

Smart schools and globalisation

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SMART School concept is comparatively a new idea an institutional framework in the field of education, especially at school level, in Bangladesh. Bangladesh government has taken an initiative to introduce ICT in education and ICT education at secondary level.

The purpose of this initiative is to ensure a vibrant and effective teaching learning environment for a student to cope as a future global citizen. ICT gives students better understanding in a systematic way, makes learning more interesting and enjoyable and motivates them to more practice self-managed learning, while teachers tend to be more creative and innovative in their teaching methods.

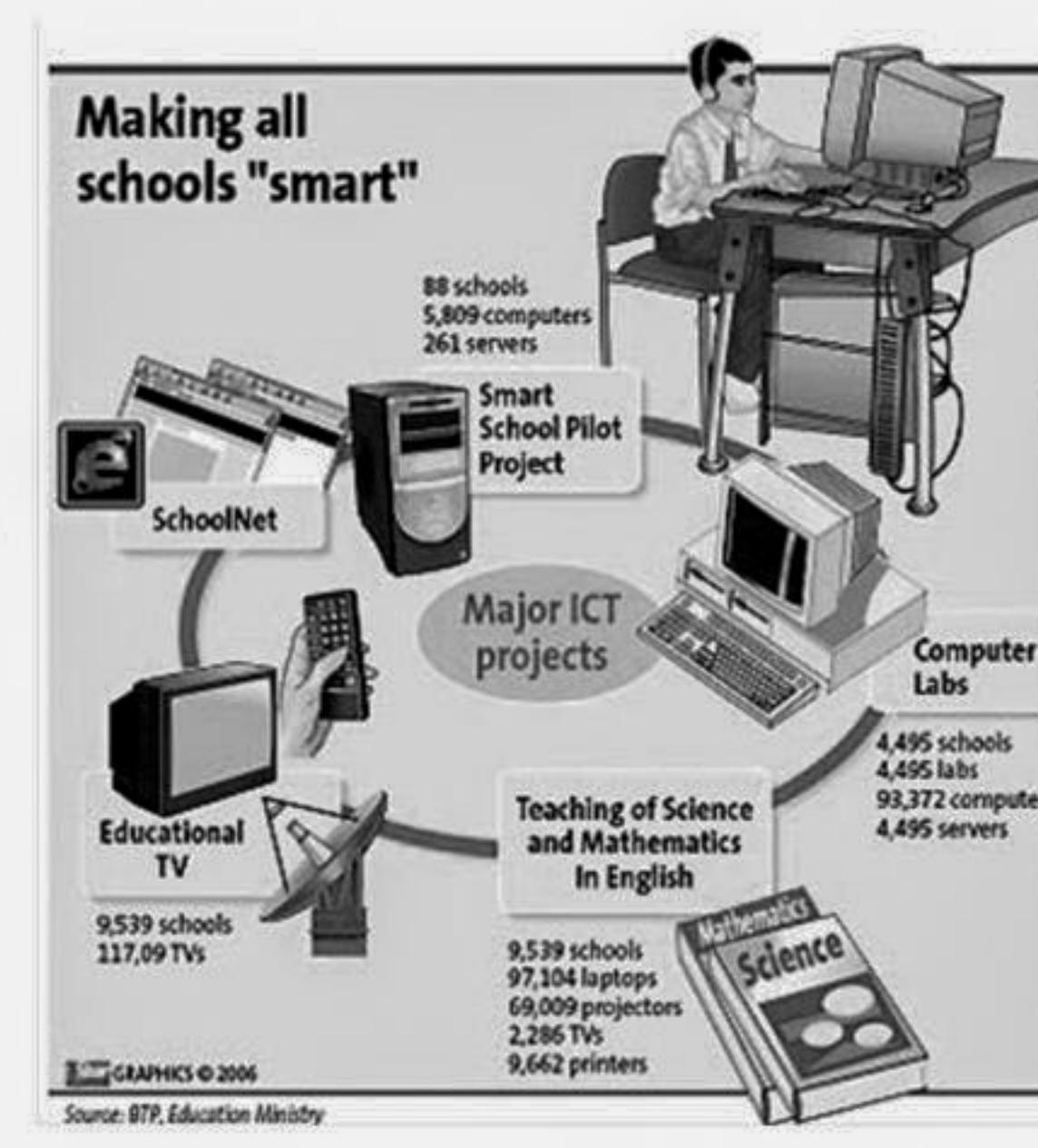
Using ICT in classrooms can give students knowledge in order to be prepared to accomplish the country's vision of becoming a middle-income country by 2021. The government has formulated Education Policy 2010 and shows the utmost commitment to implement it.

ICT is the key enabler in democratising education through communicating the learning aspiration to all the students. The main intention of the government is to provide opportunity to all students to practice technology utilisation in teaching learning environment to face the challenges of globalisation.

Quality education depends largely on smart schools. Teachers and students jointly participate in teaching learning in a school environment. Teachers play an important role in effective teaching learning. Improving the quality of teaching learning environment to cope with the world is major agenda of Bangladesh.

Smart schools ensure quality education and congenial teaching learning environment. They help students develop themselves as global citizens. The school level is very important because at this level the foundation for future life is built, but most teachers face numerous problems while teaching and a majority of them are unable to manage a classroom effectively.

Rural areas and the disadvantaged and poorer segments of the population lack proper education system. Virtual interactive classroom (VIC) is totally absent in rural Bangladesh. A good number of first generation learners from disadvantaged families live in rural areas and fulfilling their dreams depends on effective teaching learning environment at school. Most schools in rural areas are privately managed and newly established comparatively. There is a



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crying need for adequate number of computers and availability of electricity for the comprehensive use of ICT in teaching learning.

School education is one of the most important and biggest sub-sectors in our education system, having a huge number of institutions and teachers. Most teachers at the school level don't have computer literacy. The Gross Enrolment Rates in primary schools is 99.47% and dropout rate is 21% (2011), but in secondary schools enrolment rate is less and dropout rate is comparatively high. Both levels are quite large and the government is putting emphasis on these levels to convert the huge population into a work force.

Knowledge is fundamental to becoming global and globalisation has a profound impact on the transmission of knowledge that consequently calls for major transformations in all education systems all over the world.

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Development in electronic communication resulted in the breakdown of geographical and cultural barriers that further facilitates the process of social change impinging on every aspect of human existence.

In Bangladesh, the educational system and curricula are focusing on national and global context. Nowadays our education system is moving away from memory-based learning to education that stimulates thinking, creativity, caring, catering for individual abilities and learning styles. In other words, we are searching for a meaningful, socially responsible, multicultural, holistic and technological curriculum besides looking for a more global way to improve the quality of education focusing on values, attitudes and behaviour in a society full of diversity, especially in terms of race and culture.

Bangladesh allocates 2.6% of its total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for education sector while other South Asian countries allocate up to 6% of their GDP in this sector. Budgetary allocation in education sector in Bangladesh is only 11%. Only 5% people are under the purview of internet.

Among 19,040 secondary schools 4,714 don't have electricity connectivity. At primary level situation is more vulnerable. Connectivity and accessibility of internet are major preconditions for ensuring effective teaching learning. In this case, we are lagging behind.

Teacher-led digital content development training programme has been adapted nationwide. Teachers are being trained and encouraged to conduct classes using multimedia and projector. National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has introduced digital text books. The government has taken a challenging initiative to ensure electricity in all secondary schools. Solar panels are going to be introduced in schools in remote areas.

There are four important elements in smart schools -- Smart Learning, Smart Teaching, Smart Assessment and also Smart use of Technology. It is a matter of great regret that we do not have all four elements, especially Smart use of Technology. The government is committed to ensuring one multimedia and one projector at every school. It is trying to promote smart schools as an important factor for ensuring quality education and creating congenial teaching learning environment to help the students develop themselves as global citizens.

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In a blind alley

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THE state of Pakistan has been pushed into a blind alley and it is at the same time under attack from hardliners of more than one brand. Nobody knows what tomorrow holds for the people although it is unlikely to be anything good.

It is not clear as to what extent Dr. Tahirul Qadri, chief of Tehrik-i-Minhajul Quran, will succeed in stealing Ziaul Haq's legacy of an anti-democratic pseudo-religious order from its traditional keepers, but he certainly represents a phenomenon that will keep haunting Pakistan if belief continues to be allowed to pollute the stream of representative governance.

The expedition against Islamabad and the killing of Hazara Shias in Quetta are two sides of the same coin and neither will yield to quick-fix remedies, such as the one tried in the case of Balochistan.

The dismissal of the Balochistan ministry, following a marathon protest by the Hazara Shias in Quetta and by their supporters across the country, was the inevitable result of the federal authority's ostrich-like policy of courting disaster through sheer indecisiveness.

The Hazara Shias of Quetta have been victims of targeted killings since 1999 and of mass killings since 2003. No less than 24 incidents in the latter category were reported between August 6, 2003, and September 20, 2011. In four massacres, the number of deaths ranged between 26 and 63. The highest death toll (63) prior to last Thursday's outrage was recorded on September 3, 2010, when a Yaum-i-Quds procession was attacked by a suicide bomber in Quetta city.

In most cases the culprits were not caught, despite the fact that their identity -- or at least the identity of the militant party behind them -- was no secret. The authorities were aware of at least one public announcement of a banned outfit's resolve to "finish off" the Hazara Shias. A few persons were tried and convicted of attacks on the Shias but the way a most notorious criminal, who had been sentenced to death, was allowed to escape from a high-security prison convinced the Hazara community that the authorities were covering up for the killer gangs if not colluding with them.

Losing faith in the local administration and the provincial government's ability to protect them a large number of Hazara Shias closed down their businesses, sold their properties and sought asylum in far away lands. Many of them drowned while trying to reach Australia in rickety boats.

The provincial government did nothing to stem the wave of Hazara Shias' organised extermination and by and by its helplessness became obvious not only to the victims but also to any other party that cared to study the situation. And the federal government invited censure for failing to find out the reasons behind the provincial government's flabbiness, to say nothing of its responsibility to help the latter in meeting the crisis.

Thus, the Hazara Shias' decision to stage a sit-in and put off the burial of the dead bodies till their demand for handing Quetta over to the army was met should be seen in the context of the grievous losses they have suffered and their frustration at the denial of justice for over a decade. Besides shock and anger at the highest death toll in a single incident, several factors helped them steel their resolve to take a stand.

We are witnessing the worst forms assumed by attempts to force a theocratic dispensation on a people whose culture does not allow it. These efforts sometimes take the form of armed militancy and sometime beguile the people with populist mumbo-jumbo. In either case politicians can be pushed into oblivion by charlatan chameleons. What a horrible prospect.

First, the provincial ministry showed diligence in turning itself into a laughing stock. Only a few were amused by Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Umran's unending diatribes against the chief minister and his government. The chief minister did get rid of the speaker (quite a bizarre affair) but suffered a loss of moral ground. At the same time, the federal government continued to enlarge its trust deficit with the people. Above all the vulnerability of the Raisani ministry became clear to everybody when the Supreme Court signed a warrant for its execution.

Faced with the nationwide protest against the January 10 massacre the federal government found itself without any rational options and was obliged to sack the Raisani ministry. While taking this decision the federal government apparently forgot that the logic of the action against the Balochistan government could be applied to itself as well. This deci-

sion is unlikely to win favour with the democratic opinion, in the long run if not immediately.

The dismissal of an elected government is always bad as other ways of dealing with an inefficient or corrupt ministry are available. The PPP could have asked its follower occupying the chief minister's chair to step down or advise dissolution of the Assembly -- a course of action that was warranted by political reality all along in the post-2008 Balochistan.

Besides, the ministry's dismissal implies its ability to deal with the Hazaras' exterminators if it had wanted, a premise apparently not maintainable. Indeed, those who know anything about the situation in Balochistan have long been complaining that power has never been transferred to the civilian politicians in that province. Putting the destiny of the people of Balochistan in the hands of Frontier Corps sounds like a painful and costly joke.

The sense of discipline and resoluteness displayed by the Hazara Shias, especially the bereaved families who even refrained from burying the dead for quite a long time, certainly commands respect and admiration. But were they right in calling for the city to be handed over to the army? This demand surely offered a measure of their despair and frustration. Unfortunately, there have been situations in Pakistan when the people have been so fed up with the powers that be that they cry out for "anything but this" and rush to prefer expediency to principle.

In their moment of unbearable grief the Hazaras were perhaps not open to argument and one only hopes that they, and anyone else sharing their views, will realise the price Pakistan has paid for welcoming military intervention in political matters. And the immorality of the idea itself.

The main problem we face is the fallacy of treating the killing of Shias (not only in Quetta but also in Gilgit-Baltistan, Kurram Agency and Karachi) as the work of ordinary criminals, who can be dealt with by the strong arm of law, whereas this is one of the symptoms of the state's progressive surrendering of its democratic ideals in favour of obscurantists and pseudo-religious militants. We are witnessing the worst forms assumed by attempts to force a theocratic dispensation on a people whose culture does not allow it. These efforts sometimes take the form of armed militancy and sometime beguile the people with populist mumbo-jumbo. In either case politicians can be pushed into oblivion by charlatan chameleons. What a horrible prospect.

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SHIFTING IMAGES

The dream weavers



RECENTLY I happened to be at a social event where the conversation veered towards the new US fiscal plan, which would result in a tax hike for the top 2%. An informed and lively discussion ensued until a young, successful business entrepreneur griped: "The Obama administration's tax policy acts as a disincentive for many like me who came to this country to pursue the 'American Dream.' I worked hard for my success -- my dream home, my comforts and privileges. Why should I be made to pay for someone else's healthcare and social security benefits?"

The remark generated both support and opposition and gradually the congenial conversation turned into a heated debate.

For some reason the words "American Dream" lingered on in my mind. I asked myself: What is this seemingly seductive concept, which is bandied around by millions of Americans as well as aspiring immigrants? The phrase is in fact used quite loosely and means different things to different people.

The prevalent interpretation seems to be that America is a land of opportunities that provides unfettered prospects for material success in terms of mega mansions, posh cars, and private school education for kids and family vacations in trendy resorts. But, I wonder, if the promise of material wealth is the main component of the American Dream.

Or, is it an ideological concept that is expected to yield collective benefits for all citizens?

I decided to delve a bit deeper into the root of the term. Surprisingly, the major documents drafted by the founding fathers do not allude to the American Dream. It was historian James Truslow Adams who popularised the phrase in the 1930s, in his book *The Epic of America*. However, Adam's narrative did not only focus on the material aspect of the dream, he referred to the dream that the Puritans aspired for when they fled religious persecution in England and came to America hoping for a "better richer and happier life for all our citizens, of every rank."

Today, the phrase has morphed into a "wealth-based" concept, which primarily means striking it rich or leapfrogging into an affluent lifestyle. The unfortunate consequence of this recalibration is that the American Dream has been reduced to a form of raw consumerism for personal benefit. The concept of public good and shared happiness for "all" is no longer part of the equation.

As a matter of fact, even the idea of the state offering

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affordable healthcare to all American citizens is now considered "socialistic!"

The substantive change in the perception of the American Dream partially occurred during the economic boom of the '80s, '90s and early 2000s. The robust economic growth reinforced the notion that the average American could transit into a wealthy lifestyle, provided he was prepared to work hard and be innovative.

Other key variables required for success like talent, skills and infrastructural support were de-emphasised. In addition, the conventional wisdom that the rich and successful need to contribute via taxes to build a society where the less privileged could also realise their dreams was considered passé.

The impact of the changed philosophy was sharply felt in the run up to the 2012 presidential elections. President Obama was roundly criticised for his campaign stance that the rich should pay more taxes because their success is in large part due to the support system that others have "helped to create!" Whatever the president's critics may say, it's a fact that taxes fund public goods like roads, bridges and schools which play a critical role in helping citizens realise their life's goals.

President Obama is a living testimony of the fact that these easily accessible services are what make this a land of immense possibilities for everyone. As he, himself, put it: "Only in America is my story possible!"

In conclusion, it is only fair to point out that the hardcore materialistic interpretation of the American Dream is not only confined to the United States. Today, in almost every country dreams and aspirations are rapidly becoming synonymous with individual material gains.

Even communist China is beginning to succumb to conspicuous consumption as evidenced by the mushrooming of high-end designer stores, luxury cars and mega homes. There is nothing wrong with acquiring wealth and aspiring for a more affluent life than enjoyed by previous generations. But unfortunately, this trend is accompanied by the attitude that the rich and successful have limited responsibility toward creating a more equitable society.

As a result opportunities for upward economic and social mobility have been restricted leading to a widening gap between the rich and the poor. More disturbingly, there has been an upsurge of social friction and frustration.

If these tensions exacerbate there is a real danger that the much sought after dream may turn into a nightmare!

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank.