

VOICES... Young People Speak Out

Nameer Rahman
looks at how
gullible some
people can be

The Developmental Generation Gap

EVERY one seems to know what ails Bangladesh. They bombard us with facts, and bore us to death with endless seminars and workshops, do nothing to increase productivity or reduce unemployment. Since everyone is empowered to express an opinion, I also submit a teenager's perspective of the problems of my country.

In my humble opinion, there are basically four fundamental obstacles to development:

First of all, politicians (need I say more). Secondly, our work culture (or rather the lack thereof). Thirdly, foreign aid (the attitude of something for nothing). Lastly, NGOs (dubious do-gooders).

We all know what politicians are like in our part of the world, or for that matter perhaps anywhere. Ask any man on the street his opinion of a typical politician, and you might receive a volley of abuse. Is this justified? If we are to judge politicians by their own words and deeds, certainly. But there are other problems which politics only helps to compound. The attitude that just because we're an impoverished Third World country we can't survive without aid and are constantly in search of gullible donors, has led to diplomacy with a begging bowl. Enter "economic diplomacy." Should cash and business tycoons really decide our domestic and foreign policy, and whose interests are they best suited to serve?

In this context, basic commodities such as salt and sugar acquired celebrity status, becoming almost as lucrative as contraband gold, while the country paid a small fortune to perfect the monopolistic trading practices of the favoured few. Still more absurd, and perhaps the ultimate irony of fate, is the fact that there could be fertiliser riots in a country starved of food. It is absolutely unbelievable, and an insult to our intelligence that we are actually expected to accept such criminal aberrations of the market economy.

It is often argued that we lack resources. Permit me to give a prime example of a country without resources and a ruined economy that bounced back to become one of the world's major economic powers. Presenting the one and only Japan. What do they have that we don't? Let's start off with what I said, the mentality, or rather the work culture. We believe in saying "It won't work." They believe in saying "We'll make it work." We

say "It's broken," they say "we'll fix it." Its all mind over matter. Japan is a country that was literally forced to face the world at gunpoint by the Americans. Forced to adapt with no resources whatsoever Japan built a navy that defeated the Russians during the Russo-Japanese war in 1905. It was defeated during the Second World War by the Allied forces and in the process had its entire infrastructure and economy obliterated. It had two atomic bombs dropped on its two cities, and by comparison we have the audacity to proclaim insurmountable obstacles. In a mere twenty years Japan rebuilt itself and was already competing with the United States. Japan is just as overpopulated as we are, they have just as little resources as we have. So where lies the problem? It all boils down to mentality. A history of assassination, political turmoil, and natural disasters have fathered a generation of frustrated young Bangladeshis eager to escape to foreign shores.

The "brain drain" is born of despair and defeatism. Those who remain are deprived of any opportunity of improving themselves or their quality of life. We don't even make an effort to adequately educate our youth. Only 37 per cent of the population barely knows how to read and write. They do not learn any proper trade nor do they receive a proper education. The government provides free primary education, which only teaches rudimentary reading and writing. During this time they remain deprived of anything that will help them on the paddy fields, which is where they will inevitably return, nor would they have finished their education which will at least give them the choice, incentive and stepping stone to enter a more lucrative

profession. As a result, the illiterate masses, especially the younger generation, have no direction to life. Education for all within the next 10 years is not impossible. We do have the resources and man power. Appropriate training isn't a difficult task especially if the government opens up several teacher training institutes, and needless to say, more schools.

Regarding aid (everybody's favourite cure-all) I'm sorry to take you back to Japan which accepted foreign aid only once in its history, and that too, grudgingly. It was considered a disgrace to the nation, and the resulting outrage brought down the government of the day. This act of national dishonour was never repeated, whereas our governments boast of how much charity they have shamelessly accepted. Have we no pride in ourselves that we've had to borrow every year since the year of our birth? As a matter of fact, in our first year of existence Bangladesh received more financial assistance than all its SAARC neighbours put together, achieving the distinction of being the highest aid-receiving country in a single year in the history of aid-giving.

What's even worse is the fact that in spite of receiving so much, there is very little visible improvement. It all goes into the bottomless pit of corruption. Would you believe that between 1992 and 93 we received more than a billion dollars in foreign aid. One billion 675 million dollars to be precise. It's bad enough that most of the bitterly-begged-for aid disappears in keeping the government afloat, but NGOs receive almost as much that goes completely unaccounted, which brings us to our fourth factor.

We have currently more

than 700 independent NGOs working throughout the country in over fifty-five thousand villages. The government has no verifiable reliable or published records on the income and expenditure of NGOs. Did you know that NGOs:

a) are income tax-free, b) are accountable to no one, neither to the government of the country in which they work nor to the donors, and c) do not have mandatory audits or submit annual balance sheets to anyone.

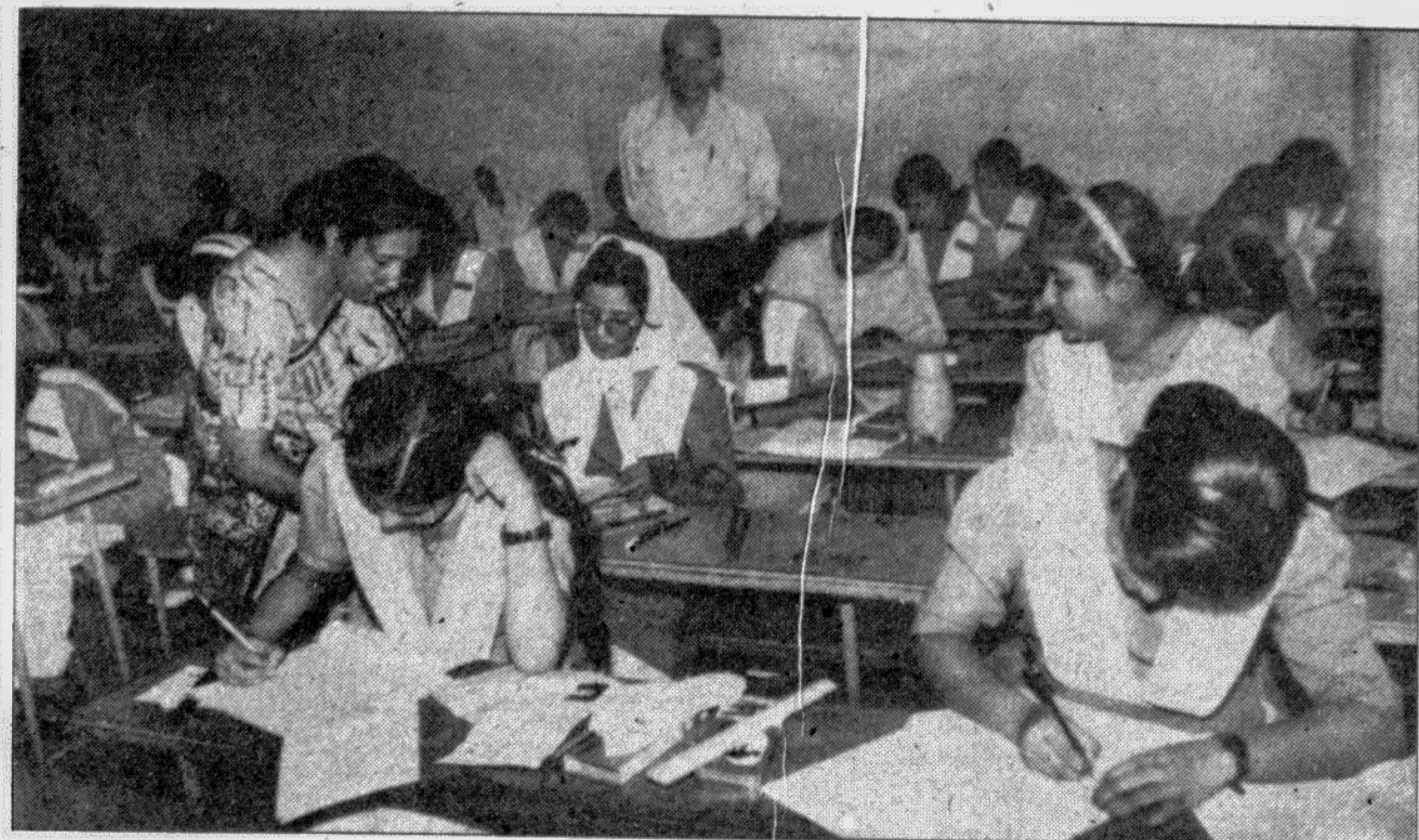
Is the productivity of all these NGOs proportional to the amount of money they receive every year? How useful are the NGOs that delve into projects like research, dialogue, analysis and theoretical choice? I predict, when the era of political gang-war has finally ended, the use and abuse of NGOs will be the next burning issue, in the economic life of Bangladesh.

What we have in this country is a wide gulf between miserably poor people and the shockingly rich, where money pours into the country and disappears into a black hole of bribes, greed and corruption. Semi-literate politicians treat politics like a football match while the nation is a captive spectator. Students fall hook line and sinker for every aspiring MP, who pays handsomely for their support and allegiance. Every con man in the country is lining up to pull a scam and make a thumping profit in the NGO game. People in whom the nation has put its trust and faith neglect their constitutional duty while the government and opposition alike, act literally like immature children. Destruction of private property is condoned in the name of democracy and freedom of expression. Assassination and murder are everyday affairs.

If I have offended my elders, particularly those who think they know better, let me make myself absolutely clear: the younger generation have no confidence in your ability to lead with responsibility. You have lost their trust, and as such, there is no place for you in the future. Recent political crisis is sufficient proof of the validity of our doubts.

What then is the cure or rather the hope for the future, from a teenager's perspective? If we are sincere to ourselves we will succeed in getting rid of the mental block, improve our work culture, stop pandering to politics, NGOs and foreign aid. Only then will we have taken the first step in the right direction.

Enjoying a developed sleep



Fixing the Backbone

Education of the country is decaying, it needs an immediate modification, says Manwar Islam Khan

"A! Khal! Varsity jaba?"
"Na, jamu na. Bou,
Bachha falatya mori."

No it is not a dialogue from a Bangla cinema or drama. This is a real-life incident of a Third World country — Bangladesh. It is painful but true that the impression of our ordinary people about students have reached the last stage of panic and abhorrence. Erroneous, our educational structure is liable for this miserable situation of the students. We did not introduce our educational system thinking about true demands and welfare of nation and society.

The system, which is continuing, is not beneficial for anybody. Acquiring knowledge should be the main purpose of our education. But today it is

known to all that success and failure of life depend on the high score in the exams. So, anyhow students have to score more marks. At that time they forget — "Education is for knowledge, not for exam." On the other hand, corruption engulfed the system. "I think teachers are responsible for this," said Ms Shameela Tabassum Shithi, a teacher of Golden Eagle.

As a result, institutions are overcasted by violence. The students are engrossed in the ocean of oblivion. "Gherao", "Hartal", "Bhangchaur" and clashes between two rival groups of students are now everyday incidents. On the other hand, if the exam questions are little bit difficult or 'not-common', the students flare up into

agitation and it is a matter of regret, at that moment these students are encouraged by political parties of our country.

It is necessary to say that political terrorists are on the loose and the political leaders of our country is standing behind them. Terror has exposed its ghastly teeth and an unbearable darkness engulfed the educational institutions. Terror snatches away may innocent lives from many mothers' lap. Months after months doors keep shut of many institutions. That's why the session complications are increasing day by day.

The situation of Dhaka University is more horrible. Eighteen students have died at Dhaka University during the last 3 years. So, if we describe

Dhaka University as a factory of terrorism, then it think it would not be wrong. As far as I know the Halls of Dhaka University are already full of Bahiragoto Shanthasht. This is our educational environment.

This decaying structure of education have to be modified immediately. Teachers and guardians have to be conscious. However, only teachers and guardians alone will not be able to solve the problems of Dhaka University. We hope that interference of the government and the opposition parties will make things better.

Lastly, I just want to say that still I hope and believe that the political parties and people of our country jointly can counter any type of obstacle that comes on our way.

The Long Way of Chaos

Tasin Ahmed is worried about the future of the student community



Any hope from the political pit?

Come let us thrust the roots of our tradition into the very core of our sufferings.
In the heart of summer
Or in the cool rain of the countryside.
Let some light shine forth — from our eyes.

We don't know what our future is, we don't know how will we lead the nation in the future, we don't know how will we be able to clean all the rot created by our forefathers. All we know is that we are existing and will continue to exist like an elephant who has fallen in the mud and even the ants are kicking it if we — the younger generation — don't speak out.

It's time for us to speak. We have noticed how the spirit and the teachings of 1971 are gradually disappearing from our social life. We have noticed that since '71 till today we haven't enjoyed true fundamental rights that we were awarded by our glorious freedom fighters. In 1975, we noticed how the father of our nation was brutally murdered and our destruction started. In 1981, we saw how president Zia was assassinated and how army took over. Our problem and our total destruction started when we saw how the autocrat Ershad ruled our beautiful country on his wish and will.

And recently we noticed how an elected government can ruin the social and economic structure of the country. The younger generation have always fought against all odds and criminal acts and they have always showed how democracy-minded they are in their thoughts and applications. We fought for our freedom, we fought for our democracy. We want result that will last for the time to come.

We don't know what democracy is interpreted by our politicians, but it certainly is not what we the younger generation understand. Democracy is not keeping the students hanging in the hook as they don't know what their future is. They don't know when they will get books to read as well as know when they will appear in the exams. They don't know when will they be able to complete their institutional courses and even they are in a dilemma whether they would be able to get a job after completing their education.

It started a long time ago and it seems that it has an endless tail. Firstly, the opposition MPs decided that they have done enough to serve their respected area from where they had been elected and walked out of the Parliament which is the best place for working out everything.

Then the all through democratic-minded and autocratic workshop — government decided to rule the country without any opposition. In the midst of one-party Parliament, the government for some time tried to pursue the opposition

to return to the House but the opposition had other ideas in mind. They first of all failed to find any real issue on which they could raise their anti-government movement and tried to bring out false allegation.

The government during this certain period totally played a silent role and hardly took any real friendly attempt to bring the opposition back to the Parliament. They started ruling single-handedly, unopposed and unquestioned. But then came a unique issue for the opposition, to raise their voice when a scandal about the distribution of fertiliser arose.

The whole opposition jumped to the occasion and started to go after the government. The government on the other hand lost their perseverance and started to speak out and did some bad mistakes. The Magura by-election put a nail into their coffin followed by some wrong policies. The opposition started various kinds of agitation and even started to protest in front of the Secretariat and the house of the PM. During this time the government tried to consolidate their pride by again giving an election. The opposition who had already achieved the gear for their anti-government movement totally boycotted the election.

They said that they would take part in the election only if it is held under a caretaker government. The government this time totally disagreed to create a caretaker government but the PM announced that she would resign a month earlier than her allotted time.

She also promised that she would cancel her ministry as well. But the opposition followed the motto of asking for bed after food is given and stuck to their demand of the caretaker government.

The combined opposition refused to take part and added that they would do all necessary that can be done to stop that election which was basically an illegal one. The government also announced that they will hold the election at any cost and eventually they did. The opposition tried hard to stop it and though they failed but still they gained the most as it was finally proved that the election was totally a fake and one-party election. It

also proved that the government had cheated the nation by giving a false account of vote cast.

Now, what have we gained through all these games played by the political parties? Firstly, we have achieved the distinction of being the only country of the world who had only 12 days of working out of 29 in February. Secondly, the whole world noticed how brutal and ferocious our opposition and government supported activists can be while doing politics. Thirdly, our economy reached its unique destination — the bottom of the basket as a massive economic loss occurred. Fourthly, our garments industry collapsed totally. Buyers from other countries and the importers had to take off their order from the garments of our country and gave it to our neighbouring countries. As a result the garments industry couldn't provide the country its highest amount of foreign currency. Fifthly, our basic and fundamental needs shattered.

The price of the necessities rose so high that it was out of the reach of the lower and middle class people. Furthermore lots of fruits and vegetables turned out to be non-useable and they all dried. Sixty our industries collapsed our jute industry and all other industries suffered a tremendous amount of loss and many of the industries had to be shut down. The raw materials, needed for industries, were scarcely available and production came to a halt. Seventhly, The banks and insurance companies remained closed as the opposition announced strike for an indefinite period of time and as a result all kinds of money transaction and insurances were non-available. Eighty the student's fell into a world of darkness as they couldn't find books needed for them as there was no books in the market.

The BCS exams and many other exams had to be canceled and the SSC exam was in a jeopardy. The HSC students even today don't know which is the actual date of their exam as it has not been officially announced. The dignity of our people was totally destroyed when a citizen was striped. This is a

clear signal of social destruction. The students fail to understand why the opposition raised the Golam Azam issue after long 14-years of his stay in this country. This man has been living in this country for long 14 years, and if he is a war criminal, then under whose umbrella was he living in this country without being opposed? Why didn't the opposition act against him during Ershad regime?

We, the student community, definitely wants all the war criminals to be put before the court and pay for their heinous deeds. But we don't want a chaos in the country, burning of gas stations and posters of the identified persons, as these things will not help us punish the war criminals that they deserve.

We can't fathom how the protectors turn out to the destroyers. We become really ashamed when the police awfully for turned and killed Yasmin in Dinajpur and our heads go down while thinking of such brutality. The students were shocked when the government did nothing noticeable to solve the political impasse created by itself and the opposition. We noticed a wonderful thing: the flight of two iron ladies who continuously stuck to their motto of one aspect — power. One to keep it forever and the other to snatch it for enjoying.

The students noticed how the school, colleges and universities remained close for most of the time in last few months and what a terrible atmosphere was prevailing all over country. The economy is destroyed the culture is shattered and the whole society collapsed. They don't believe that the two lady leaders can do what they have done so far.

The students are grateful to the former PM for at last accepting the caretaker government and for her will to announce an election under free and fair hands. But what they don't understand is that why didn't she accept it a month earlier? Why did she remained so stubborn? She has always said that people are with her party and they are her main force. If she truly believes that, then why did she hesitated to announce an election under caretaker government earlier? If it was for keeping the Constitution running, then it's a bully. She said that she wanted people to get two square meals and she did a lot in this regard. But by showing a stubborn attitude, she actually destroyed her good work as it was the poor who suffered the most.

The student community don't want biased politics, politicians of several colours, politics of power hunt and anarchy in the political arena. They don't want any terrorism, nepotism or the death of mental peace. They want to see this country running in its own pace and not hindered by personal race of power. Let some light shine forth — from our eyes.

Shingara, Shamucha and Toilets

CLEANLINESS is one of the prior necessities of human life, in homes, on the streets, in public places, and obviously, in schools and colleges. The sanitary system must be hygienic in these places in order to prevent the spread of germs of some dreadful diseases. But unfortunately, this bare necessity is not fulfilled in most of the colleges and schools. Except from a few well-known educational institutes, the toilet systems in all the other schools and colleges are drastic and frightening.

There are no appropriate way to purify the toilets. Most of them are dirty, smelly and without any proper sewerage system. In most cases, the toilets are very small or not large enough for a grown-up student. They are not at all adequate for the whole college, in many schools there are only three toilets for all of the students, which could be well over a thousand. These toilets usually don't have much space and sometimes are tin-roofed without any water line installed. Because of that, stu-

dents have to use the tubewell outside for water.

This type of schools can not only be found in villages but could easily be found inside Dhaka city, the capital of our country with all the modern-life facilities. However, the other better toilets in better schools and colleges are actually not up to the standard. They are not cleaned regularly and not taken care of. Such disgusting condition of toilets discourage students to use them even when they need to. Unless any emergency, they usually never go near a toilet, let alone using it. They grow a tendency of not using the toilets and beyond their knowledge develop diseases that take affect afterwards and cause a lot trouble.

Those who use the toilets also fall victim to diseases like urine infections, which emerge from the filthy and germinal environment. But the school or college administrators seem not to be bothered with it. In most places, they even cannot realise the problem that these polluted and in-

fected toilets are causing. Even the students who suffer fall to know the real reason behind it. Also, the guardians are not much aware of this situation.

Moreover, there is no adequate supply of drinking water for the students at the educational institutes. The younger students, carry flasks with drinking water in them to school. But the seniors generally do not take any flask because, to them, this seems to be a bit babyish. So without any other choice they get habituated of not drinking any water at all during school hours. Taking a flask or tiffin in the college can be a big gag, the students make a fool out of anyone who does that. And the college canteens cannot provide clean water or healthy food for them. So what happens that the college students give up drinking water and start eating unhygienic cheap food such as shingara, shamucha, chop etc., from the canteen.

Students who can afford, eat out in the fast food shops that serve junk foods and drink Coke. After playing a

game or doing some tiring exercises the exhausted students drink water from the bathroom to satisfy their thirst. Thus without knowing they take in all the deadly germs mixed in the water. This practice is very harmful and indicates certain danger to the health. That is why food poisoning and diarrhoea are most common and frequent to the students. And all these result in diseases such as jaundice, dysentery, kidney failure and other food and water related diseases.

A school or college must have a healthy environment. The authority should make sure that all the educational institutes meet all the basic needs for a clean and purified sanitary system. They should also provide clean and unpolluted drinking water. This act is vital and should be taken care of as soon as possible.

The students should also look after what they are eating and drinking, they must give up eating crap food regularly.

Sajid Razwan Matin



Garfield®

IF YOU TELL ME HOW OLD YOU'RE GOING TO BE NEXT WEEK, I PROMISE NOT TO LAUGH



SEVENTEEN



I WOULD HAVE PREFERRED THE LAUGH

