but by 1985 they were close to two-thirds of all university students. Conversely, the Chinese had been about 56 percent of the student population in 1966, and 20 years later their numbers had shrunk to 29 percent. One by-product of the 1971 law is that non-Malay Malaysians (Chinese and Indians) have started their own private universities, and they account for the largest percentage of students in all private institutions. Since the late 1990s, however, a meritocracy system for entry to public universities has been implemented.

There is an increase in the desire for more academic or individual autonomy, a greater say in the governance of the institution, and an increased role for research.

Funding

The government is increasingly desirous of the public universities finding income from other sources than simply the ministry. The corporatization of state-controlled universities since 1987 allowed public universities to find alternative sources of income. Although the ministry still accounts for over 80 percent of all operational funds, the public universities are functioning in ways akin to other tertiary institutions throughout the world. The universities are trying to increase their economic development and research capacities. As with what has occurred in Australia, one fiscal bonanza is international postgraduate students. These students pay full fees. The result is that Malaysia currently has students from over 150 countries and the intent is to increase their representation. The assumption is that a relatively stable and safe Muslim nation has the potential to attract many Muslim students from the Mideast and elsewhere. Further, the language of instruction in many classes is English, which makes the country's postsecondary institutions attractive to English speakers. China is also seen as a country with a great number of students who might be attracted to their Southeast Asian neighbor.

Centralization vs. Decentralization

The control of public institutions has been in the hands of the ministry throughout the country's history. Over the last decade there has been an increased call for greater institutional autonomy, and the current prime minister has agreed that the universities should have a bit more power. It remains to be seen how much power a vice chancellor and the faculty have and how free they are to set the direction for an institution. The government is in a bit of turmoil right now, having lost its two-thirds majority for the first time in its history. The result is that postsecondary educational reform is not a top priority for the government.

Public universities also continue to increase the number of faculty with a doctorate; no institution has less than 50 percent of the professoriate with a terminal degree. Most of the faculty have received their doctorate from the United Kingdom, Australia, or the United States. There is an increase in the desire for more academic or individual autonomy, a greater say in the governance of the institution, and an increased role for research.

Conclusion

As with the rest of the world, education is seen as a key vehicle to increase the wealth of individuals and the economic well-being of society. Even though employment for college graduates is often difficult, the assumption is that a high school certificate will no longer be sufficient for gainful employment. The result is that a great deal of ferment is occurring in the country with regard to the nature, focus, control, and size of Malaysian higher education. In this light, Malaysia is a dynamic example for trying to understand the changes that are taking place worldwide within and across segments of the higher education system. ■

Efforts to Reconstruct Afghan Higher Education

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In 2003 higher education in Afghanistan was made up of 18 universities, with 34,000 students in a country of about 27 million people. Half of the institutions merited the title "university," the rest were just places of postsecondary training. However, the number of highly qualified academic instructors had already grown exceptionally. Returnees from the West, Iran, and Pakistan and graduates from the former Soviet Union challenged the resident faculty who had survived the regimes since 1976, when the 30-year war began.

Today, 20 public universities are registered, 9 private institutions are seeking accreditation, while one (the American University of Afghanistan) has been functional since 2006. There are about 100,000 students enrolled, many more women have been admitted, and from the outside the system seems to be surviving. At a closer look, however, this system is at a critical crossroad.

After 2002, there was some immediate progress under the liberal, well-educated Higher Education Minister Mohammad Sharif Fayez, who is an eminent scholar in comparative literature and knows the West from his exile in Washington, DC. He encouraged local and foreign experts to assist in urgent drafting of legislation. The German Rectors' Conference and the German Organization for Academic Exchange helped to establish a rectors' conference in Afghanistan and UNESCO assisted in drafting a master plan.

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Backlash

Only when President Hamid Karzai refused to sign the law, wanting parliament to vote on the legislation, the misery began. Fayez was dismissed, and his successors were conservative enough to return to prewar legislation or to copy the occupation rules from the Soviet period. The backlash was imminent on all levels, despite considerable international help and the high potential of returnee scholars. The rectors' conference was stopped, student participation and freely elected rectors belong to the past, and the country is about to lose ground again in the international higher education community.

Public higher education is hardly breathing within a restrictive bureaucracy. The former minister Fayez is now the founding president of the American University of Afghanistan. Other private institutions are needed to meet the demand for teachers, midlevel executives, lawyers, and other professionals. Arts and social sciences have yet to be reintroduced or initiated. A research base is required in most disciplines, while the basic equipment is still deficient. Academic freedom, social protection for students and faculty, a sustainable and effective undergraduate coursework, and an interface with international standards are still missing, despite considerable efforts by the US Agency for International Development; German, Japanese and other countries' aid; and some support by the World Bank. Yet, many reformers seek international assistance without the help or blessing of the ministry. Exchanges with foreign universities and some aid programs have become a certain routine. A few campuses are being renovated, but the lack of maintenance and basic equipment continues. The ministry is trying to cut the tiny blossoms of autonomy and accountability within the institutions. There is a mixed situation after five years of reconstruction.

Outlook

Hopefully, the experience of academic freedom and average social and cultural environments of good universities will have a stronger impact on the returning faculty members and some students than the manifold attempts to radicalize the religious and other authoritarian influence at all levels of society in Afghanistan. The facts are simple: higher education is, apart from the new national army and some sectors of business, the only way to escape the vicious circle of poverty, illiteracy, and the war economy. Furthermore, demands for low levels of tertiary education—such as community colleges and undergraduate or professional and vocational training—become stronger by the day. These factors may prove to be the only exit from the Taliban insurgence return or another large-scale exodus of skilled Afghans.

The war zone covers about half the territory but for most people, security is not at the top of the agenda. Most people are concerned with clean water, energy, employment, and education. Of course, the Afghans need well-trained security forces and police for protection. This is why international troops will also be needed for a long time to train local police and the national military. However, secondary education, teacher training, basic expert education in agriculture, technology, social work, and social science are most urgently needed to fulfil all the priorities. Money is needed for dormitories (especially for women), teachers' salaries, teachers' social protection, and for a high level of international participation.

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The United States bears the biggest part not only of the war against the Taliban and insurgents but also involving civil reconstruction. While US efforts could be better allocated, the rest of the international community must share the task of building Afghanistan's new society. Countries need to disburse the pledges made over the years, less than 45 percent of which have ever been fulfilled. What the country requires is material support and solidarity. ■