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# Government, Police And Students

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A government is entrusted with the delicate and difficult task of managing affairs of state, both internally and externally. The duty of Police is to control and regulate affairs effecting the general order and welfare of society. It is widely accepted that students are in the process of a training which prepare them for the future responsibilities of a nation. These three segments of society are separate in orientation and role; but are always found interacting with each other in so many ways. The record of this interacting role of these segments has not always been satisfactory in Bangladesh and for that matter in any developing country of the Third world. Although nobody could envisage a completely idyllic situation, the unsatisfactory experience is also what one would not certainly desire. This is more so in the case of Bangladesh, a country born out of a terrible blood-bath which affected all segments of the society. But we desire it or not, the Government-police-students triangular relationship has so far followed a course not always satisfactory. More often than not students are found on a collision course with forces represented by a combination of government and police. Such a phenomenon is not rare when a colonial rule exists and administration is oppressive. But Bangladesh is an independent nation and administration is not supposed to be oppressive. Then, why is this confrontation? What is really amiss? The discussion that follows would seek to answer these and other related questions and suggests certain remedies.

There are indeed two separate aspects of this very complex phenomenon. On the one hand, there is the oft-repeated complaint by the government, and for that matter by police that confrontational situations are products of student indiscipline and violence. And on the other, we got to reckon with the complaint by the student community of police excesses in the act of regulating law and order and the consequent harrowing atrocities. These two separate phenomena are linked by a causal connection. Any objective explanation should try to find out answers to two questions. First, what causes student indiscipline and violence. Secondly do police excesses really help solve this problem?

The problems that face the students and make them unruly are not unique and isolated from those that convulse and destabilise our society. In this sense, Bangladesh does not really make an exception to all other developing nations. These problems are mainly socio-economic with political manifestations. The break-away from Pakistan was hastened by a desire to build an egalitarian society where the masses would have basic requirements of life fulfilled. But even after thirteen years of independence this goal seems chimeric. Bangladesh has gone down the scale of poverty further and is considered one of the thirty-six Least Developed Countries most affected by adverse socio-economic circumstances. The gap between the rich and the poor has widened; and the ratio of landless poor increased. The post-independence euphoria and increasing frustration have made things further complicated. Tension in such a society is inevitable. Such a social scenario is also marked by an absence of consensus on the fundamental

issues. Wide and divergent views are reflected in the formation of a countless number of political parties always found in competition with each other for power. Absence of a consensus and geometrical growth of political platforms make politics violent and unruly. This is the case of all the Third World Countries. That the so-called big democracy of India is also a part of this scenario has been proved by the violent killing of Indira Gandhi. Anyone closely following Bangladesh politics since 1972 would know what diversion violence has reached. The tenor of this analysis is that frustration and exasperation born out of unresolved socio-economic ills inevitably lead to violence that threatened general law and order and also stability of the society. The unwanted manifestations of sudden behavioural pattern are to be linked to this general socio-economic problem.

The administration or those who manage home affairs would argue that student indiscipline has links with certain problems of the campus and machinations of political parties. But as an explanation I would repeat the argument that these are corollaries to the problems facing the society in general.

If student indiscipline is caused by overwhelming socio-economic problems a confrontational attitude by the authorities would not help. It is certainly not a case where a hard task-master disciplines his unruly students. The police excesses in the past have only widened the gap between the police and the student community. If this trend continues unabated in an independent country future would be critical. As a person involved with the student community for the last eighteen years I take this as a gloomy foreboding for the troubled nation.

What is the way out? Two ways could be suggested: one long-run and the other short-run. The long-run solution presupposes a comprehensive approach to the solution of our socio-economic problems aimed at establishing an egalitarian society. But this cannot be achieved unless a truly representative government holds the reins of power. In the short-run the police could do well in cooperating with authorities of relevant educational institutions for with the incidence of student indiscipline. One fine example of such cooperation is the recent management of college examinations at the University of Dhaka. The examination centres at some of the city colleges for Honours and M.A. final examinations were cancelled for reported unfair means by the students and the inability of the authorities of the colleges in question to check them. The decision of the authorities of the University of Dhaka to hold these examinations under direct supervision at the University was opposed by some misguided students of those colleges by threats and actual acts of violence.

Nevertheless, superb cooperation of the police with members of the staff of the University of Dhaka and the Student Action Committee of the Dhaka University Central Students' Union has made it possible to hold the examinations smoothly under the most difficult circumstances. If

on the contrary, the police had intervened and acted on their own to do the normal job of enforcing law and order in the campus by by-passing the university authorities the result would have been certainly different. I believe instances such as this, if followed in future, would go a long way in enhancing the prestige of the police as a community in the eyes of the saner elements of the student community.

In an independent country all apparatuses of government are meant to serve public interest and not to create circumstances that hinder it. The occasional police excesses in the face of student indiscipline do create circumstances that certainly hinder overall public interest. The law-enforcing authorities are expected to demonstrate utmost restraint even under the most trying circumstances. After all, there are at least more than one ways of dealing with a situation and the least violent way is the most desirable. Both parties stand to gain from such a way. Under such circumstances one should not forget that violence breeds violence.