

# Student Politics: Lost in the Abyss?

by Syed Abul Maksud

THE other day the people have witnessed the street drama staged by the activists of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, the student wing of BNP, in Dhaka city. Violent protests sparked as BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia formed a five-member central committee of JCD, the main force of her party. The frenzied JCD activists resorted to violent agitation demanding dissolution of the committee. The protesters went on rampage and damaged vehicles, ransacked shops, hurled bombs and fired gunshots in front of the BNP office. They stormed the central office of the organisation and set fire to their office at Naya Paltan. The angry activists also attacked the residences of two BNP leaders. They brought out processions and held rallies on the Dhaka University campus. Similar demonstrations were also staged in other educational institutions across the country including Dhaka College and Jagannath College. The protesters chanted slogans against the new committee formed by Begum Zia allegedly on the advice of the hardliners. The dissidents said, "Razakars occupied their position beside Begum Zia and that's why she floated a committee with non-students and fathers of children." All the five members of the newly-formed committee are reportedly "married and non-students." "None of them have been in touch with the students. They are contractors by profession." According to Press reports, a large number of BNP leaders have expressed their resentment over the formation of the new committee of JCD. A senior BNP policy-maker remarked, "Khaleda is trying to be a hard-liner and wants to turn the party into an extreme rightwing force from its centrist disposition." (DS 26.12.2000).

Begum Zia had suspended all activities of the Chhatra Dal central committee on July 5 last year following a series of violent clashes between two factions of JCD. It may be recalled here that

two JCD activists were killed on the Dhaka University campus during a gun fight between the two factions on July 2, 2000.

The happenings in the JCD had drawn the attention of the conscious section of the society. Concerns have been expressed by relevant quarters regarding the future of student politics. The Daily Star in an editorial said, "those who have been named in the leadership of the JCD are family men with children of their own, doing different types of business and have numerous criminal charges against them. They have neither anything to do with education, educational institutions nor with the students, except to mislead

against the Education Commission Report and in the mass upsurge of 1969, will be remembered by the nation in the years to come. Students were the first to take up arms against the fascist Yahya-Tikka regime in 1971. The Dhaka University halls had been the first target of attacks of the Pakistani occupation forces. Innumerable students were killed on the first hour of the crackdown of the Pakistan Army. The extent of their sacrifice cannot be measured.

After liberation the students strove to establish a democratic society. The ruling party student wing, Chhatra League, was divided in early 1972 and the

by fear of unemployment rather than a will to change the existing society. They prefer a peaceful academic life and after the successful completion of their academic career they are eager to enter the profession which is very difficult to secure in an over-populated and unemployment-ridden country like Bangladesh.

Our student leaders had always been busy with national politics. They do not speak of the necessity for education reform rather they are interested in other national problems. All the major political parties do have their student fronts. So leaders of the student organisations strive to serve the purpose of their parent parties. At present

struggle against the Pakistani semi-colonial rule and in establishing democratic rights of the Bangladeshis. The Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal along with other organisations played a vital part in the anti-Ershad democratic movement in the 1980's. The 11-point charter of demand of 1969 and the 10-point demand of the Central Students Action Committee of the 1980's are two important documents in our political history.

A qualitative change has taken place in the student politics during the last two decades. Now it is not regarded as a noble pursuit for the cause of nation rather it has been an income generating endeavour. It has

Eid-ul-Fitr and New Year celebration... Leaders of BCL and their counterparts in JCD are going to shop-owners asking for money for the celebrations. Sometimes, they send representatives to the shop-owners to collect toll, insiders said." (DS, December 25). The report further said, "The BCL factions are also consolidating their position on the campus ... since a good position ... always helps a leader or a group grab tender and collect toll." To the utter surprise of the conscious section of the society, this has become the order of the day.

In those days, student leaders and ordinary students involved in political activities suffered immense financial hardship. As an humble activist of the EPSU I had seen awkward predicaments of many a prominent student leader from a close quarter in the early and mid-sixties. The dedicated student leaders borrowed 5/10 rupees (taka) from fellow students who were fortunately well-off. Modhuda's Canteen and tin-shed and bamboo-walled Sharif Mia's tiny canteen had been their last resorts. Their only aim was to materialise their ideals and programmes in the greater interest of the nation.

At present student leaders are not guided by the values of the past and are not inspired by the vision of the challenges of the future. Now they do not speak of the necessity for reforming the education system, to modernise the courses and to rationalise the production of the students according to the needs of the national economy. But this cannot go on. We hope, as the vanguards of all political movements in the past, the genuine student leaders and activists now would shun the path of self-interest and once again help student politics emerge as a powerful and positive factor in political force. They should dedicate their time and energy to free the society from exploitation and injustice and voice the hopes and aspirations of the common people.

**We hope, as the vanguards of all political movements in the past, the genuine student leaders and activists now would shun the path of self-interest and once again help student politics emerge as a powerful and positive factor in political force. They should dedicate their time and energy to free the society from exploitation and injustice and voice the hopes and aspirations of the common people.**

them away from politics. What sort of leadership are they likely to provide to our future nation builders the students? Will good students be attracted to JCD when they see that non-students and people with questionable moral characters lead it? Most likely not." (January 6, 2001).

Students as an effective political force had played a glorious role in our national life. Sometimes they were more militant than the organised political parties and labour organisations. Students participated selflessly in the freedom movement against the British colonial rule in the Indian sub-continent. They took part in almost all the democratic movements in the 20th century Bangladesh. Students as a community created history in the Language Movement of 1948-52. The uncompromising and valiant role of the students against the military dictatorship of Ayub Khan, especially in the 1962 movement

leaders of the dissident group in collaboration with a section of the freedom fighters formed the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), a militant opposition party based on socialist ideology. Meanwhile degeneration had begun to surface in the student politics. The already volatile campus had turned into a battle-field. Bricks and hockey-sticks were replaced by bombs and sophisticated firearms. For example, seven students were gunned down in Mohsin Hall of the Dhaka University in 1974. More than one thousand students have already been killed in the name of student politics after independence. The ballot boxes of the election of DACSU, known as the most democratic organisation in the country, were snatched away by the pro-government hooligans in the election of 1972.

But majority of the students are in general apolitical. They have little interest in the national politics. Most of them are driven

support of general students rather they care for the blessings of the leaders of the parent organisations. They try to appease them in whatever way they can. Now conventions are not held to choose the leadership in a democratic system. It is the party chief who selects them.

Many prominent leaders had begun their political career in their student life. They had to go through a hard apprenticeship in politics during their academic career. They suffered oppression, repression and imprisonment. The nation is indebted to them. Besides mediocre and less than mediocre students many brilliant students were involved in active politics in the 1950's and 1960's. Many of them later secured important positions in the state and in government administration.

Both the Chhatra League and the Student Union played a glorious role in the persistent

become a profitable concern that requires no capital. Now-a-days income of a mid-level student leader is said to have been more than that of a medium industrialist. There are exceptions. But some student leaders have already amassed a stupendous fortune even before completion of their academic career. Extortion, toll collection etc have allegedly been the source of income of many a student leader. Businessmen and traders fear the so called student leaders often more than the Azrail the angel of death. Student leaders do not wait for any occasion to extort money from the traders but ahead of any festival they become more active. A report published in The Daily Star said, "Different factions of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), student wings of ruling Awami League and opposition BNP, respectively, are now busy collecting tolls from city markets for

## Drug Addiction: Needed Immediate Corrective Measures

Drug addiction is rising in Bangladesh due to lack of adequate measures to stop it, writes Mahboob Kabir of News Network

SEVEN-YEAR-OLDS grow under the shadow of parental love and care. It did not happen to Bachchu. He got addicted to drugs when he was only seven years old.

"When I started taking drugs I was too little to understand its consequences. Now I regularly take phensidyl and heroin in

addition to natural cannabis," Bachchu, now 18, of city's Mohammadpur area said blaming his senior friends for spoiling his life.

Another teenager, Babu, of

New Market area, became drug addict at the age of eight. He first started smoking and gradually became addicted to hemp, charash and phensidyl.

Still unbelievable is the story of Sumon, a 13-year-old boy of Katsur in city's Mohammadpur thana. Not only he takes drugs. He has started sleeping with girls. Yusuf, a 23-year-old youth of the same area, also got addicted to drugs when he was a student of class VIII. He too blames his senior friends for destroying his life.

Now at 18, schoolboy Propid of Mirpur area started taking drugs when he was a student of class IX. "I know my life is doomed. I was an SSC candidate of 1999 but I could not appear in the exam," he regretted.

Twenty-year-old Pervez, who comes from an elite family of Dhanmondi area, also could not appear in his master's degree examination due to addiction to heroin and morphine. He got addicted to drugs soon after his admission to Dhaka University.

All these teenagers and youths, except Bachchu and Pervez, became addicted to drugs after coming in contact with political godfathers. In the beginning they were used in selling drugs and carrying their firearms. And even they were forced to blast bombs at processions of political parties. Thus they spoiled their lives.

Pervez's mother, a social worker, recognised, "Our son actually became addicted following a gap of close contact between him and us. His father, who is an engineer, was abroad for a long time."

The cases of Bachchu, Babu, Sumon or Pervez are no exceptions. There are 21 lakh drug

addicts in the country, more than half of them living in Dhaka, the capital city.

The rapid rise in the number of country's drug addicts is attributed to bad association, curiosity of teenagers to taste drugs, mental disorder, family trouble, abuse within family, easy availability of drugs, unemployment, frustration and lack of awareness.

Statistics provided by Madakasakti Niramaya Kendra under Narcotics Control Department showed that on average 68 per cent people become addicted to drugs due to influence by friends while 14 per cent out of curiosity, 6 per cent to enjoy easy pleasure and 4 per cent due to family trouble and frustration.

In addition, there are some people who take various drugs, including wine, pethedene, bhang, charash, morphine and sleeping pills, because of mental disorder, easy availability of drugs, unemployment and lack of awareness.

Most of the people who take or use drugs are heroin addicts. The number of heroin addicts constituted 67 per cent of them in 1998 while it stood at 63 per cent in 1999 and jumped to 75 per cent in 2000.

Although codeine phosphate like phensidyl, polidrug and phenargan syrup took the second position as drug items, the number of codeine-phosphate addict has decreased in recent years. In 1998, it was 15 per cent which dropped by 2 per cent in 1999.

The number of hemp addict was 6 per cent in 1998 while it rose to 10 per cent in 1999 and stood at 7 per cent in 2000 and the number of people addicted

to tidigesic was 8 per cent in 1998, 10 per cent in 1999 and 5 per cent in 2000. However, the number of drug addicts caused by adverse family atmosphere and frustration has increased alarmingly in the country, while the number of addicts due to abuse within family decreased remarkably.

Masud, a former counsellor of Apan, a cure centre for drug addicts, said the number of female heroin addicts alongside male ones are on the rise. "Women now constitute half the country's total heroin addicts," he said. Figures gathered from various surveys of the Madakasakti Niramaya Kendra also support this observation.

But the Niramaya Kendra has no accommodation for female drug addicts. The pressure of heroin addicts has become so intense that it now cannot properly cope with it. According to its statistics 285 male heroin addicts out of 1,858 went back from the centre without treatment in 1998 while 234 out of 1,608 and 177 out of 986 in 1999 and 2000 respectively.

Findings of the centre also revealed that illiterate, less-educated and unemployed youths, traders having earnings between Tk 1,000 and 5,000, usually become addicted to various drugs while those under-15 or above 50 usually show little interest in drugs.

Statistics of the first six months of the last year shows that nearly one per cent of under-15 boys while seven per cent of people aged between 36 and 45 years take drugs. Besides, 10 per cent of the youths who passed XI and XII

classes, use drugs while 4 per cent students, 15 per cent working men, 8 per cent drivers, 6 per cent workers and one per cent farmers follow suit.

According to the centre's studies, three per cent couples who live separately, one per cent of divorcees, six per cent of students studying in different universities and three per cent of who have completed university education take drugs. Three widows or widowers in 1,000 were also found drug addicts.

Those who earn a lot of money do not usually show interest in drugs. But 14 per cent of those who earn between Taka 5,000 and 10,000 become addicted and three per cent of those who earn over Tk 10,000 have tendency to take drug.

Although the number of drug addicts continues to rise, little has been done to increase facilities in four cure centres at divisional level. There is a 40-bed cure centre in Dhaka while three 5-bed centres in Rajshahi, Khulna and Chittagong. "At these centres, the drug addicts are put on a 14-day course and then released without any measures to rehabilitate them, which is essential as per the rules," said Dr Shamim M Chowdhury, director of the Madakasakti Niramaya Kendra.

There are 6-7 private clinics for drug addicts in the country. Most of these, including Apan, Crea, Baraca and Promise, are in Dhaka. These centres charge Tk 6,000 to 8,000 per month for the treatment of every drug-addict patient.

Brother Ronald Drahozal, an American teacher, who came to Bangladesh in 1988 and launched a programme, "Narcotics Anonymous", said, "on an

average one person in each family here is addicted to drug. But the government has no political will to crack down on drug dealers or drug addicts.

"There is a big hospital here for diabetic patients, but not for drug addicts. The government makes efforts to face flood, but not the flood of drugs," Drahozal observed.


"The number of drug addicts is on the rise in the country as selling and smuggling of drugs

continued under the very nose of law enforcers," said an official at Narcotics Control Directorate wishing anonymity. He said the drug traffickers allegedly with the connivance of police, BDR as well as local administration have long been smuggling various drugs into the country and overtly selling these among the drug addicts.

"Only 30 per cent of the smuggled drugs are seized. So, the government needs corrective measures immediately," the official said.

Eight percent of Dhaka University's total students are drug addicts and three percent of them are girls, according to a study conducted by Social Science Department of the University. Though exact data is not available, over three percent female students of the country's other public universities like Jahangirnagar, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna and Sylhet were said to be drug addicts.

Statistics released by the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) showed that there are over 21 lakh people in the country who are addicted to Indian Phensidyl, an alcoholic syrup. The DNC data showed some 40 percent of phensidyl addicts come from upper class families while 30 percent from upper middle class, 20 percent from middle class and the remaining 10 percent from lower class families. Dr Shamim Matin Chowdhury, Director of Madakasakti Niramaya Kendra, a clinic for drug addicts in the city's Tejgaon area, said the number of girl drug addicts rose by five times in the last five years. As the number of drug addicts continues to multiply, the number of clinics for their treatment is also increasing in the country.

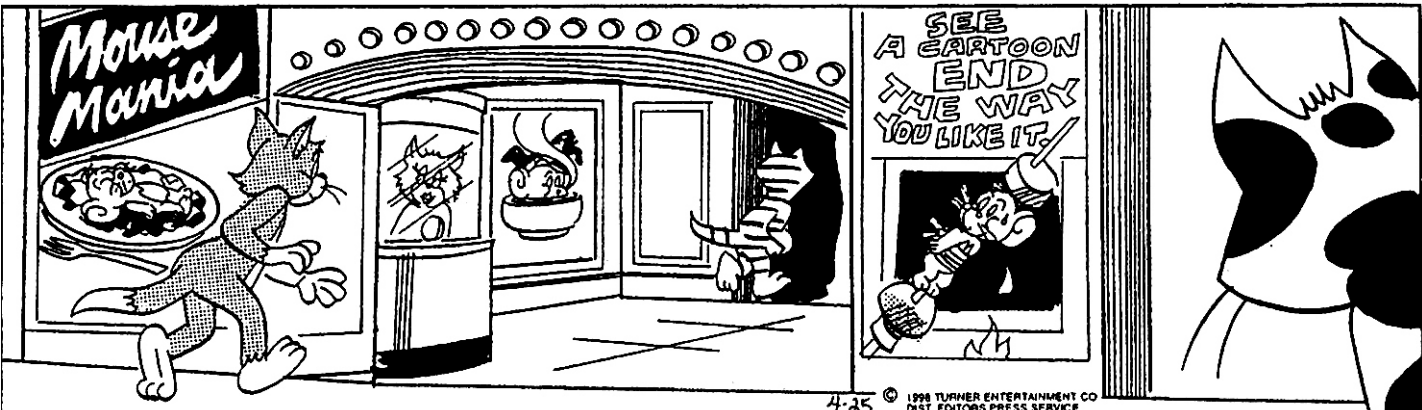


There are 25 clinics for drug addicts in Dhaka City alone, Shamim said. Chairman of Psychology Department of Dhaka Medical College Dr M Firoj also agreed that the number of girl addicts in the country has been on the rise alongside the boys. The DNC statistics also revealed that all sorts of drugs, except pethedene, are being smuggled into the country from India. Phensidyl worth about Tk 9,000 crore is smuggled into the country from India each year. A report submitted by the Multi-descriptive Service to the DNC, showed that phensidyl worth of Tk Tk 867 crore was smuggled into the country from India in 1999 alone.

Another survey conducted by CARE, a leading NGO, revealed that those who used to take only phensidyl and heroin have now started taking TD-Zesic, a deadly intravenous drug. The survey found 5,000 destitute people addicted to TD-Zesic. Alsaaruddin, a teacher of Social Science Department of the Dhaka University, attributed the growing trend of drug addiction to unemployment, frustration and failure in love affairs. "Still there is time to tackle the menace, or else, the country will have to pay for it," he warned.


**TOM & JERRY**

By Hanna-Barbera



**James Bond**

BY IAN FLEMING  
DRAWING BY MORAX



SO SORRY, MR. BOND— BUT YOU SCORED ON THE JAGUAR FIGURE! MY PIN IS A CLOWN—

A CLOWN?... WHAT SPLENDID LUCK! THEN IT IS JOAO ONC— WHO CLAIMS THE PLEASURE OF YOUR COMPANY FOR THIS CARNIVAL NIGHT!

LET ME JUST LOOK AROUND... AH, THERE IS A JAGUAR PIN! THE BEAUTIFUL SENEHORA CARVALHO IS YOUR LADY OF THE EVENING!

MAY I HELP YOU— BOND, OLD CHAP?