

Knowledge society

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S. AMINUL ISLAM

TODAY the world is moving towards a knowledge society. Most countries are taking measures to re-shape their societies into knowledge societies. The term "knowledge society" was coined in 1969 by management guru Ferdinand Drucker, and came in vogue when Daniel Bell published his justly famous book, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, in 1973.

Bell argued that the world had entered a new type of society, which he called the post-industrial society, defined by the service sector, the predominance of theoretical knowledge, "a new intellectual technology" and "pre-eminence of the professional and technical class."

If, in the industrial society, the factory was the well-spring of modern life, the post-industrial society, Bell pointed out, was "organised around knowledge for the purpose of social control and the directing of innovation and change." The university was to become the primary institution of the post-industrial society. Later, he called this new type of society

an "information society."

The expressions "knowledge society," knowledge society the information society, "information society," and "information society" are now used concomitantly. Whatever term one uses, it is clear that mankind has entered into a fundamentally new type of society and a new age called the "digital age." The break is as revolutionary as was the rise of the agricultural or industrial society.

Today, Bell's venture into forecasting has been more than successful. The term knowledge society is fast becoming the most popular catchword of this century, and the university the centre of global attention. Many nations are moving increasingly to reshape their old universities and build new ones. Various countries and agencies, and Unesco in particular, have embraced the concept of knowledge societies.

Knowledge society has posed, according to Professor James J. Duderstadt of Toronto University, four challenges for higher education: skills race, adapting to market, use of new technology and global sustainability. The skills race has

been fuelled by a change in the role of university from teaching and scholarship to creation and application of knowledge in and for a new marketplace through a whole array of new technologies, with special focus on generation of knowledge for combating climate change and ensuring sustainable development and sustainability of the planet.

It is now beyond question that the East Asian miracle was triggered by intensive use of knowledge. The knowledge factor is playing a major role in the growth of the economy. This has prompted an increasingly large number of countries to allocate a significantly large share of their budget for higher education, and redesign and create universities within the dynamic context of globalisation. It has led to a paradigm shift in higher education, entailing the transformation of the internal structure of the university for closer interlocking with the market forces, regional or local-global partnership for harnessing knowledge, and assuring quality of higher education at a global level. In this context, the new idea of "world class university" had emerged.

Developed, and many developing, countries are redesigning several key areas in their higher education system. Rich countries are expanding their budgets for higher education. Some countries are spending between 4% to 6% of their GNP on education, giving priority to higher education. In contrast, Nigeria, although a resource-rich country, spent only .07 of its GNP on education. Along

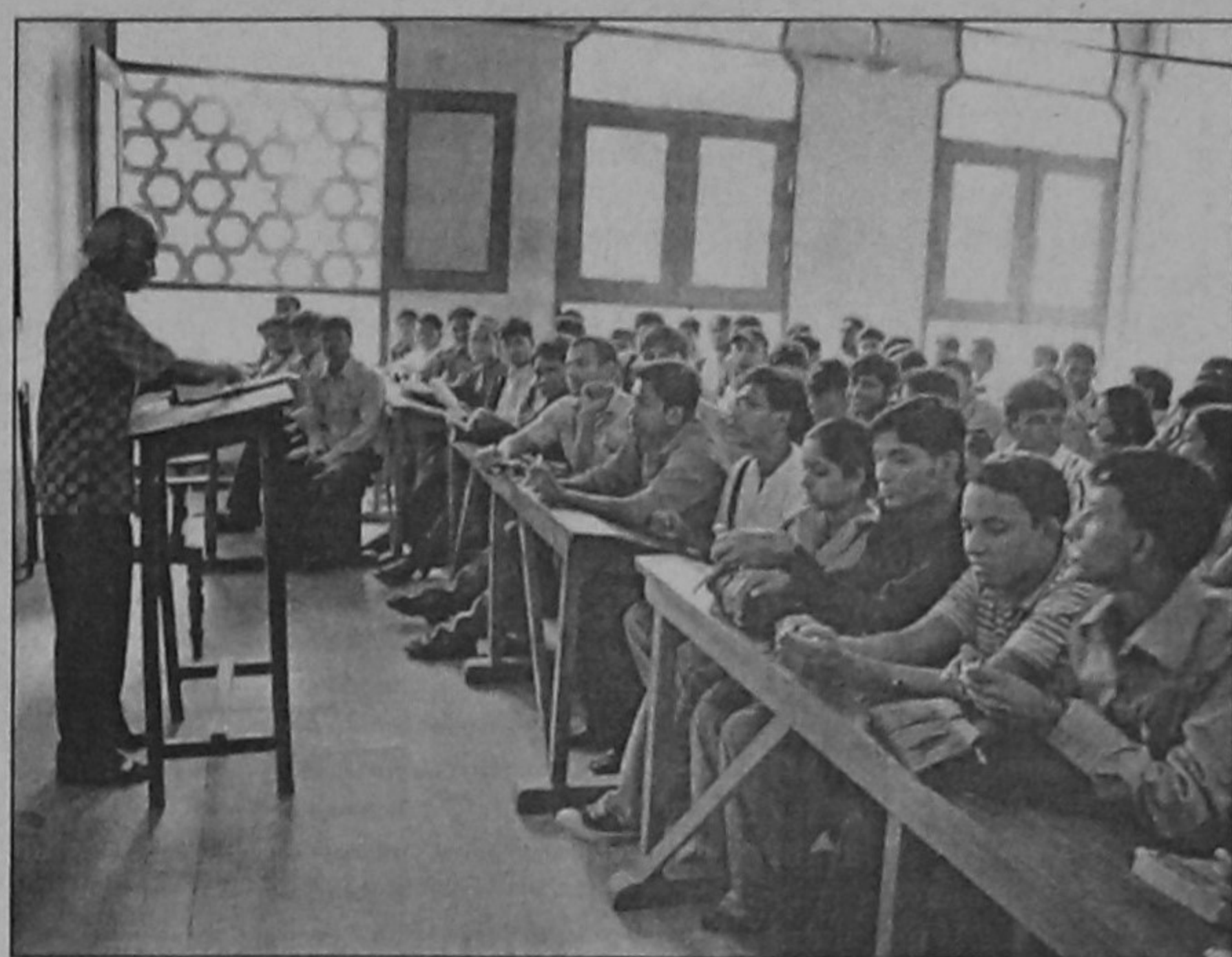
with investment, more and more countries are moving towards networking and partnership for teaching and research. Most importantly, great emphasis has been put on the quality of higher education.

In 1997, UK moved to establish a Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for higher education to "ensure 'sound standards of higher education qualifications' and to 'inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education.'"

European countries also set in motion fundamental reforms of their higher education system through the Bologna Declaration of 1999, which are to be completed by 2010. The European Commission has advanced the idea of European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning with a further objective of integrating the diverse protocols of higher education. Even countries like Egypt, Tunisia and Pakistan have taken steps for ensuring the quality of higher education. Japan, China and India are also moving to create world class universities.

Barbara W. Tuchman writes that in the early 14th century -- the most violent century (perhaps except the twentieth century) -- the University of Paris boasted of more than 500 faculties and innumerable students from all over the continent, and even rivaled Rome as an ecclesiastical authority.

In the first decade of the 21st century, the University of Dhaka, often called the



Oxford of the East, has sunk, according to a new ranking by Cybermetrics Lab, to number 4,922 position among 6000 universities of the world. Even five institutions of higher education of Pakistan have been ranked higher than the University of Dhaka. Although this lowering of the status of DU is due largely to web-based indicators the Cybermetrics Lab uses, few will disagree that the university is lagging behind in the race for knowledge society.

When many countries of the South are moving fast towards a knowledge society, our higher education institu-

tions, except for a few, have become trapped in deadly politics and lack of commitment to the task of learning by both faculty and students. Shall we continue to live in the past and occupy the dark side of the digital divide, or revamp our system of higher education for a way out? The government has taken up digitalisation of the education system in right earnest, but mere digitalisation is not enough. What we need is a complete overhauling of our system of higher education.

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Civil war in Pakistan?

Winning a civil war is all about getting the support and allegiance of the common people. Once the state wins back respect and love from its own people, it cannot be defeated. The rebel guerillas also cannot succeed without popular support. Is the Pakistan state in a position to ensure the Islamic bigots' ultimate defeat?

M.B. NAQVI

PAKISTAN is in the midst of a civil war. Taliban, al-Qaeda and other Islamic extremist groups like LET, Jaish Mohammad, et al claim that they are fighting for Islam and they aim at establishing an Islamic Caliphate. Those in power are now jubilant. They have the Taliban on the run; the Pakistan army has scored victories in Swat and Malakand Divisions. So far so good.

What they are now claiming is a second victory: all religious leaders and Mashaikh of the Bareilvi school have termed all those rebels in Pakistan's northwest as un-Islamic. Scholars of Darul Uloom Deoband, the second largest chunk of the subcontinent's Muslims, have come out clearly, disowning the Taliban and calling their efforts un-Islamic. These are political victories, if they can be used properly; improper use will boomerang. The celebrations are premature. Why?

In a civil war there are always ups and downs. The rebels fight an asymmetrical war: they come, hit and disappear; they refuse to fight set piece battles. It is the army that wants them to congregate in one place so that it

can crush them.

They normally refuse to provide this satisfaction to an army, except when they are about to win. That stage is not near. The Pakistan army started with an offensive and the Taliban disappeared. They went into their hiding places -- only to come out again later to attack and then see if they have to run away or can stay. This can happen innumerable times. This is where Pakistan is at.

The certificates from the leaders of Bareilvi and Deobandi schools can be put to use if used for propaganda. There is a great risk involved in what Pakistan has so far done. The Ulema and Mashaikh of the Bareilvi school were collected by the state, and there appear to be some who perhaps want some kind of a civil war between Bareilvis and Deobandis. This can lead to unending woes and sorrows for the people. Will someone drive some sense into the brains of decision-makers in this country?

No doubt the Pakistan state now has an advantage. Winning a civil war is all about getting the support and allegiance of the common people. Once the state wins back respect and love from its own people, it cannot be defeated. The rebel guerillas also cannot succeed



without popular support. Is the Pakistan state in a position to ensure the Islamic bigots' ultimate defeat?

The story is that the Taliban have not been able to re-establish rapport with the common people of NWFP and tribal areas. Most people do not like the Taliban, al-Qaeda and others. Doubtless they fear them because of what they will do if they become angry. The February 2008 election showed that an ordinary Pushtoon prefers secular Pushtoon nationalists of ANP to all

others, including those shouting Islamic slogans. Even in a later by-election ANP won handsomely.

The trouble in the Frontier region is in part another civil war inside the larger civil war: The Taliban wants ANP to be decimated more than anything else. This has also proved to be a contest between those who promise an Islamic dispensation and secular democrats.

Pakistan has first to ensure that the common people side with them and oppose the cruel and barbaric

obscurantists. This is where the propaganda part comes in. Propaganda, if done stupidly, can backfire. Secondly, how it will manage that is up to the state; but it has to mobilise the people against the barbaric Taliban.

How can it win the people's support against those who offer quick and cheap Islamic justice and a Caliphate, which might superficially appeal to Muslim or Pushtoon masses?

If the state is seen as mobilising some people in the way the Indians mobilised their Salva Judums against Naxalites, it may not be effective. The mobilised people should not be seen as robots manipulated by the government. The state has to do better than the rebels, but has fewer resources in those parts. It can implement its plans more easily, and the rebels cannot do without bloodshed and dicey efforts. The state has to reform itself as well as the economy so that the common people get something.

The trajectory of a civil war should be familiar to people now after so many cases that can be studied. The rebels succeed when they do better than the state. The biggest historic victory of rebels was in China under Mao Tse Tung. He established what later became China by one simple but effective device: his men and women confiscated the lands of big landlords and redistributed them among the landless. Whoever does this becomes a political immortal. By the time Mao's march men ended, there was the People's Republic of China.

In India, CPM implemented modest but effective land redistribution -- and has ruled West Bengal for over 37 years.

Only now has CPM received a big setback, when the party started behaving like others in wooing industrialists with lands of poor peasants. It is an object lesson to the subcontinent's politicians.

This CPM episode must be understood. Only he who does something concrete for the poor and the needy will win in the end. Those who do not do so will lose. This is the best way to conquer any territory, and the conquest will last indefinitely if the conqueror is not stupid or needlessly greedy. The old rebels become the new People's army and go on to become a bigger and stronger state.

But the process can be reversed just as easily. But it is contingent on one big condition. The state has to be intelligent and well informed. Stupid states are fated to fail and come to grief. All a government or a state has to do is what the rebels promise -- in substance and not in form only. But ownership of land is the core issue in most places.

In populous South Asia, unemployment and overpopulation make for a combustible situation. Fulfillment of the promise of a job or ensuring other means of livelihood does the same for urban people that guerillas have done for the landless in the countryside.

The state can always do much more than the rebels. It can ensure personal freedoms as well as provide some kind of a social security, together with genuine land reforms, while ensuring impartial justice.

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TRIBUTE

Mukul Bhai and those Chhampatra days

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

M.R. Akhtar Mukul's place in Bangladesh's history was assured in the course of our twilight struggle against the state of Pakistan in 1971. And, of course, those times were also our *annus mirabilis*. They were because of the epic battle Bengalis of all classes and all professions and all religious persuasions waged against the Pakistan occupation army. Armed with the spirit and courage drilled into us by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and inspired by the fierce resistance put up by the Mujibnagar provisional government to Pakistan's predatory acts, all of us, beyond the country and inside it, went to war to reclaim history and culture.

Mukul was a frontline soldier in that war. No, he did not carry a

weapon. He was not on the fields of battle. He did not blow up bridges or shoot down Pakistan's marauding soldiers. Then again, he did all of that. His war was a metaphor. There being ample instances of wars being waged through words, through the magic of the radio, Mukul knew what he had to do. It was his feverish mind at work, a process of thought that forever seemed to be energized by an infusion of ideas. And that was how he went into giving shape to *Chhampatra*, that seminal programme on Shwadin Bangla Betar which was to capture the imagination of seventy five million battling Bengalis. Day in and day out, with rarely any absence, Mukul churned out words and thoughts which not only demonstrated his rapidly evolving thoughts

on the war but also provided Bengalis with renewed ideas about the need to push the enemy into the sea. *Chhampatra* was essentially a one-act, one-man play where that one man became many men, indeed turned into so many freedom fighters.

All these years after that tragically beautiful war, the image of Chhokku Mia, that inimitable voice of freedom and wit Mukul forged in *Chhampatra*, remains part of the Bengali historical consciousness. Chhokku Mia's locale is old Dhaka; his dialect is old Dhaka and yet in his perceptions of the war it is an entire nation that speaks. *Ekgada peek phalaya Chhokku Mia kollo*... that was how the young man came to us. Indeed, with his inflections of language, with his deliberate attempt to be condescending to the Pakistanis,

Mukul became Chhokku Mia. Once he did that, he brought into the character all the sarcasm, all the ridicule he could muster against the mighty and the wicked in Pakistan. Yahya Khan was endlessly the inebriated dictator presiding over the genocide of a nation; Zulfikar Ali Bhutto could not but be *Larkana's nawab*, *Ehia'r ek gelaasher dosto*, *pyaare Zulfikar Ali Butto*.

And Pakistan's soldiers? The smallest of sounds set them scattering, with many of them ruining their trousers in the process. *Okko-re bashonti rong oiya gelo gaa*, as Chhokku Mia would report gleefully, with that well aimed spitting out of the *paaner peek*. Speaking of sounds, Mukul sent his audience rolling into waves of laughter with the deep-throated *dhaaeen*,

ostensibly to imitate the sound of a bomb explosion. It was nothing of the sort, but it did go a long way to put across to us the gradually rising fear among the Pakistanis of the Muktis, as they called them in their various states of nervousness.

That was Mukul Bhai for us. He was a light on our dark, tortuous path to freedom, one of the many stars that held out hope for us. He was the Chhampatra man. And he was much more. A writer, a book lover, a raconteur, a media man, a full-blooded secular Bengali, he saw the twilight descend on his life on a June day five years ago. An age came to a swift, sad end.

(M.R. Akhtar Mukul died on 26 June 2004)

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