

Recent trends of student politics of Bangladesh

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Abstract

(Students are the most progressive, articulate, inspired and dynamic segment of the country's population. In the context of Bangladesh, student community has a glorious political history. In the historical Language Movement of 1952, Education Movement of 1962, Six-Point Movement of 1966, Mass Upsurge of 1969 and finally in Liberation War of 1971 students played pivotal role. After the independence of Bangladesh students also played vital role in all democratic movements including nine years' anti- autocratic movement during 'Ershad regime'. Student politics unfortunately has gone into grips of hooligans, thugs and professional criminals. In recent years student politics has become an important issue of national debate. Educationist, political leaders and civil society are of divided opinion- whether students' politics should exist or not. Student politics had become polluted. Students' violence is the common phenomena in higher educational institutions especially in public universities. Records of campus violence in recent years mostly by the ruling party activists crossed all previous records. At the back drop of the government's failure to control its students and youths five top educationist of the country expressed their grave concern through the statement in the press and requested the Prime Minister to keep the students and youths of the ruling party away from the destruction politics and to maintain congenial atmosphere in the educational institutions. At present it is said that there is no idealism in student politics. Student leaders make money from extortion, from selling tender; they control dormitories of the students, the canteens. The majority of the student leaders are no longer students but 'gangsters'- make money from their influence within the campuses. In this article attempt has been made to identify the major reasons behind the polluted and deviated form of the current student politics of Bangladesh. To back the student politics in its track a proposal has also been presented for thinking of the civil society and consideration of the policy makers both in government level as well as university administration.)

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Introduction

Education and educational institutions are closely interrelated. The importance of institutional education is undeniable in achieving the ultimate goal of education. It is not possible for a man to grow up as an all rounded personality without educational institution. It is proved that educated persons have been playing key role in running the state and society. Only the educated people had been given leadership in building the civilization. That is why it has been said that the future of a nation is made in its class rooms. So emphasize is being given in the development of education in almost all the countries of the world. There is no alternative of quality education for human resource development. Along with other elements the congenial atmosphere is essential in the institutions for ensuring quality education. Unfortunately that atmosphere is seriously hampered in the institutions of Bangladesh. For this reason the total activities of education system is being troubled. Quality education is not achieved. Session jam increases day by day, student life is being prolonged, guardians fell in to economic crises for maintaining their kid's expenses. In this article institution means University, University college, Medical colleges etc.

Problems of higher education

Most of the higher educational institutions of Bangladesh faces infrastructural problem severely. Educational activities are being hampered because of the shortage of necessary accommodation. As per student ratio a few institutions have required academic staff. Besides that , there is a serious crises of skilled and equipped teachers. The education system and the educational institutions of Bangladesh have been suffering from various types of problems. These include: weakness in curricula and examination methods, insufficiency in library and laboratory, corruption in education administration, dearth salaries for teachers, insignificant budget for research etc. Recently the problem which overtakes all others is the negative student politics and its criminalized activities. After the 9th parliamentary election, anarchy in the educational institutions seems to be an everyday affair. Most higher education institutions are closed sine die for violence and vandalism created by different sections of student wings. The Universities are turning into a battle field with mediaeval barbarism to kill or cause grievous hurt to fellow students.¹ Hooliganism, hijacking, extortion, robbery, teachers beating, female students harassment, hall occupation, seat possession, tender manipulation, admission trade etc. are the present scenario of our educational institutions. Banner news of the national dailies are usually printed with the criminalized activities of the student leaders and campus violence.

Recent scenario of the campus violence

In 2009, there were at least 141 student violence in different higher institutions which caused 3 students died and 1463 injured. Among 141

clashes 57 were committed due to intra conflict of the student wing of the ruling party, 22 were between Chhattra League and Chattra Shibir, 7 between Chattra Dal and Chattra League and the rest incidents were held among other organizations and student- police conflict.² During the time between January 2009 to June 2010 at least 9 students were killed in different institutions. During this period 4 universities including Rajshahi and Comilla universities had to be closed for 287 days.³ In July – August 2010 more than one thousand violence were occurred in different institutions. At least 10 students were killed in these incidents. Only in the Jahangirnagar University about 60 clashes were held within 19 months.⁴ Establishing the supremacy in the campuses, hall occupation, extortion, tender manipulation, admission trade are the major causes for student violence. A small account of campus violence and a brief description of its causes are stated below.

Causes of the violence in higher institutions

Intra party conflict

One of the main reasons of the recent violence in the institutions is the intra party conflict among the rival groups of the ruling party's student wing. The student leaders want to establish their dominancy in campuses to earn money. They earn money through extortion, tender manipulation, admission trade, seat trade etc. After becoming student leader they own flat, plot, business firm and lead luxurious life. Leaders of ruling party's student wing usually get more privileges to do these criminalized activities. Statistics shows that after liberation the largest number of tragic violence held among the rival groups of ruling party's student wing. In 4 April, 1974 the first heinous event of 'seven murder' starts the denounce chapter of student politics. That was held between the two rival groups of the then ruling party. In 1974 four more students died because of intra party conflict of Bangladesh Chattra League. Joydeep Datta, a Chattra League leader was killed in 21 January, 1995 at Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University because of intra party clash.⁵ After assumption of the power by Bangladesh Nationalist party (BNP) its student wing Jatyotabadi Chattra Dal fell into intra party conflict. In 1992, between 30 August to 4 September within a week 3 students were killed in several intra party clashes. In 15 March, 1993 one Chattra Dal worker of Dhaka University died after 9 days of getting serious wound on his head during a intra party clash.⁶ In the opening days of 1993 Mr. Rezaur Rahman an elected representative (G.S) of a hall of Mymensing Agricultural University was killed in a gun fire attack between two rival groups of Chattra Dal ,the then ruling party's student wing.⁷

After formation the present government of ' Mohajoot' (grand alliance) in January, 2009 Bangladesh Chattra League, the associate

student organization of Bangladesh Awami League, main party of Mohajoot government, made new record in intraparty conflict. Chattra League was seriously criticized for its very desperate attitude and involvement in campus violence. Observing the opinion of civil society and mass people Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on protest withdrew her position as the organizational leader of Chattra League. Despite her resignation the criminalized activities of Chattra League did not decrease even in nominal scale. In Dhaka University, Dhaka Medical College, Chittagong University, Sylhet M.C. College and in other institutions several severe violences held among the rival groups of Chattra League. Within one and a half year of the present government 9 students were killed of which 6 killed in intra party clashes of student wing of ruling party Awami League.⁸

Intolerant attitude towards opposite organization

In a democratic state, there should be an ample opportunity to exercise different ideologies. It is expected that this type of opportunity must be protected in higher educational institutions. But unfortunately in the institutions of Bangladesh this opportunity usually does not exist. Like the parochial political culture of broad sphere, in institutions there is a few understanding and respect to opposite student organizations. All student organizations do not get equal scope to perform their activities. Dominant organization always try to check the small or opposite ideological organizations. As a result clashes are being held among the organizations for maintaining their existence. Statistics shows that after liberation most of the period ruling party's student wing dominated Dhaka University. With the change of government ruling party's student wing drives out leader-workers of opposition organizations. In Dhaka, Rajshahi, Jahangirnagar, Chittagong University and some other institutions all organizations cannot do their activities openly and deliberately. Within some days of the formation of present government Chattra League established its dominancy in almost all higher institutions. To establish their supremacy they drove out the opposition workers from campuses forcefully. In March 2009 Sharifuzzaman Nomani, secretary of Chattra Shibir, Rajshahi University unit was brutally killed in a clash held between Chattra League and Chattra Shibir. In February 8, 2010 another violent incident was held in the same campus between Chattra Shibir and Chattra League when Chattra League worker Faruk was killed. His dead body was rescued from a manhole. In February 11 to April 16 of 2010 within two months three meritorious students were killed at Chittagong University campus by rival student groups.⁹ In March 11, 1982 two Shibir workers – Ayub Ali and Abdul Jabbar were killed between a clash of Chattra Shibir and Chattra Sangram Parishad led by Chhatra league.¹⁰ In February 9, 1989 Kapil Uddin a

Chattra League (JSD) leader was killed in a clash in front of ‘Modhu’s canteen’ between Chattra Dal and Chattra Sangram Parishad. In February 25, 1990, Chunnu, a Chattra League leader and Vice President of Jahurul Haque Hall students’ Union was killed in a violent incident between Chattra League and Chattra Dal. In December 19, 1999 Mahmudul Haque and Rahimuddin – two Shbir workers of Chittagong University were killed in a violent attack by opposite student organization.¹¹ In December 22, 1990 Farukuzzaman a worker of left organization of Chittagong University died in a violent clash between Chattra Shibir and All Parties Student Unity. Chattra Dal leader Musa and Chattra League leader Ali Murtuza of Chittagong University were killed outside the campus by the terrorists. Both organizations claimed that Chattra Shibir was the responsible for those killing.

Monetary affairs cause

Scope of illegal income in the campuses is another important cause for campus violence. Through establishing dominancy student leaders earn money by extortion, tender manipulation, seat trade, admission trade etc. For this purpose some leaders form special terrorist group with their own cadres. Leaders use these groups for their illegal earnings. Sometimes several groups exist in one organization. Conflict arises when one group put share in another group’s interest. Sometimes one group does not hesitate to kill the members of another group in this connection. Recently Jahangirnagar University became in the top of the list for campus violence. According to some sources, the main cause behind the violence was to gain the leadership for getting tender or extortion from Tk.10 core budget of new hall building.¹² Causes for the rivalry among the Chattra Dal leaders of Jagannath University were- admission in exchange of money, answer script writing, controlling the Sadarghat terminal, establishing the dominancy to extort from local people.¹³

Student leaders earn thousands taka through admission trade. Especially leaders of ruling party’s student wing enjoyed ‘a special quota ‘for 1st year admission in some renowned government colleges. Recently Principals of different colleges were harassed for not fulfilling admission quota. More than one violence were occurred in Dhaka College, one of the best college in the country in this connection.¹⁴ 452 resident students were to leave Halls because of extortion and seat trade.¹⁵ A number of V.C, Provost, Proctor and teachers became under physical attack when they could not materialize student leaders’ illegal demands.¹⁶ During one and a half year (from January 2009 to August 2010) at least 11 teachers were harassed in Dhaka University campus. Three teachers of Barisal B. M College were physically assault by Chattra League workers.¹⁷ At least

25 teachers of Jagannath University went under attack within five months by the members of ruling party's student wing.¹⁸

Irresponsible role of the policy makers

Behind the scene of the campus violence and criminalized student politics; ministers of the government and influential leaders of the political parties might have direct or indirect encouragement. Political leaders use the student workers as the ladder to achieve the power. To create influence in the party politics and to use muscle in the election leaders formed own cadre groups. This personal group is usually constituted with the present and former members of the student organization. Sometimes speeches and statements of the central leaders encourage their party members especially student workers to be stand up against opposite political party. Sometimes leaders especially leaders of the ruling party make politically motivated statement which go in favor of party terrorist. Being criticized by the civil society and mass people for country wide criminalized activities of student wing the leaders of the ruling party claimed that members of the Chattra Shibir and Chattra Dal penetrated in Chattra League and those infiltrated persons were doing criminalized activities in the name of Chattra League. If the statement was true it was the responsibility of the government to search out and arrest them. But the government did not do that. The terrorists of the Chattra League felt safe side and they were going on with their negative activities. We have observed that despite of repeated warning of ruling party leaders including its secretary general Chattra League did not stop their terrorist activities. Within 5 days of its secretary general's warning Chattra League murdered its one worker -Faruk in Panchagar district in connection of tender manipulation.¹⁹

Formation of the committee undemocratically and irregularly

Another important cause for campus violence is not to constitute the committee in all stages democratically and regularly. Usually chief of two major political parties of the country selects central leadership of their student wing. Central council of the student organizations did not hold regularly and constitutionally. Even though the council held, it does not elect central leadership. The authority to select president and secretary usually has been given to the chief of the main political party. Naturally, opinion of the workers does not reflect on the decision to elect their leadership. Complain raises against leadership for nepotism, regionalism and favoritism. Those who can do strong lobby they could include their name in the committee. Because of grouping skilled and sacrificing leaders could not be included in the committee. Sometimes deserving leaders are excluded and non students (bus helper, seamster, shopkeeper) became the members of the central committee.²⁰ Like central committee,

university committees do not constitute regularly. As for example, the committee of Chattra League Shahjalal University performs duty consecutive 7 years without holding any council.²¹ After end of formal student life student leaders do not leave campus. They stay campus and enjoyed undue privileges until new committee is constituted. Expecting candidate for the post usually fall into conflicts with the old committee members. Therefore violence occurs. If the committee does not form timely, the non student terrorist take the scope and do criminalized activities in the banner of organization and its leadership.

Self contradictory role of the policy makers and want of good will

In minimizing the violence in higher institutions the role of government is very important. Proper and unbiased measurements may decrease violence in campuses. Strong political will of the ruling party and government is necessary in this respect. Ruling party and opposition always want to use their student wing. Ruling party considers it student workers to tackle the opposition. So they cannot be stand up against the negative activities of student leaders. Police know very well the position of the student leaders of ruling party. So they are to hesitate to take proper action against terrorists under the banner of student organization. Some police personnel were harassed and deprived of their due promotion discharging their duties sincerely. According to observers policy makers of the government and political parties are the main savage of students and youth cadre.

Because of admission trade, tender manipulation, extortion, intra-conflict and unethical activities of the Chattra League, Sheikh Hasina Awami League president and the Prime minister became annoyed and resigned from the organizational leader of Chattra League. She avoided student leaders and abstain from attending the programs of her party's student wing. She was considering taking action against 20 central student leaders.²² But Awami League president did not stick on her stand. Within some days she started to join the programs and accept the bouquet from the Chattra League Leaders. For reasons, she failed to take action against black listed student leaders. Above all She expressed her reactions to the senior leaders who criticized the activities of Chattra League in the meeting of central working committee.²³ Her earlier stand against student leaders might check the activities of student organization.

To maintain the congenial atmosphere of the institutions and to keep the students aside from criminalized activities five eminent educationists in a statement requested the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to cut off all direct and indirect relations with Bangladesh Chattra League. In response to that statement the Prime Minister said that why Chattra League was

charged alone for criminalized activities.²⁴ Usually terrorists of the ruling party's student wing might get self satisfaction from the reply of P. M Sheikh Hasina. In fact the statement of five national educationists was not inconsistent with the campus situation. At that time Mr. Obaidul Kadar M.P, the former president of Chattra League and Presidium member of ruling party Bangladesh Awami League said that he felt shame to introduce himself as the former central president of Chattra League.²⁵

Negligence of University authority to control campus violence and indifference to implement the recommendations of the inquiry committees:

In every society there is an existence of good and bad people. Only to give advice is not sufficient to keep the bad citizens away from criminalized activities. There must have process to persecute the criminals through prescribed rules and procedures. To check and control the violent activities university authority should come forward with the help of administration and police forces to implement its proctor rules properly. But university authority cannot implement the rules properly because of political pressure. University is an autonomous organization, but at present V. C, Pro-V. C and other dignitaries are usually appointed on the political basis. Therefore they could not function independently. They are to consider the advice or requests of the ruling party's leaders. Student organization gets privileges in different ways. Sometimes university authority falls in to a shaky position to maintain the government attitudes.

Usually an enquiry committee is formed after violence in campus. But most of the time the report of the committee could not be published due to pressure by the political elites or student organizations. If the report of the inquiry committees could be published and recommendations could be implemented violence might be decreased in the campuses. From a report published in a daily we came to know that 74 killings were committed in Dhaka University for last 37 years but only tk. 10 was fined as punishment for one incident.²⁶

Subservient teacher politics

Teacher politics is also responsible for campus violence. Teachers are involved in party politics under the banner of different groups. These groups are called in the name of color like Blue, White, Pink, Yellow or Green. As for example, teachers of Chittagong University are sharply divided in to two groups. These are Blue group and White group. In deed these two groups represent the two major streams of national politics. It is not objectionable that teachers are involved in politics. But what is not expected that teachers serve the interest of the political party. At present it has become our culture that V.C, Pro-V,C and other members of the

important bodies are appointed considering their activities in the ruling party supporter group.²⁷ Power greedy teachers always maintain close relation with student leaders. Sometimes post expecting teacher/teachers influence one group students to start agitation against incumbent V.C or administration. Consequently clashes occurred between V.C group student and anti V.C students. Usually politically appointed teachers cannot run administration without biasness. Of course there are exceptions that can do judgments of their own.

Student community is the most conscious and effective force in the society. The role of students and youth in any revolution, change, agitation, and struggle is undeniable. All most all developed and underdeveloped countries there are student organization and student politics. But the nature and activities of student organization in Bangladesh is much different than that of developed and other countries. In developed countries students are involved mainly with the academic activities and problems related to students. If necessary, they involve in the activities to solve the national crises. But their major duties are to address the student's needs.

The glorious and historical role of the students of Bangladesh is recognized by all. The role of students in different movements including Language Movement of 1952, Mass Upsurge of 1969, Liberation War of 1971 was significant and meaningful. After Liberation, in all democratic movements students were forerunner. In anti autocratic movement during 1982-1990 students were the main force and the movement became successful after the initiative and efforts of all party students' unity. Unfortunately the glory of student's politics had become defame after student leaders involved in various criminalized activities including extortion, tender manipulation, killings etc. Being annoyed with these activities civil society and conscious people are of opinion to stop student politics for some time. Most of the guardians and students have been demanding the ban of campus politics. A research survey shows that 91% of the respondents (students, guardians, and teachers) opined that student teacher politics should not exists. About 93% of the respondents were of opinion that subservient party politics of teachers and students should be stopped.²⁸ Despite the repeated demand of guardians, students, and civil society student politics has not been banned. The major political parties are using students as their political weapon. As per the role of PRO of 2008 there is no provision of student organization of a particular political party. Nevertheless all major political parties have student wing.²⁹

It is not possible to stop student politics unless the ruling party and oppositions reach in a consensus. Considering our socio-economic and

political context we have to think the issue whether we should ban the student politics or we should take student politics in its own track. To minimize the violence in campuses and to back the student's politics in its own track I would like to place the following proposals for discussion and consideration.

Proposals

1. At present the government must be promise-bound to minimize the criminalized activities of student politics. To check the terrorist government and police administration must play neutral and effective role. Government agencies must do their duties sincerely without any discrimination whether terrorists are belonging to ruling party or oppositions.
2. To stop extortion, tender manipulation, seat trade and other illegal activities University authority could form its own law enforcing force. It may be called 'Campus Police'. The personnel of campus police should be recruited by the university authority special orientation and training should be given to tackle campus violence. They are to know how to behave with the students.
3. To comply with the 'RPO' political parties must stop the direct patron ship and controlling.
4. Political party leaders should not select the central leadership of student organization. Students should select their leadership according to their constitutional process.
5. Non-student should not be the member in the committee. Irregular students should not be selected for the post of President, Secretary. As per constitution council should be held on regular basis.
6. To supervise the activities of the student organization as per their constitutions there should be a monitory cell in the ministry of education or with the University Grants Commission.
7. University and institutional committees should be formed with the regular students. Tenure of the committee should not exceed two terms. Within stipulated time committee must be renewed. Otherwise the activities of that particular organization should be banned.
8. If any violence occurred due to intra-party conflicts the functioning of that party should be suspended for 6 months temporarily.
9. In universities and higher institutions there must have elected student union. We may call it Student Represent Council (SRC). The tenure of the union must be specific. The very day the union expire its tenure it will lose its position automatically.
10. 'Student Union ' could be elected on non party basis. The union will be consisting of the members from four tiers of representatives. These four tiers may be: Department, Faculty, Hall and Central student

union. The SRC should make efforts to identify the problems of the students and try to solve them through proper ways. The council is also responsible to perform the Co-curricular activities to nourish the latent talents of the students.

11. The election process and criteria of the SRC will be determined by the institution authority. Scope should be given to regular students with better results to be elected in the council. Central council may be consisted with 5 members from each hall and at least 3 members from each faculty. The member of constituted council later on will select V.P, G.S and other dignitaries by the secret ballot. Student advisor will be the chief of the SRC.
12. If any student is found guilty for any criminalized activities he or she must be punished as per rule without any discrimination.
13. It is necessary to form a special division to take care the student activities. It may be called Student Affairs Division. One senior and skilled teacher will be the chief of the division. This division shall be the responsible to take plans and implement those for making the students all round personality. It will also take the necessary steps to make the students morally high.
14. All teachers must be sincere and conscious about their responsibilities. Teachers must guide the student maintaining the teacher-student relationship. There should have one day in a week for the students as 'consultation hour'.
15. Tutorial class should be held effectively and meaningfully. Teachers are to know problems of the students of his tutorial class and give suggestions to solve them. Through tutorial process all students may come under direct contact of teachers. No student would be left from the identification in this process. But it needs teacher's sincere activities.

Conclusion

If the government, political parties, university administration, teachers, and student organizations come forward to discharge their duties effectively and sincerity it will not take much time to control the criminalized activities in the campuses. All concerned must be promise-bound to do it collectively. But the government must play pioneering role. If we fail to check violence in the campuses, as a nation we must pay a lot for it. Our future generation will not pardon us for our failure.

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