

To Ban it or Not to Ban it, That's Not the Question

THESE has been an avalanche of reports, opinions, editorials and commentaries in the newspaper pages ever since the Prime Minister made a proposal in the Parliament to ban student politics in the country. Of course, hot debates and exchange of ideas are also taking place in other arenas of both public and private discourses. Although no scientific evaluation of these views and opinions are yet available, perhaps it can be safely surmised that the public sentiment is leaning towards banning student politics rather than streamlining it or leaving it as it is.

Such a near universal disapproval of student politics by all sections of the people indicates how glaringly things have gone wrong with so-called student politics in the country. The reasons are, however, not far to seek. Many of the students or non-students, who are involved in student politics, have long been involved in all kinds of anti-education and anti-social activities. President Shahabuddin is right, more often than not, they carry guns, instead of books.

If newspaper reports are any guide, they are involved in collecting tolls and amassing wealth, adopting unfair means in exams and shattering public properties, disrupting congenial atmosphere in campuses and resorting to armed battles in broad day light. Sometimes they work as hired goons — to

silence the opposition, to defeat rival candidates, to deny others to bid for a tender, and to sustain a reign of terror in the designated areas.

The situation with the Dhaka University is still more horrifying. Anybody familiar with the university knows that the students here play a key role in appointments at coveted positions both inside and outside the campus, they poke their nose in multi-million dollar business deals, and they are adept in transforming burning national issues into non-issues, and non-issues into sensitive national issues.

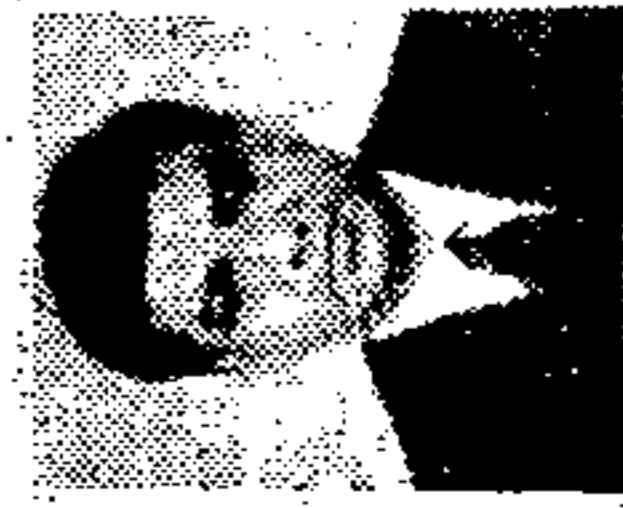
And these king makers and prime beneficiaries of state-induced booties are almost always above the laws of the land. You just can't touch them — they are protected by awfully powerful people, your fingers will be burnt. Therefore, it is not surprising that the members of the public are expressing their almost total disgust with the existing state of affairs with the student politics in the country, and demanding a ban on it, for five to ten years or for an indefinite period.

Without denying or undermining any of the accusations against student politics and without having any sympathy to anybody remotely involved in student politics, this writer,

however, believes that to ban student politics or not to ban that can't be a question in a society that claims to be a democratic one. As the readers of this column may recall, this author also opposes ban on CBAs and trade unions on the same ground.

A democratic society simply does not have such an option — it has to live with the chaos and discords, and orchestrate its

tem, than in a democracy. If students and trade unions can somehow be banned the job of ruling would be much easier — two of the most militant and most powerful groups of the society would lose their voice in the operation of the state-craft. There would be no street agitation as the other forces of the society — the bureaucracy, the military, the business community — simply cannot afford to



by CAF Dowlah

way through the morass so that slowly but surely a stable political system can emerge some day in which everybody, including the students and labourers, will bow their heads to the rule of law.

The position of the ruling party on banning trade unions and student politics is easy to understand. Like any body familiar with the operation of a state-craft, they know that it is always easier to rule in an authoritarian or dictatorial sys-

be that militant. And then, if the press can be silenced on some pretexts, the game of ruling the country would be a fun of the century.

There can be no additional advantage with the banning of student politics in the country except creating a honey-mooning environment for the rulers. This writer, therefore, believes that, like the problems with the trade unions and CBAs, the solution of the problem with the student politics lies with

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cleansing it, not with banning it. A government, having guts and honest commitments to enforce laws of the land, should pick up all students involved in anti-social, anti-educational and other untoward activities, and place them at the disposal of the country's judicial system.

For some reason or other, this is a much difficult job to do in the country than banning the student politics altogether. After all, how can you bring a student before a judge knowing fully well that you supplied him the gun and the license to abuse it? How can you put a student before a trial knowing fully well that it is your money and your backing that provoked him to commit the crime that he has been charged for? How do you put a student on trial knowing fully well that he knows the secrets of your successes and triumphs, your holdings and properties, your appointment and promotion, and your killings and riggings?

The university administrations are equally incapable of handling the students. Key positions in the universities are routinely filled up with persons actively involved in politics. How can a Vice-Chancellor, having total commitment to a political party, convince the students that he is acting neu-

trally? How can the students belonging to other camps accept his integrity knowing fully well that he is in the hands of those who had put him in that coveted position? How can one believe that the VC is not communicating to the students what he has been asked to communicate by others that he has to listen to? No wonder, under the existing system, the institution of VC lost its credibility almost in to.

Therefore, problems are everywhere, diseases are all over the body. The misdeeds of the students or the trade unions are not any bigger, any nastier than those of other segments of the society. Only difference is that the misdeeds or crimes of the other segments of the society are less known or less exposed. Moreover, none should forget that the students and labourers are not aliens in this land, they are parts of this society and their rights are protected by the Constitution of the country as is everybody else's.

Banning student politics or trade unions will not ensure endless flow of milk and honey in the streets. This will only pave the way for an authoritarian or dictatorial rule in the country. Today you ban student politics or trade unions, tomorrow you will kill the freedom of the press. Nothing can be expected from a society that stifles these three forces — their freedom is indispensable for a society that claims faith in democratic development.