

Students And Drugs

An anti-drug organisation is reported to have found in a one-year study that forty per cent of the youth in Dhaka's student halls were abusing one kind of substance or the other, including cannabis, sleeping pills and addictive cough syrup. Interestingly, the most commonly abused substance, tobacco, which some 55 per cent males and 7.69 per cent females smoke regularly, is not even recognised as a drug. Close to tobacco comes alcohol. Both these substances are understandably at the top of the list for 'status', specially if they are foreign brands. That is hardly surprising.

The tobacco industry for one, had spent, and continues to spend worldwide, billions of dollars for more than a hundred years, to imprint upon people's minds that smoking is synonymous with the good and the great—not to forget glamour. Despite damning evidence of tobacco-related diseases and increasing campaigns against smoking, the industry seems to be winning new smokers every day, particularly in developing countries.

In Bangladesh the tobacco industry is a powerful tax-payer, employer and ubiquitous advertiser-sponsor of fashionable events. No matter how hoarse the anti-tobacco activists may cry, cigarette manufacturers look like winning all the time, seducing new generations into lighting up and staying hooked.

Surveyors found that the most susceptible students were in the early twenties and the percentage of male addicts were alarmingly higher than that of females (55.2 and 7.6 respectively, adding up to over 60 per cent). The study was conducted among 20,681 students living in 32 male and 12 female hostels in Dhaka. It has been indicated that the most self-indulgent are those who are also involved in politics. This, to say the least, is a deadly combination.

The cumulative effects of Bangladesh's pathological politics plus substance abuse, on the physical and moral well-being of these youths, can be gauged from the state of the campus every now and then. It is a sheer waste of resources which an educationally-constrained country like ours tolerates at its own peril.

Considering the fact that the "education" of these youths is being heavily subsidised by the public it is only proper that they be brought under an effective sensitising programme to influence them to give up their expensive and unhealthy habits and get on with their primary duty—to get educated for the nation's sake. Each university student should be made to understand how much it is costing the nation to subsidise his/her lifestyle.

Unsullied youths can be won back for the good of the nation, that is, if they have not sold their souls irrevocably to the underworld. Campaigners against drug abuse should recruit reformed addicts to strengthen their struggle and lend credibility to a wider, high-profile movement to cleanse the country's youth force from the criminalising influences of present-day politics.