

The Daily Star-Students Dialogue on National Politics

STUDENT POLITICS

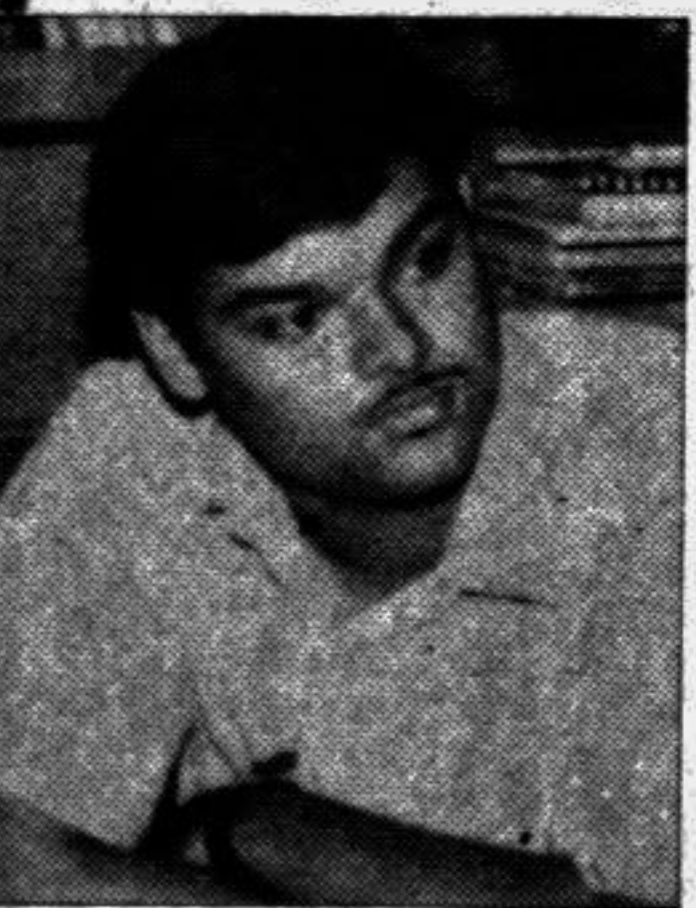
For the Cause — Yes, for the Trend — No

In the second of the three discussion meetings with our young citizens, The Daily Star asked the invited students to come up with their views on national politics with emphasis on student politics. The meeting was conducted by The Daily Star editor Mahfuz Anam, assisted by Ekram Kabir and Fakrul Islam Chowdhury. Following are what they said

MAHFUZ ANAM: I thank you all for joining this discussion meeting. Today we'll discuss on 'Politics, Politicians and Student Politics'. We want you to share your opinions with our readers. Let's pay attention to what Mahfuz Anam has to say.

MAHFUZ ANAM (St. Joseph High School): I am in favour of student politics. But the way student politics is now directed to by our political leadership. I am against that. The prevailing trend of using the students as weapons to terrorise political rivals by our leaders, must stop. The widespread use of arms among the student fronts of Bangladesh political parties is a very unhealthy practice. We must bring back the glorious tradition of our student movements, if we want to ensure the well-being of our future generations. The years 1952, '62, '69, '71 and '90 have witnessed the power of our student movements to uphold the will and desire of the people. Students proved in the past that they were the most conscious and sacrificing section in our society. They always have come to rescue the nation when situation demanded. So, it is only a matter of time when students will again come out of this grim situation and fight for the rights of themselves and their fellow countrymen. I'm sure, the negative trend we are now witnessing is temporary.

ANUPAM DAS (Udayan Bidyalyaya): A student's first priority should be to study. But we are now seeing, specially at the university level, a large number of students forget



Mahfuz

dent organisations involve in political activities under the guidance of a national political party. When the national leaders cannot help themselves being corrupt and when party loyalty among them is on the wane, ideology, idealism, commitment to the nation and/or interest of the people become mere phrases to the students. So I think the main cause of the prevailing negative trend in student politics is the failure of our political leaders. The student politics is only following the track of our national politics.

It is the national leadership who failed to live up to our expectations. The rampant violence and sharp decline of morality in students are only a manifestation of the failure of our national politics. Students must realise that they must start their own politics based on their own ideologies and idealism to break this vicious circle of political underdevelopment.

I mean students should direct their politics around their own issues such as, modernisation and upgrading the curriculum, press-demand house for the solution to accommodation problem in the residential halls, etc.

MAHFUZ ANAM: But these things can easily be done by college or school students' unions. Why do you have to involve yourselves into politics to solve your education-related problems when you can easily solve it through the students' unions? I think I must clarify what we mean by student politics. I am talking about the involvement of students in the politics and about their affiliations to the student fronts of various political organisations, i.e., Chhatra Dal, Chhatra League, Chhatra Union etc. I am asking you: do you think this is desirable? Do you support the involvement of students in national politics? And if your answer to the question is yes, then tell me, from what level? Do you think student politics can be allowed from the primary level? Or at the higher secondary or at the university level?

SHAFUAT RABBE (Dhaka College): My answer to your first question is yes. I think students should be involved in national politics. Because... who will lead the nation in the future? Definitely the students of today. There is a phrase in cricket 'Big match temperament', you cannot play at the highest level without building

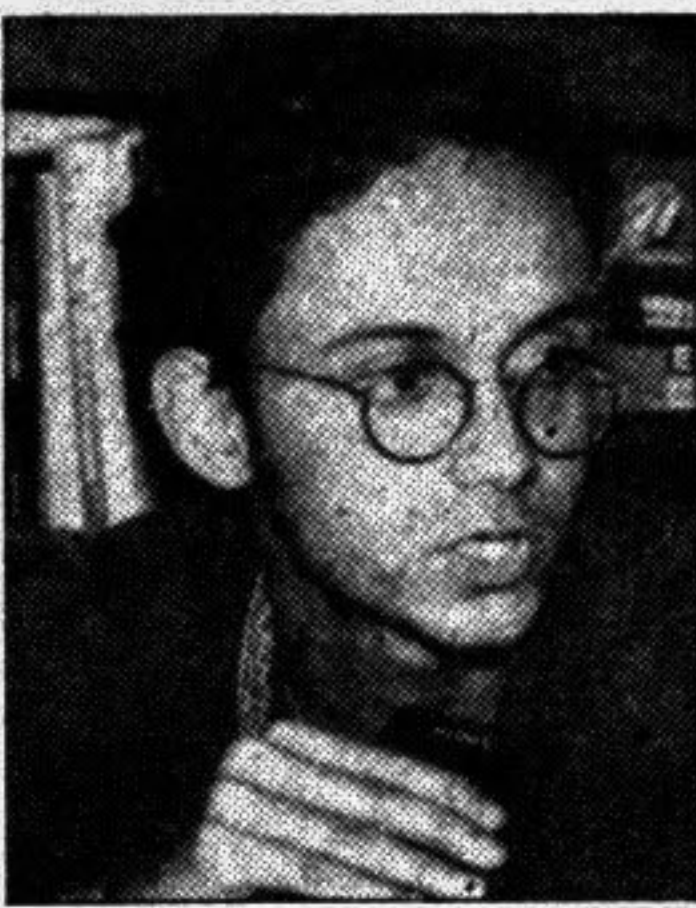


Anupam Das

their primary duty and engage themselves in politics. I am against this trend. What I want to say is that the trend among a large number of students, to give priority to politics over education is very damaging.

Besides, when our ancestors were involved in student politics, they upheld certain ideologies. But now our brothers and sisters who are in student politics, do not stand for any such ideology. This lack of ideology has led our student politics to a dead end. I hope, our political leadership, educationists and civil society will guide our students so that they can bring back ideological commitments into student politics.

SABIGH BIN MASOOD (Dhaka College): First, I want to say a few words on our politicians. When elected to power, our politicians forget their pre-election commitments to the people. They begin to work for themselves. This lack of political honesty is a well known fact to all of us. I think hypocrisy, dishonesty and lack of commitment to the country among our national political leadership played an important role in corrupting our student politics. Our stu-



Joy Alamgir

your 'big match temperament'. You must go through a period of apprenticeship before qualifying for the big games. Same is true in politics. If our students are to lead the nation in the future, they must prepare themselves properly through student politics. Involvement in politics in the student life will make them mature enough to confront national problems in the future. And to answer your second question, I will say, students should be allowed to engage themselves into politics from class VIII.

I think so because if the students are allowed to involve themselves into politics from class VIII they will be able to judge the political ideologies, and positions of different political parties. But to ensure that we need to educate them from Class VIII about various political ideologies like Marxism, democratic capitalism, autocracy etc. If we can educate our students from such an early stage they will be matured enough to reject the prevailing negative trends in student politics, when they enter into universities.

IMRAN KARIM (St. Joseph High School): But I think if a student of Class VIII is exposed to such influential ideologies, they will not be able to digest those ideologies. I am afraid what Shaquat is proposing will backfire.

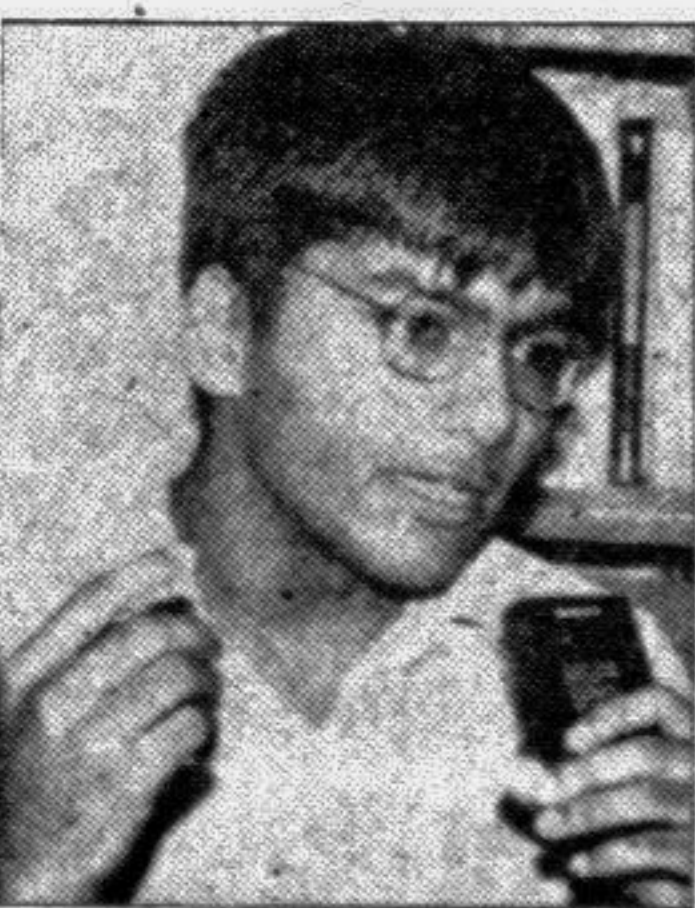
JOY ALAMGIR (Notre Dame College): I think if students at this stage of their life are introduced to political literatures of autocracy, dictatorship, or fundamentalism they will form their opinion corresponding to that particular ideology. And if they come in touch with Marxism, first, chances are high that they will emerge as diehard Marxists. And if you teach them about democratic ideologies at this level, they will definitely be influenced by democratic ideology. What I am trying to say, at such an early stage of life of a student we must not bring him or her in contact with any such ideology if we do so, it will do more harm to their mental development than we can imagine.

IMRAN KARIM: I want to say that it will be very difficult

- List of Participants
Joy Alamgir (Notre Dame College)
Imran Karim (St. Joseph's High School)
Shaquat Rabbee (Dhaka College)
Sabigh Bin Masood (Dhaka College)
Arupam Das (Udayan Bidyalyaya)
Mahfuz Anam (St. Joseph's High School)
Tasin Uddin Ahmed (Notre Dame College),
Sharmin Khan (Holy Cross School)
Sakib Hamid Pratay (Government Laboratory High School).

that ideal politicians will emerge from the present generation of politicians. Chances are very slim. Some one has to come forward. In this regard, I want to add that student leaders of today have responsibilities on their shoulders. I am optimistic about the future of our student politics. Given our student leaders can reject the path of terrorism, we have a great future.

JOY ALAMGIR (Notre Dame College): Student politics as a part of education should be

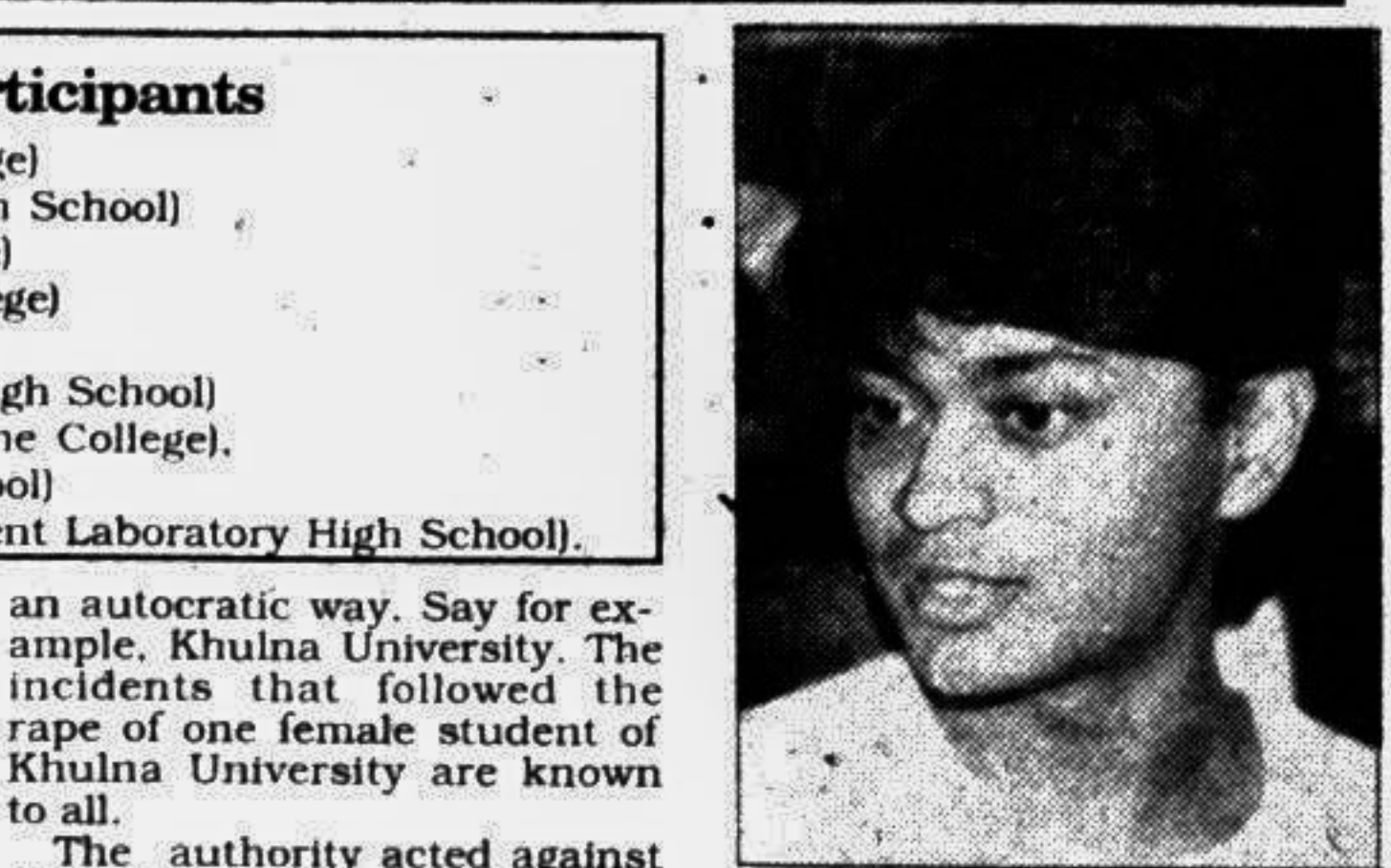


Shaquat Rabbee

encouraged but students should not be allowed to participate in political activities at the national level.

The universities should increase tuition fees and should also grant scholarships to students for education. The system should be like this, if any student engage him/herself into national politics, while a student, the scholarship would be withdrawn. The students, embracing the idea of joining national politics, will be forced to give up the temptation, and this way, our universities can be free of student politics and terrorism.

SAKIB HAMID PRATAY (Government Laboratory High School): I don't agree with Joy Alamgir. I'm in favour of student politics. Because it gives the students an opportunity to work as a pressure group to press home their demands. Where student politics exists the authority cannot exercise absolute power over the general students. There always exists a platform from where our voices can be raised. From where we can fight for our rights. In the institutions where student politics is not allowed, the authorities can, and in some cases really act, in



Joy Alamgir

an autocratic way. Say for example, Khulna University. The incidents that followed the rape of one female student of Khulna University are known to all.

The authority acted against the interest of the general students and gave punishment to the students who protested against the rape. If politics was allowed in Khulna University, I don't think the authority would have dared to take such actions.

But I don't think students should be allowed to be involved in politics at school or college levels. Because they don't have the maturity to judge the political ideologies at those stages.

MAHFUZ ANAM: Then we all agree that student politics should only be allowed at university level? All of you share a common view, the tradition of our student politics. It inspires you all. Now tell me, where has this glorious tradition led us to?

There are many developed countries where students were never directly involved in the national politics. But it did not hamper their progress. On the other hand, in your opinion we have such a glorious tradition, still we are in the middle of nowhere.

SHARMIN KHAN: In nineteen fifty-two student politics made it possible for Bangla to become our state languages. Student politics played a major role in 1962, '69, '71 and even in 1990. It is we, the following generation, who could not maintain that momentum. We have failed to live up to the expectations of the nation. The glorious tradition of our student politics always lived up to the expectations of the nation.



Imran Karim



MAHFUZ ANAM: I am not saying that it was not worth it to come out in the streets when the country needed its young people. Students played the major role many times, no one is denying it. But these situations occur in a nation's history only occasionally. I am sure if our motherland requires, all of you will come out from your classroom and fight for our country. But what I am asking is that, are the present trends of students being involved in politics under a party flag, propagating party politics, meeting party interest, good for our country?

IMRAN KARIM: In the USA, if students have any problem regarding their curriculum or if they feel some changes are required in the education system, they can always talk to the authorities. Government and the authorities of the academic institutions ask the students from time to time if they had any suggestions. So, the students can make their voices heard through existing ways. But in our country there is no such way. So, students are sometimes forced to join in politics to make their voices heard.

MAHFUZ ANAM: Then now we have consensus on two points. First, we are not in favour of the student politics that is now prevailing in our country and second, we all have agreed that some failures in our education system sometimes force the students to be engaged in politics.

TASIN UDDIN AHMED (Notre Dame College): I want to add something. We must make our national politics free of corruption and nepotism otherwise student politics will not be free of the prevailing negative trend.

Our society does not seem to pay due respect to law and order. This tendency must change. Politics should be people-oriented. We must assure that the influence of black money and arms will be uprooted from our political arena.

MAHFUZ ANAM: Thank you Tasin. Now I have another question for you. Do you agree that a few mastans are reigning over the majorities? Do you personally face this sort of sit-

uation in your academic institutions?

ANUPAM: Yes, we do face this sort of situation and student politics is to blame for that. If any one of us protests against some actions by the mastans then we have to face the dire consequences. Udayan Bidyalyaya is situated inside the university area. So when someone protests against the activities of any school boy turned into a mastan, if he is unable to perform his actions over us, he just brings his big-brothers from the university. We don't have spell out to make you understand what follows next.

MAHFUZ ANAM: Do you think that the tendency to join this sort of unhealthy stream of student politics among the general students is increasing?

SABIGH: Yes it is. Because of the greed, greed for power and greed for money. These two have been successfully exploited by the politicians to trap the general students into this sort of unhealthy stream. If I join any particular party, the Baro Bhai will make sure that I can have my burgers to-day and my Cokes tomorrow and my birianees the following day, all free of cost.

MAHFUZ ANAM: But can't they understand where these activities are leading them?

SABIGH: Yes, they can understand. But I think, like smoking, it's an addiction.

SHARMIN KHAN: I think the approach of our teachers and guardians must change. They always tell us that the purpose of good education is getting a good job or being established in life. Education has become a means to accumulate wealth in our society. We have lost the true spirit of it. Education does not enlighten our souls any more. So, when a student knows that by becoming a mastan he can also accumulate wealth and make himself established in the society, he never hesitates to become one.

MAHFUZ ANAM: Are you willing to do anything about it?

IMRAN KARIM: If we try to do anything, the first obstacle we have to overcome is our parents. Because our parents never want us to face any danger.

MAHFUZ ANAM: Then, are you saying you are all living a terrorised life?

PRATAY: Yes, we are terrorised. In our school, when I was in class IX, one of my friends brought an arms in the school one day. This particular student is not studying in our school any more but there may



Sharmin Khan

be others like him. I feel really insecure. MAHFUZ ANAM: Why didn't you try to make him understand that what he was doing was wrong?

PRATAY: We failed to make him understand. Because the big-brothers were always there to influence him.

JOY ALAMGIR: I don't think it's worth the risk. If we try to make a terrorist understand that his way of doing things is wrong it will certainly take time to persuade him. And I also have my doubts about the success of such an effort. Meanwhile chances are high that he will be able to influence some other boys in the institution to follow his footsteps.

Can we afford to put some other boys' lives in risk, in order to reform just one terrorist? Is it worth it? I don't think so. I want to say, the authority should take strict disciplinary actions against him



Tasin Uddin Ahmed

and just throw him out of the institution.

MAHFUZ ANAM: Throw him out to where? You may throw him out from the institution but you can throw him out from the society?

SABIGH: Could you say that we should just throw him out and forget about him if he was your own brother? We must be more sensitive to the needs of the students who have chosen the wrong path.

MAHFUZ ANAM: Then, we now have two conflicting opinions. Some of you are suggesting that strict disciplinary actions should be taken against those students who terrorise others and walk in a wrong path. Others are saying that we must be more sensitive to the needs of these students and try to make them understand that what they are doing is wrong. You are suggesting to try to bring them back in the mainstream. My last question is to those of you think that being sensitive to the needs of the students who have chosen a wrong track may bring them back to mainstream — are you yourselves willing to take this responsibility? It is yes? Well, then let us end on this positive note. Thanks to all of you for participating in this discussion.



Sakib Hamid Pratay

The Daily Star Entertainment Guide

Table with columns for ZEE TV, SONY ET, DD 7, EL TV, and other channels, listing programs and times.

Garfield by Jim Davis comic strip advertisement featuring Garfield, Odie, and Jon Arbuckle. Includes text like 'SMACK!', 'HEY! WHAT HAPPENED TO THE FAR SIDE?', and 'I WILL INFORM MY SUPERIOR WHAT YOU SAY ABOUT SUGAR, MR. SCARAMANGA... THEY WILL NOT BE HAPPY'.