

Editorial**How to Check Brain Drain from Pakistan****Dr. Azhar Masud Bhatti**

Editor in Chief

Most of Pakistani students going abroad for higher, or specialized, education every year, very often never return to their homeland. Though Pakistan has a number of institutions for higher education, various students prefer going abroad.

Presently, there are 68 public universities and 56 private universities in Pakistan. Eight public and 18 private institutions have a degree-awarding status. According to a BBC report, Gallup-Pakistan survey indicates that not only qualified professionals and university graduates want to leave the country, but even semi-skilled and unskilled workers want to migrate in search of better prospects. About 62 per cent of the adults interviewed for the survey expressed the desire to go abroad to work, while 38 per cent say that they would prefer to settle permanently outside the country. This shows that many Pakistanis are gradually losing faith in the country's economic future. Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) statistics of July, 2007, show that the total number of Pakistani students enrolled in the UK was 9,335 in 2006-2007, with 6,205 students in postgraduate and 3,130 in undergraduate courses. The number increased to 9,840 in 2007-2008, out of which 6,550 Pakistani students were postgraduate and 3,290 were under-graduate.

There are mainly two types of students who go abroad: First are our absolute brightest and most talented students; they generally go to elite schools and are fortunate enough to not only attain the best education the country or even the world has to offer, but also to excel at it. These students set their sights on the world's best universities such as Cambridge, Harvard, Yale or Oxford. While not everyone makes it, they still wind up going abroad to their "safe choices" of universities, which might not be great but are still outside of Pakistan. It is not just about education, but also about a lifetime experience. They either get scholarships, or their parents are able to arrange for their expenses on their own, while a few struggle to find other ways.

The elite educational institutions charge them heavily for their "services" to enable them to make this journey, often making false transcripts and writing fabricated stories about them as recommendations.

One often sees advertisements of these schools boasting about how many students they got admitted to universities abroad. Many of these students do hope to come back to Pakistan after attaining their education and changing things, but frankly that seldom happens.

The second type is made up of students who are from middle or even lower middle class. These students have not had a chance to obtain a quality education, nor have

their financial circumstances allowed it. These students have a dream of going abroad, not primarily to study, but also to work, to sustain themselves and, perhaps, send some money back home. Lured by dreams of a utopia abroad, they become victims of "agents" who, in the interest of making money, send these students to mediocre/low level or even non-existent universities. They mostly end up staying illegally abroad, away from their families and are forced to do menial labour jobs at low wages.

According to Ali Moeen Nawazish, the Youth Ambassador of the Geo/Jang Group, the mass demand for going abroad is primarily fuelled by a lack of opportunities both in number and quality in Pakistan. The favourite destinations of the students are situated mainly in Europe, North America, China and Australia. Every year, nearly 10,000 foreign student visas are granted in Pakistan. There are nearly 10,000 Pakistani students studying in the United Kingdom. All in all, between 2004 and 2008, as many as 42,000 Pakistani students were admitted into the UK. As of 2010, there were 5,222 Pakistani students in the United States, putting Pakistan among the top 25 countries sending students to the US. There are some 1,000 Pakistani students in Cuba, all of whom are studying medicine on scholarships provided by the Cuban government. There are over 2,000 Pakistani students of medicine in the Central Asian state of Kyrgyzstan. China also attracts a large number of students from Pakistan, with 2006 estimates putting their number well over 1,000; in Xinjian alone, there are over 500 Pakistanis in universities. Another most favoured destination for Pakistani students is Australia. There were 1,626 Pakistani students in Australia in 2005; in entirety, some 5,000 Pakistani students chose the country for studies in 2011.

There is another aspect of the issue also, and that is the brain drain. We are losing our best brains to the developed nations fast, and it is unfortunate that no serious steps are being taken to check the trend. Successive governments have made no well-thought-out policies in this regard. The government does not persuade Pakistani students to come back and serve their country. They are not offered proper jobs, according to their qualifications. According to a British Council report in July 2009, the driving force for all Pakistanis to study overseas is increased employability in a competitive marketplace. This whole map shows that in coming years, people aged between 18 and 38, the age when people prefer to study and make their careers, the trend will continue. There is no denying the

fact that the Higher Education Commission (HEC) is a success story when it comes to the provision of higher education in Pakistan, and it has changed the higher education landscape in the country. However, the government also needs to cooperate more with the HEC in terms of funding. Reducing this brain drain is pivotal for the development of the country as a whole. We need more universities to accommodate the increasing number of students. The HEC needs to ensure quality and regulate higher education especially in private sector 'business oriented' universities. There also needs to be an effort towards excellence in research, which is an inherent university feature which we clearly lack in Pakistan. We also need to look to industry to create employment for our graduating students and the government to ensure fair wages.

Pakistan's neighbouring country, India, is a clear success model in this regard as a BBC documentary

showed that most Indian students now prefer to stay in India for higher education than going abroad. This has been fuelled by an intense focus on quality, and a heavy government subsidy for local students, along with employment opportunities. Nobody can say that going abroad to attain an education is wrong; our students should go abroad. But our most talented students not coming back to Pakistan is wrong, especially after having been given the best opportunities in the country. It is sad that those given the best opportunities are not using them to add value to the country and society.

Secondly, there is no point in paying ten times more for the same quality education that is available in Pakistan. Going abroad is not a magical thing where everything will be better than in Pakistan. There is no point for our students to go to mediocre, or low-level, universities abroad when we can provide them better education here in Pakistan.