

Banning Student Politics

by Alauddin Talukder

MUCH has been said and written about student politics in Bangladesh. Our President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmad, has been vocal and said many good words on banishing student politics from the campus. The President dwelt on 'Godfathers' accusing them of enticing youths, students in particular, into evil deeds like terrorism and killing. "A large segment of the country's youth community, particularly, college-university students, are dabbling in active politics and terrorism", he noted with deep anguish. "Armed with firearms they are capturing halls, killing their rivals by shooting or bombing and being rewarded by their respective godfathers on submission of reports of these misdeeds. All kinds of wrong-doings are now taking place in educational institutions, barring studies."

At Rajshahi University, while speaking on the occasion of its 7th convocation ceremony on Sunday the 29th Nov '98, he said that standard of our education at all levels has degraded to such an extent that our certificates are not accepted in other countries. President Shahabuddin said that student leaders have chosen 'student politics' as a very profitable profession/business. As usual, he has raised yet another serious question asking that - if violent student politics can make them rich and even MPs and ministers, then why should they take the trouble for education?

If such a situation continues in educational institutions, the future of the nation will be gloomy. No civil society can support these evil deeds. It's the responsibility of us all, specially the political parties, to bring these deviated youths back to the right track", the president said.

Our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina went to the United States (1996) to give a talk at Harvard's Fairbank Center for East Asian Research. The Prime Minister was eloquent, as any other visiting foreign dignitary would be, in praising Harvard — one of the top universities in the United States. "Harvard has been, and will always be known for many things: learning, research, excellence, discoveries, values, great achievements and laudable leadership. However, from a distance and at the receiving end of what Harvard

could give to the rest of the world, I believe one word best captures the essence of Harvard: vision," she said. When her attention was drawn to a sharply contrasted atmosphere prevailing in the academic arena back in Bangladesh, and as to whether her government has any plan to suspend campus politics as proposed by the President, the prime minister replied in the negative. "Student politics is not the problem, the problem is terror on campus. We have to make a concerted effort to combat campus terrorism in Bangladesh," Sheikh Hasina suggested. But many Bangladeshis living in and outside the country have reservations about this view of the prime minister. They would rather believe that it is student politics that lies at the root of campus terror in Bangladesh, and hold the politicians squarely responsible for dragging students into politics.

Disgusted by the conduct of the politicians, some who are more explicit on this issue say that they turn the students into front-line party workers and use them in a highly irresponsible manner to advance selfish political agendas. Narrating their personal experiences, they say that the self-seeking politicians care about neither the future of the students, nor the conditions of the poor parents making tremendous sacrifices for the higher education of their sons and daughters. These people say the politicians, on the contrary, do care about the future and well-being of their own off-springs. They send their children overseas to keep them at a safe distance from the dirt and danger of politics and have them brought up with the most advanced education and knowledge.

An important mission of politicians is to build an educated nation, as education is the backbone of a country. Education, indeed, is also the yardstick of civilisation and a key to all-round development. Then why don't the politicians help restore a normal academic atmosphere at colleges and universities across Bangladesh by keeping politics out of the campus? Why do they turn the educational institutions — where peace and calm should always reign for learning and research — into a hotbed of politics instead?