administrators, staff, peers, parents of the students, and even the alumni -- i.e., the constituents of the academic community -- help the new students experience what character is about, what conscience is about, what citizenship and social responsibility are about, only then will these fledglings be initiated into a transforming process of self-improvement. If, on the other hand, they are greeted as non-entities and welcomed without

the warm extended hands of academy's various constituencies, they will feel they have arrived at the doorsteps of a cold, indifferent, and inhospitable world. Treated thus, the cycle will repeat itself, perhaps driving each new batch to greater depths of insensitivity, intolerance, and uncivil conduct.

Let us understand that the academy is a community -- a learning community -- where different persons and personalities come together, to learn formally and informally from each other, and to enrich each other through their character, upbringing, ideas, behaviours, friendships, and a host of other positive attributes. Clearly, the sustenance and growth of the student body must be shaped in an environment that recognises how individuals influence community and how community influences individuals: both must be given the respect and tolerance they deserve.

The academy is the nation's main junction -- its focal point -- where people from various points of origin come together, share ideas, find answers, and prepare themselves for various destinations to shoulder the diverse responsibilities of nation building. Instead, if the junction becomes a gathering place where one is imbued with vile, corrupt, and outrageous norms and values, what can the nation expect from them? It is time to clean the house (of academia), open the windows, and let in a fresh breath of spring air to revitalise what academy once stood for. Decrepit ideas of the past must be dis-

carded and the academy must be reinvented. In that effort students must be given a vision, provided guidelines for appropriate behaviours, and allowed to drink from the fountain of knowledge to nurture the soul, build the spirit, hone the talent, and develop the capacity to pursue their crafts and chase their dreams.

That dream of a transformed academia, however, will not come about without engagement -- total engagement -- of the various constituencies representing the academic community. Held hostage today by a lowly group of thugs and charlatans who use fear as their main weapon, the academic community seems to be foundering. To reverse that trend, it must respond in unison by coming alive intellectually, spiritually, and morally, as it involves, energises and transforms the student body with new hopes and dreams that bring a sense of emancipation to them. There is going to be both overt and covert resistance, especially from the beneficiaries of the existing state of affairs in academia who have chosen to be up there must now be held to more stringent standards. And they must show results instead of towing party lines as they embark on a journey, a mission, to reinvent the academy -- and, thereby, the nation -- that is competitive with its neighbours and the community of nations at large. Only then will the glorious past be resuscitated when those in academia were accorded the highest esteem and when building better human beings was considered a pious and patriotic act.

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In memoriam

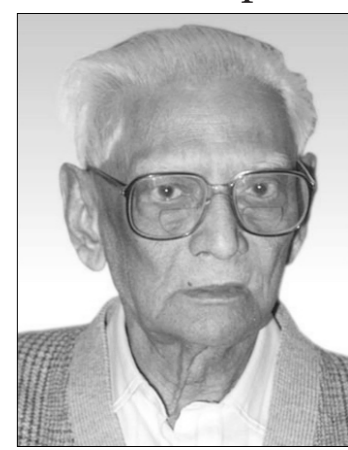
Ahmedul Kabir

A dreamer and conscience keeper

WALI-UR RAHMAN

IT was late Monday evening November 24 when national Professor Sufia Ahmed informed me that Ahmedul Kabir breathed his last at a Calcutta clinic. Mr. Ahmedul Kabir was not keeping well for sometime but there was no indication that he would leave us so soon. Years ago, I was introduced to him by my cousin Syed Altaf Hossain formerly a NAP leader and later on founder President of Bangladesh Gonorantrik Dal. After lapse of considerable time Mr. Ahmedul Kabir visited Rome as team leader of Bangladesh Delegation to the Inter-Govt. Committee on Tea under FAO. We in the Embassy did not miss the opportunity of making sure that a top media leader from Bangladesh met his homologues in Italy. The guests, inter alia, included the Minister on regional affairs, few media-men from right and centre-left of Italian politics; they were at times boisterous. Italians love to talk with gesticulation and gyration of a different kind. [distinguishing them from their French counterparts who make points through facial grimace or movements of epaulette]. But that made the evening very special; the guest of honour enjoyed it. He was amused when the Italians exclaimed 'Vivino la verita'. In the post-prandial conversation our guests wanted to know the state of democracy in Bangladesh. His observations were in perspective and topical, critical but optimistic: after all the people who made supreme sacrifices in 1971 to achieve an independent and sovereign country mattered. He himself was put behind the bars in 1971 by the Pakistani army.

A man of great erudition and enormous learning, Ahmedul Kabir was always creative. Never for a moment he would allow his friends a dull moment. Be it a meeting, a salon or a social gathering -- everybody noted his presence. When his brother, founder of the national journal, the *Sangbad*, Mr. Khairul Kabir expired I went to attend the condolence at the Sangbad office. It was a time pregnant with uncertainties. Many like me were engaged in grim battle with the government of the day for our honour and dignity, taken away by a corrupt, maleficent and non-transparent bureaucracy. We won the day. My visit was a symbolic show of solidarity with an institution standing for a cause, a vision of liberal and progressive Bangladesh. When I was asked to speak, I felt embarrassed. I had very little knowledge about Mr. Khairul Kabir. I valued reading national press particularly those with liberal and progressive views. But my knowledge on Khairul Kabir was entirely based on what Altaf Bhai told me about the progressive movement in Bangladesh etc. I can't remember what I said but the host thought I spoke well! Ahmedul Kabir was crisp and precise, always with a sense of positivism. But about our politics he was less so. The experience of his two parliamentary stints left him with a sense of indifference. The emerging political culture of Bangladesh -- divorced from the ideological moorings of the war of liberation, left him unhappy and disengaged. That's why he used to indulge in ironies and sarcasm. Like the Adlai Stevensons



and Jimmy Carters of the world his place in our history remains that of a conscience keeper.

In my on-again off-again search for knowledge about the liberal movement in Bangladesh, I tried to look for occasions. The golden jubilee celebration arranged by the Sangbad family some years ago at the Sheraton provided me with one such evening. It was a feast for my soul. All and everybody with some contribution, however minuscule, in the development of liberal thinking and progressive politics of Bangladesh were around. I never did so much pacing up and down the Winter Garden as I did that evening. But the party was over so soon!

From my BILLIA niche, I received the phone of Mr. Ahmedul Kabir. He wanted to know about a book entitled 'Evsjiv ivRbxwZzZ E vic's x gymwig ivRbxwZKt i f-wgkv (1905 N 1925)' by Imtiaz Ahmed published under the BILLIA auspices. He asked for a copy. His main purpose for calling was something else. He was curious (though he was pleased) to know how BILLIA had published a book in Bangla! I said if any manuscript of national interest is handed to BILLIA, I would apprise the Executive Committee about it and the Executive Committee will decide. He read the book and shared his personal knowledge about Barrister Abdur Rasul, Moulvi Abul Kasem, Advocate Abdul Halim Ghaznavi, Moulvi Mujibur Rahman of *'The Mussalman'*, Moulana Moniruzzaman Islamabadi of the 'Sultan' and many others who were pioneers in the movement of liberal and non-communal politics in Bengal. I was a silent listener. We agreed that he would visit us sometime at his convenience.

Ahmedul Kabir had a dream -- dream of a society, a democratic country based on the immutable values of the war of liberation. He knew that it was not easy but he never gave in to despair. The daily *Sangbad* was his mirror image -- it gave us a perception about real Bangladesh -- its roots, its past and history that every Bengali writer, student or scholar must instill. This nation will remember him. We owe him so much. His efforts to set certain norms, certain civility established in the country will always remain a beacon for those who want to inculcate the spirit of Bengali persona, Bengali zeitgeist and *Sonar Bangla* for which the glorious war of liberation was fought.

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Improving the nutritional status in Bangladesh

KAMAL U. HYDER

DURING the last 32 years since Bangladesh became an independent nation in 1971 production of rice, the main staple food, has exceeded 19 million tons per year, whereas it was only about 8 million tons in 1971. In spite of the fact that population has increased steadily, the availability of rice today for every man, woman and child is nearly one pound per day according to the data provided by the Bureau of Statistics in 1999. This is indeed a remarkable achievement. Besides this, it is encouraging to note that food production is growing at a greater pace than the population. Even wheat the second major food grain used as staple is gaining popularity and its domestic production is reaching 2 million tons per year. Net availability of meat, fish, milk, egg and pulses has increased from 1994-95 to 1997-98, which is reflected in their increase in per capita consumption.

This advancement in agriculture and increase in productivity can be attributed to production of hybrid seeds, application of proper fertilizer, use of safe insecticide and pesticide, farm mechanisation, water and soil management and above all the will of the people. Bangladeshis have been in the forefront to receive the benefit of the cutting edge of technology. Development of agricultural colleges and universities, research institutes and extension services deserve mention in the success of Green Revolution in this small country of about 57000 square miles with 120 million people.

Apart from the technological advancement, Bangladeshis deserve special credit for developing the capability of disaster management. Taking precaution against natural calamities has become a part of life. The high frequency of floods and cyclones has taught the people to be prepared for handling such disasters

to avoid famine and death. Management of food grain storage and distribution during the times of natural disasters has been given top priority by the government that has set an example of cooperation between the private and public sector including the armed services. It is, therefore, expected that Bangladesh will keep the food production and distribution as a major priority. With this assumption one can be optimistic about the outlook for food grain availability and price stabilisation even if some import has to take place during times of need.

Present nutritional status in grism

Let us now examine the nutritional status of Bangladeshis. Mostly rice and some wheat provide the bulk of daily food on the plate. One pound of rice per person yields about 4 pounds of cooked rice that is consumed daily at breakfast, lunch and dinner. This source of high carbohydrate meal makes up at least 60 percent of the daily diet according to the 1995-96 Nutrition Survey conducted by Dhaka University. The remaining 40 percent of the diet consists of the following items in descending order -- leafy and non-leafy vegetables, roots and tubers, fish, meat, milk and eggs, fruits, pulses, edible fat and oil, sugar and molasses, and salt. An in-depth look at the consumption pattern shows protein and micronutrient rich food to be at 10 percent level of total intake in rural and 16 percent in urban areas.

The urban population gets slightly better nutrition in some cases than the rural even if the agricultural production mainly takes place in rural areas. It is most likely due to socioeconomic reasons and income disparity. The overall change in nutritional status during 1983-84 to 1995-96 can be seen in daily food energy intake from 2100 to 2250 kilocalories and protein intake from 61 to 65 grams or 2 1/4 ounces. Edible oil consump-

tion in the recent survey has been reported to be 8 grams per person per day. These figures clearly tell us that improvement in diet deserves immediate attention.

The human body requires about 40 nutrients that are supplied through diet. Energy substrate, essential amino acids, polyunsaturated fat, vitamins, minerals and indigestible fibre are required to be a part of a balanced diet. While it is difficult for Bangladesh to follow the recommended daily allowance (RDA) for the diet in the United

States, attempt has to be made to improve the oil consumption from 8 grams to 30 grams per person per day for every household in rural and urban areas. Similarly, protein intake should be maintained above 60 grams per person per day through fish, meat, milk and egg etc.

The low figures of dietary intake represent mostly low-income population be it urban or rural and their poverty and poor health is usually prevalent and linked together. Low protein in diet means low supply of essential amino acids, which are building blocks for body. Inadequate fats and oil consumption can cause hair loss, dermatitis and poor healing of wounds due to lack of essential fatty acid such as linoleic acid. Moreover, fats and oil act as a vehicle for the oil soluble vitamins namely A, D, E and K for mobilisation in the body. The vitamins and minerals essential for maintaining biochemical activity of cells in our body can be obtained through eating balanced diet that includes

foods of animal and plant origin. It is extremely critical to provide such a diet during childhood and formative years of growth. Public health surveys at regional and national level during 1996-96 study at Dhaka University have confirmed prevalence of anaemia, visual impairment, night blindness, goiter, rickets, scabies and memory impairment.

The nutritional status is quite alarming in spite of the bright picture of productivity gains in agriculture. About 50 per cent of

It goes to nearly 40 per cent for pregnant and lactating female. These figures confirm that there is iodine deficiency in the diet.

The survey includes 12 different signs and symptoms to manifest the poor nutritional status of the rural and urban population. They include clinical observation from head to toe to show 28 per cent with sparse hair, 38 per cent with eye pallor and 21 per cent with dental decay. These do not include the daily onslaught of infectious diseases such as malaria, cholera,

data can boast of 177 kilograms of food, 13 kilograms of fish, 5 kilogram of meat and 23 eggs. The life expectancy has moved up to 61 years and infant mortality rate has gone down to 57 per 1000.

But the above mentioned growth and development in food and agriculture have been overshadowed by the poor nutritional status and that includes deficiency of vitamins and minerals in the daily diet of common masses in rural and urban areas. It appears to be related to three main factors.

We can expect that Bangladesh will continue to attach great importance to sustain the level of development. The emphasis should not only be on research and development in improving production and usage of improved seeds for staple foods, but also in the diversification of food of plant and animal origin. One can hope that the question of diversifying the goal of providing better and balanced nutrition will stimulate the Bangladeshi planners towards diversification of crops in all segments of agriculture...

desentery and typhoid. If we examine the status of anaemia, the survey paints a very depressing picture. According to the World Health Organization criteria 77 per cent of rural and 63 of urban population in Bangladesh are anaemic. The overall public health status due to nutritional deficiency should undoubtedly receive greater attention by the planners and those who are at the helm of affairs.

The malnutrition problem can be solved

In 1971 at the time of achieving nationhood Bangladesh was in a state of disarray. Strong will power of Bangladeshis for survival coupled with assistance from overseas governments, compassionate people and charitable institutions turned this fledgling nation into a country full of success stories. The stories of famine and starvation have changed to high productivity of food and lower growth rate of population near 2.2 percent. The 1997-98 per capita consumption



The time for action is here and now

The food and nutrition outlook in Bangladesh would improve rapidly if all the policies and programmes mentioned can be translated into action. Indeed, they should be taking place with deliberate speed and should be well orchestrated to achieve the national goal. Development of the Desirable Dietary Pattern for Bangladeshis with the design of nutrition education to promote them should be considered as an excellent goal that deserves priority. A food pyramid based on Bangladeshi diets may be of interest in this regard. It may assist in nutrition education. We are certainly at a critical juncture. Resources are dwindling and time is fleeting. A concerted effort is needed to unite all the donor agencies, non-government organisations, government departments, private sector and academic institutions so that duplication of efforts are minimised and the results are obtained in shorter time to benefit the population.

In conclusion, we can expect that Bangladesh will continue to attach great importance to sustain the level of development. The emphasis should not only be on research and development in improving production and usage of improved seeds for staple foods, but also in the diversification of food of plant and animal origin. One can hope that the question of meeting the goal of providing better and balanced nutrition will stimulate the Bangladeshi planners towards diversification of crops in all segments of agriculture that includes cereal, oilseed, horticulture, aqua-culture, beef and mutton production and poultry and dairy farming.

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