

# TEENS and TWENTIES

## The Dirt Under the Carpet

by Zaki Wahhaj

**I**N 1952, the death of four university students triggered a revolution in the then East Pakistan which, 19 years later, changed the lives of 70 million people. Last month, when a student was shot dead in the Engineering University campus, the news was not even on the front pages of our newspapers. What could possibly have happened since the *Chhatra Andolon* that has changed our attitude towards our students and student politics so drastically. Why have we begun to ignore them like dirt under the carpet?

Over the last several weeks, I talked to all sorts of people about "Chhatra Rajniti". My talks ranged from simple conversations with frustrated friends in local universities to formal interviews with people who have played crucial roles in shaping our history. I have read some of the innumerable books written about this issue and spent hours contemplating the problem. I do not think that my activities has made me an expert on the issue. If anything, I have realized that the problem that Bangladesh faces in the political arena has no simple solution. So I won't be arrogant enough to suggest that I have the ultimate answer.

I will point out, however, that there is no shortage of bright and talented people in Bangladesh who understand the problem and are concerned about it. The established intellectual and the common university student are both aware of the challenge we face and are ready to tackle it by the horns. What we need is a united effort. The purpose of this article is to bring the issue to the forefront and establish the basis for some much needed dialogue.

First, there is no denying that the nature of student politics has changed since our liberation. In the past, we were guided by ideology, and there was a common goal towards which we were striving. Few will claim today that student politicians have the same firm beliefs that they had in the past.

Dr M A Matin, a Professor of Mathematics at Dhaka University and a one-time student politician himself find the terms "Chhatra Rajniti" and "ideology" mutually exclusive. "Political ideology is so lacking nowadays that students of different political parties often use the same weapons in their fights," he

says. Of course, in his student days too, there were some student politicians who would do anything for money. But now, the crisis has become almost amusing. During a recent municipal election, Dr Matin was approached by a student leader who politely asked "Sir, will you cast your vote yourself or do you want us to cast it for you?"

Why is the youth community which was once our pride now a national shame? There is, as I have said before, no simple answer. However, Mr M R Akhter Mukul, one of the organisers of the language Movement, believes that one major reason is that the nature of the students in our national universities has changed. "Before, DU students consisted almost entirely of meritorious and wealthy students," he explains, "but now, the majority of the students come from small towns and are sons and daughters of menial workers." In the 60's, the university students had no desperate financial needs. The talented students would receive scholarships and the wealthy ones would have their parents to finance them. Therefore, if these students did participate in politics it would be for their ideological beliefs and not for monetary gains.

The campus scene is completely reversed now. The "muffassil" students desperately need money for their living expenses and they know that graduation will simply lead to unemployment. *Chhatra Rajniti*, which can be a source of easy money, thus becomes an attractive option.

Dr Matin feels that, we too have to take part of the blame for the sad turn that *Chhatra Rajniti* has taken. "Nowadays, the more mastan-like a student is, the more likely he is to become a neta (student leader). We encourage aggressive behaviour and we respect it more than wisdom." Such being the case, is it at all surprising that our present student leaders make Nazi-like speeches and switch sides at the drop of a hat? Most gunfights that take place in our campuses are not based on ideological differences but over zones of control. And student leaders have no inhibitions about using university property for their personal pleasures.

Perhaps the saddest chapter in the story is that student politics has become a lucrative business. And the one sure ticket to becoming a student leader is deviousness.

As long as we don't change our way of thinking, a lust for money and an insidious instinct will be inherent traits of any student leader who takes the top spot.

Does student politics have any constructive roles to play in the future? To answer this question, we have to analyze the roles *Chhatra Rajniti* has played in the past. The language movement in 1952 was brought about completely by university students who re-

where they are not needed or even welcomed?"

As I mentioned earlier, I have neither the wisdom or the experience to come forth with the ultimate solution. I can, however, provide some food for thought. S M Ali, in his book *Rainbow over Padma*, speaks of a new political culture which must replace the present one for Bangladesh to grow into a viable democratic state in the future. The present nature of

This special report on student politics has been the result of hours of research and interviews carried out by a group of concerned students from various schools. Our research work took us to various places, ranging from libraries to the Dhaka University campus. It gave us an opportunity to not only present a picture of the history of student politics but also analyse the changing nature of the role of students after the liberation war of 1971.

The aim of this report has been to remind the 'Teens and Twenties' of today of the glorious contributions students have made in the past and reflect upon their own responsibilities as the 'students' of this generation.

belled against the idea of having to study a foreign language (Urdu) for their examinations. Most of the students who took part in the demonstrations had no political affiliations although they worked under the guidance of the major student leaders of the 50's. The national politicians, such as Suhrawardy and Bhasani played no role in the movement. Neither did the university teachers or the intellectuals.

The movement of '62 and '69 were slightly different since the students who took part in these movements had strong political ideologies and a more militaristic attitude. In 1990, the ideologies may not have been there, but there was still a united front and a single goal.

I cannot picture students leading another movement in the future unless they can unite again as in 1990 or form ideologies which played the key-roles in the pre-liberation movements. As Dr Nurul Amin Baparie, a professor of Political Science at DU said "The arms do not fight. Behind the arms, there are people and behind the people there is an ideology. And it is the ideology that fights."

Perhaps the role of student politics should change, now that we have gained both independence and democracy. A student of IBA felt that there was no point in the students' involvement in national politics. "Many of our departments lack adequate facilities. And inefficiency among the university staff has resulted in repeated session jams. Why don't the student leaders try to address these problems instead of getting involved in national politics



student politics in Bangladesh has become too infested with greed, violence and blind prejudice. It is time we swept the dirt from under the carpet and started afresh.

Special thanks to Mridul, Carina, Arif Robeth and Iresh for helping me conduct the interviews.

**T**HE role of the student community making Bangladesh, and later in preserving its democracy is one of utmost glory and pride. During the 24 years of struggle against West Pakistani rule, the students have made vital sometimes leading contributions. In fact, it would not be an overstatement to say that today's Bangladesh owes much of its existence to the sacrifice of the thousands of students who fought relentlessly to give its people a distinct, proud identity.

On 14th August midnight, Muslims of the undivided India were rejoicing over the

## Students: The Vanguard of a Society

by Mridul Chowdhury

control the situation, the administration closed the University for an indefinite period of time, 27 students

secular group, "East Pakistan Student Union", was formed with the influence of the communists. Also a new secular student 'political and cultural' group, Youth League, emerged. However it wasn't before 1955 that Awami "Muslim" League dropped the word "Muslim". Thus, it was the students who paved the way towards secularism in the then East Pakistan.

Meanwhile, the Language Movement got a new momentum in January 1952, when Pakistani Prime Minister Khawja Nazimuddin repeated Jinnah's statement. In February 1952, while the political leaders were reluctant to break Section 144 which they knew would postpone the provincial election in East Pakistan, the students went out in the streets in small groups calling for Bengali to be named as a state language. Salam, Barkat, Rafique were shot dead. The revolution spread to every corner of the province. At last, the West Pakistani bureaucracy was forced to give Bengali its deserving position.

The year 1962. By this time, Pakistani government had been taken over by a military ruler, Ayub Khan. During his reign, the economic disparity between the two wings of Pakistan became more profound. On 30th January, 1962, Suhrawardy was arrested and Ayub Khan arrived in Dhaka a day later. As soon as the news of his arrival reached Dhaka University campus, the students blew up in protest against the autocratic ruler. In spite of military intervention, they took to the streets, tore down posters containing Ayub's name, burnt and trampled upon his photos, and made an effort to besiege his residence. Ayub left Dhaka secretly. Thus, the first organised protest against the autocratic regime was staged by the students.

By this time, students had become the emblem of the hopes and dreams of the common people. While the political leaders 'talked', the students spurred into action. Putting aside ideological differences, the two main student political groups of the time, student league and student union, joined forces to bring down the autocratic

rule. In September 1962, the students organised a united revolution to protest against the educational policies under taken by the military government. On 17th September in Dhaka, students, laborers and the poor people took to the streets in a huge procession. This was soon resisted by the armed forces resulting in the killing of Waziullah, Babul and Mutafizur. In the year 62-'63, student agitation took to such heights that classes were held in no more than only 27 days.

In 1966, with the initiation of the six-point Programme East Pakistani politics took a more definite shape and West Pakistani exploitation took a stricter turn. With scores of political leaders being regularly arrested in the name of treason, the responsibility of continuing with the revolution fell on the students. Ayub Khan wrongly believed that he could put an end to the revolution by putting the political leaders behind bars. He grossly underestimated the power of the students, a mistake which cost him his chair. Student League, Student union and all other student bodies joined together to form "Chhatro Sangram Parishad".

The students carried on with the reevaluation on the basis of the 11-point programme devised by the student leaders. Gradually, the 11-point programme soon spread to every corner of East Pakistan. The entire population of Pakistan fearlessly rose against the autocratic regime. As a last resort, to scare the rebels, the government engaged in brutal murders in various places of the country. Asaduzzaman, Sergeant Johurul Haque, Dr Shamsuzzohar and many others fell prey to the savage killing engineered by Ayub Khan. These only put oil to the fire, and made Ayub Khan's fall inevitable. The students emerged as heroic leaders of the anti-autocratic movement.

Bangladesh became a free country in 1971. But its people still found themselves struggling for rights even after the liberation war. Within eleven years, the control of the country was forcefully taken over by a military dictator. For more than 8 years, Autocracy prevailed. Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia talked and fought for political solutions. But HM Ershad was holding on lightly to the ruins of power until 1990 when the students came to the forefront. It was again the students who reminded the politicians, always busy settling differences, of the strength of unity. Students leaders from all major groups joined together to form a student front organisation, All-Parties Student Unity.

But, by this time, the nature of student protests in Bangladesh had changed quite dramatically. Automatic guns had replaced hockey sticks; hartals had proved to be totally unsuccessful, if several cars had not been put on fire, government officials not been harassed, and the common people not been terrorised enough to make them stay at home; processions and demonstrations by the students had become such an 'everyday matter' that it took gunfights in Dhaka University campus to convince people that the students were in action. Also, the student movement in 1990 lacked the kind of unselfish conviction from the students that was present during the pre-war revolutions.

Nevertheless, within weeks the autocratic regime was forced to resign from office. People rushed to the streets to rejoice the victory of the movement initiated by the students. The thought of the way in which the victory had been achieved was buried in the jubilliance of the moment. However, a silent fear crept into the minds of many conscious citizens of the country: While there is no doubt that the students will again raise their iron fists if needed, there is considerable apprehension whether that fist will hold *kata ruffles*.

Sources of information: Shadhinota Sangramer Nepothi Kahini by Badruddin Umar, Bangladesh Chhatro Andoloner Itihash by Mohamud Hanan, Pakistaner Chahhibis Bochor by MR Mukul, Asad Theke Gono-Abuthan by HM Mustafa Kamal, Bangladesh Shadhinota Sangram by Rafiqul Islam, Democracy and the Challenge of Development by Moudud Ahmed.

## A Probe into Their Thoughts

by Arif Jamaz, Amir Faisal

**F**OR a thorough analysis of present Student Politics in Bangladesh, it is certainly important to look at the issue from the perspective of the student leaders. Therefore two interviews were conducted by the Teens & Twenties Club of the Daily Star, one of the General Secretary of the *Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal*, Mr. Nazimuddin Alam and another of the Vice President of the *Chhatra League*, Mr. Akhter Hossain. These interviews, we hope, will help the readers to probe deeper into the issue and help them understand the root of the problem.

**Teens & Twenties (TT):** Could you describe in brief the role of student politics in Bangladesh at present?

**Nazimuddin Alam (NA):** We, the students, take part in politics for several reasons. These are:

- 1) to solve the basic problems of the students
- 2) to establish our rights
- 3) to maintain a democratic atmosphere where everyone will be given the chance to talk for his rights.
- 4) to create a violence-free atmosphere in our campuses.

**Akhter Hossain (AH):** We take part in student politics to establish the rights of the students. In 1990, during the mass-uprising, this issue (the role of student politics) was clear to everyone (the general population). In order to have our demands fulfilled, we are ready to make the utmost sacrifices. No student uprising has caused as many deaths as the *Shadhinota Juddho* had. But in spite of that, new governments come one after another but none of them attempts to fulfil our demands. We remain in the

same position and we have to shed our blood again and again. We pleaded to every government to establish the Shikha Commission of Dr. Kudrat-e Khuda. But they have ignored our demands repeatedly.

We were slightly more optimistic about this government since it was elected democratically. Also, the present prime-minister herself was in the opposition at one time and the students of the ruling party had worked with us many times before. But now we see that this government is as autocratic as the previous ones.

**TT: Is the nature of student politics in Bangladesh at present different from that of the pre-liberation war student politics? If so, how and why?**

**NA:** Before 1971, students used to take part in politics to liberate the country. The atmosphere then was entirely different. The idea was to fight for the country as a whole. But now the motive of the students has changed. They campaign to establish their rights and demands. Since the students represent a major section of the population, it is inevitable that they stand up against any injustice. One of the main reasons for which the students campaign is that there aren't enough institutions and dormitories for those students who are coming to Dhaka from outside the city. We understand that the government cannot satisfy this demand since it is a very expensive project.

**AH:** The kind of student politics we had before the liberation war was different from the student politics of today. Because, before 71, students had personal demands as well as the demand

for *Shadhinota*. Now the *Shadhinota* issue no longer exists — our country is independent. Therefore, at present, student politics is centered around the demands of the students. At the same time, just as students were interested in national politics before 71, we have an interest in national politics. Because, first, we have to put our country on the right track... A government is controlled by its policies. Among those policies, there will also be policies on education. How they will control the education process, in what way they will establish the system

all these will depend on their policies. But policies are determined by politics. Therefore, we students have to become involved with politics. So, the student politics prior to 71 is slightly different from the student politics of today. But there hasn't been any major changes. Our interests are still centered around our demands. Student politics is administered in the same manner that it was before our liberation.

**TT: In your opinion, what is the main cause of session jams and campus violence in our universities? How can these problems be eradicated?**

**NA:** Session jams occur because the universities and colleges close down very often. But the present government has brought down the session jams to a minimum level. It would be inaccurate to say that a government has no control over session jams and campus violence in the universities. When a government feels insecure and the students are vehemently protesting against them, it closes down

the universities. For instance, this is what happened during HM Ershad's regime. There is another obvious reason for session jams and campus violence. The opposition might try to destroy the reputation of the ruling party by calling strikes and by bringing out processions for trivial reasons.

**AH:** All this time, it was the government that had sustained the session jams and violence in the universities. Since 1975, after the death of Bangabandhu, all the governments that came to power were autocratic. To hold on to power, these governments always induced violence in the universities with the help of their own people. Because when the universities are afflicted with violence, it is easier for the government to survive. The government tries to keep the rebellions inside the university by means of violence so that it does not spread among the common people — campus violence has been a policy of our governments.

To provide a solution to the problem of campus violence, we, the major student bodies, have had conferences numerous times. We had even made the commitment that we would no longer tolerate this sort of injustice towards students. During the Ershad regime, a *Paribesh Parishad* was founded with the help of leaders of different student organizations, university teachers and other employees. The objective of the *Parishad* was to eradicate campus violence and session jams. But we failed — the government had a very firm grip on the universities and managed to keep them infested with violence despite our efforts.

It is good news that session jams are slowly being removed from the universities. We are very optimistic because of that.

formation of a state of their own, Pakistan. But for Bengali Muslims, the joy did not last for long. Within months of liberation, they realized that they had only replaced some white rulers for brown ones. When West Pakistani leaders started denouncing our culture, specially our Bengali language, the students were quick to respond.

The student-wing of the then dominating political party, Muslim League, named Nikhil Pakistan Muslim Student League, was soon divided over the question of the democratic rights of the East Bengalis, to form a new student group named "East Pakistan Muslim Student League." On 2nd March, 1948, students from different parties of East Bengal met together with a common purpose — to promise to oppose at any cost any kind of humiliation to our heritage. On that day, "All-Parties Language Movement Association" was formed. The Language Movement took birth, out of the individualistic spirit of the students.

When, on 24th March, 1948 in the Dhaka University campus, Jinnah announced "Urdu and Urdu alone shall be the State Language of Pakistan," the students cried out in protest "No! No! No!" Some of them lost control. They tore down the stage and set Jinnah's pictures on fire. The Quaid-e-Azam returned to West Pakistan with a clear message from the Bengali masses, voiced by the Dhaka University students: Don't dare demean our culture.

The language Movement, almost entirely engineered by the students, helped the Bengali mind regain its traditional tendency to rise against suppression and injustice. On 3rd March 1949, the 4th class employees of Dhaka University called for a strike in protest to a discriminating policy of wage distribution. Astonishing the aristocratic intellectuals, the DU students, most of whom came from well-off families extended their completely unselfish support for this poor class. The students continued the protest with regular strikes. In two weeks, the protest turned into a full scale revolution. Unable to

## What are they thinking?

by Mozammel Kabir and Arifur Rahman

**T**HE following remarks give an image of the attitude of the Dhaka University students towards student politics in this country. This survey was conducted on a random basis in some of the canteens at DU.

\* — "I personally am not very enthusiastic about student politics but I have to admit that it has a role to play not just in Bangladesh but in every democratic country. We saw an example of the kind of role students can play in politics in 1990. At the time, everyone had a rebellion in mind but it was the students who took the first step. However, there are cons to student politics too — such as campus violence."

\* — "What we should have is a student body in each university. And this body would represent the students. And each faculty would have a separate body as well. This could be an ideal way to approach politics in our universities."

\* — "The nature of student politics has changed since 1971. In 71, the students were united. But after the war, they did not receive what they had expected. This made them frustrated. So they started to commit terrorism in the name of politics. And now the politicians are using the students."

\* — "If the students could think neutrally, (i.e. without prejudice), we wouldn't have so many factions in our universities."

\* — "In my opinion, those who commit campus violence are not really students. They are outsiders, unemployed, and they are committing the violence because they are in desperate need of money. A genuine student would not have enough time to commit campus violence."

\* — "Student politics should be centered around the students. There is a lot lacking in DU. We, the students, lack adequate facilities in many departments and suffer from session jams, etc. But instead of trying to rid these problems, the student politicians are getting involved in national politics. That is not politics."

\* — "We should have a student body which would cater to the needs of the students. There is no point getting involved in national politics. There is no need for that now. In 1990, there was a need for that during the mass-uprising but why now?"

\* — "I think *chhatra rajniti* will always be necessary in this country."

\* — "Different people define student politics in different ways. Some consider the student fronts of different political parties student politics."

\* — "The national politicians believe that controlling Dhaka University is controlling one-fourth of the country."

\* — "If our socio-infrastructure is weak, only then should students come forward with their opinions. Otherwise, not."