

Teacher-student politics under fire

PROFESSOR ABDUL MANNAN

TEACHER and student politics in educational institutions came under some focus following the tragic assassination of the BUET student Sony. The recent abominable incidents in the Dhaka University campus have added an extra dimension to the entire issue. Though this was not the first time when an innocent student's life was lost by a senseless gun battle between marauding student factions Sony's killing was unprecedented as she was the first ever female victim of such a heinous incident. It is alleged and widely believed that Sony was a victim of bullet fired from the guns of the Chhatra Dal goons. When Sony's tragic demise shook the whole nation, and the entire nation was lost deep in a mourning mood, concerns from topmost position of power were expressed about banning teacher-student politics on campuses quite expectedly as a political device to quell public commotion. The same concerns are also voiced by a section of the media. As a routine matter, or as part of a mechanical formality, inquiry committees were formed, a couple of persons were arrested too, but the main culprits are still out of reach. As per the newspaper reports, the 'godfathers' of the goons are still at large basking in sunshine.

In the last budget session of the Jatiyo Sangsad the Prime Minister in her concluding speech re-iterated the position of her government and announced that the decision of banning teacher-student politics would be taken after consultation with all concerned quarters. Following her speech in the Parliament an expert committee on education formed earlier and headed by the former vice-chancellor of Rajshahi University and National University and the Chairman of the University Grants Commission, Dr M A Bari, submitted a report to the Prime Minister recommending, among other things, a ban on teacher-student politics. The recommendation even went further and proposed that no teachers should have any direct or indirect connection with any political parties. Couple of days later the BUET authorities in its Academic Council meeting in a way implemented the recommendation of the committee by banning student politics.

The education minister has already announced that to begin with implementing recommendations of the committee headed by Dr Bari, political activities in government and private educational institutions will be banned soon, and wished that following the example of the BUET, other public universities will have to take their own decision.

Now the question is what are motives behind this sudden 'crusade' against teacher-student politics on campus?

To take any decision about banning student politics, which was found to make significant contributions to all our important political movements including the Language Movement, the mass upsurge of 1969, the War of Liberation in 1971, and also in the movement against the autocratic regime of General Ershad, it is very important to be cognizant of that legacy. The most important question is: whether 'student politics' is to blame, or the party in power that uses students as its power-base, and does not let rule of law take its own course when its own goons are behind such occurrences is to blame. It also needs an investigation whether there is any relationship between campus violence and teacher-student politics. The recent happenings in Dhaka University do not have much to do with the teacher-student politics. The entire episode could have been easily averted if the

Bangladesh took place during the Bangabandhu regime in 1973 in Mohsin Hall of Dhaka University. Seven students were brutally murdered. The government arrested the killers and prosecution was started. All the arrested belonged to the then ruling party's student wing, Chhatra League. However, after the dark night of 15th August 1975 the process of trial came to a stop and they were freed.

General Zia assumed the post of President of Bangladesh on April 21, 1977. Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) was floated as student wing of BNP with elements drawn from the JSD backed Chhatra League and the banned Islami Chhatra Shangha. In the absence of any noticeable activities from the Chhatra League, JCD made it sure that there were no visible challenges in the control of campuses of the country.

The DUCSU leader Ziauddin Bablu became a minister in Ershad's cabinet overnight. When the present lawmaker and member of the cabinet Mr Amanullah Aman

of Ayub's infamous Governor Monem Khan. NSF was basically created to preach the ideologies of the martial law dictatorship of the then president Ayub Khan. The names of NSF cadres like Khoka, Paspattu, Kentu, Altaf, Bazlu and others sent chills down the spine of the students in Dhaka University campus. The worst form of their brand of politics showed its teeth when the goons of NSF mercilessly beat up the eminent economist of the country Professor Abu Mahmud of Dhaka University. It was a result of a personal problem existing between Dr Mahmud and one of his colleagues in the Economics Department who was a protégé of Monem Khan. Unfortunately that colleague used the goons of Monem Khan to settle his personal score with Dr Mahmud.

The post-1975 period unfortunately saw the entrance of non-students, muscle power, gun wielding thugs into the erstwhile pro-student and pro-people glorious student politics under the direct patronisation of political parties,

to enquire into the incidents of Chittagong University and submit a report within a month. Justice Amin took time, and waited for the new government to take over. The report that was submitted was heavily criticised by all quarters, as it did not find any fault with the troublemakers. On the contrary the report observed that the teachers and students should not have gone to attend class on that fateful day! It concluded with a confusing recommendation saying "the university will not function with the present VC in the position. The removal of the VC will also not be the solution (not the exact wording)". The troublemakers took up the first part of the recommendation and demanded immediate removal of the vice chancellor. In an unprecedented move they declared the official residence of the vice-chancellor a 'sub jail' and kept him and his family members (his wife is also a professor of the university and an eminent scholar in her field) totally confined their residence for full twelve days. Microphones were fixed in front of the vice-

universities and demand the release of the vice-chancellor of RU, Professor MU Ahmed, who was languishing in the jail. General Ershad in his introductory remark rudely commented that the teachers of the universities indulged in active politics. There was a unanimous protest from all of us. We said though it is our fundamental right to take part in national politics not many university teachers do so. On the contrary, the people who should not be in politics keep on intruding into politics. If more university teachers took part in national politics, keeping their academic honesty and integrity in tact, the quality of the national politics would have been much better. The General did not take the remark easily and the two and half-hour meeting ended without any meaningful result.

The intention of this commentary is not to point fingers towards any particular party or government. It is simply an attempt to make the point that the banning of student or teacher politics will not serve the purpose to stop violence in the campus. The glorious past of their politics has to be brought back. Instead of blaming the students, the major political parties have to stop using the students as their power base and prepare them as their cadres to stay in power. If persons responsible for crime are arrested, instead of sheltering them, irrespective of party affiliation, things will change dramatically overnight. So, fault is not in students' and teachers' politics, the main problem is with the sincerity, and intention of the political parties.

The politics of students will have to be returned to actual students. Some of the points that I would like to conclude with are: (1) There is nothing wrong in teachers taking part in national politics provided it does not come in the way of their professional duties and their political views or ideologies are not nakedly reflected in their class room teaching. Generation and dissemination of knowledge are the prime responsibility of a university. Expression of the political opinions and debating on important national and international issues can bring about a qualitative change in our decomposing political system. This has happened in many developing and developed countries. The issues that need to be kept in mind are that neither students nor the teachers should be indulging in politics to grab a share of the spoiled political system. A healthy teacher-student politics can play the role of watchdog in any society, especially in countries like ours, where grabbing of the political spoils has become a culture. (2) The thugs in the disguise of student leaders will have to be disowned by all political parties and the student parties will have to be delinked from the mainstream political parties. (3) More important is the enforcement of rule of law on those who preach and practice violence. Violence and extortion in the name of student politics will have to go. These must not have a place in the politics of civilised society.

The writer is a former Vice-Chancellor of Chittagong University.

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authorities acted more judiciously.

In the fight for retaining or restoring democracy and the right of the people in this country and later in our glorious War of Liberation the teacher-student combine has played a very significant and historic role. The founding fathers of this country always considered this section of the society as a driving force in their pro-people politics. Rafique, Jabbar, Shafiq, Asad, Mozzamel, Professor Zoha, Professor Giasuddin, Professor J C Dev, Professor Joytirmoy Guha Thakurta, Professor Munir Chowdhury, Professor Abani Mohan Dutta and others have carved their names in the honour board of our national history for their supreme sacrifices for the nation. Oli Ahad, Tofael Ahmed, Abdur Rob, Late Abdul Quddus Makhan, Motia Chowdhury, Rashed Khan Menon, Shamsuddoha, Saifuddin Manik, Abdullah Al Noman, Mahbulullah, AFM Mahbul Hoque, Shahjahn Siraj, and quite a few other familiar names in our national politics are the products of pre-1971 student politics. Though some of them now suffer from political deluge, they made significant contributions when they were in student politics.

Perhaps the first major campus violence following the emergence of

became a member of the parliament in the former BNP government he was still the VP of DUCSU. The warrant of precedence of the government earmarked the place of the vice-chancellor step behind a parliament member! An embarrassing situation, of course! It was difficult for a vice chancellor to work with a DUCSU VP, who according to the university constitution is to work under the authority of the vice chancellor, but as an elected MP, with a higher status in the warrant of precedence.

Till the seventies most of the students who were involved in active politics were those who possessed envious public exam results. Many of them later became teachers and researchers at universities at home and abroad. Some of them became professionals of international repute. When they were student leaders, their life style was often very modest and they were popular and respected on the campus not because of their muscle power but because of their academic excellence, modesty and good behaviour. Exceptions of course were there. During martial law of Ayub Khan in the then Pakistan, saw the emergence of National Students Front (NSF) under the protection and patronage

especially the party/parties in power. The leadership changed hands for the worse. The only exception was the left leaning student parties. However they mattered little because of their shortsighted policies, and at times attempts to gain cheap popularity disregarding the stark reality of the day. The usurper of state power needed people who could protect their interest and in return they would take care of them. So the state protection of such destructive elements went on. Money, firepower and lucrative business deals flowed to them automatically like a stream of water. The purpose of the government just need to be served at any cost. An example will not be out of place here. Immediately after the fall of Ershad in December 1990 the general students of Chittagong University under the banner of its central students' union (CUCSU) brought out a victory procession largely attended by students, teachers, and staff. Once the procession was over the then vice-chancellor of the university was requested to address the gathering. In his brief speech he cautioned the gathering to be careful about the collaborators of 1971 who are now posing as revolutionaries. Chhatra Shibir took this remark of the vice-chancellor on them and declared an all out war against him. They enforced an indefinite strike and when the teachers and the general students wanted to attend classes they were mercilessly beaten and Farukhuzzaman Farukh, a meritorious student was beaten to death. Everything in the university came to a standstill. At one stage the then caretaker President, Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed formed a one member judicial probe committee with Justice Mahmudul Amin Chowdhury (the former Chief Jus-

chancellor's residence and for full twelve days the trouble mongers kept on abusing the vice-chancellor in the filthiest possible language. Practically no food, no water, no electricity, no telephone facility was available for the VC and his family members during those days. During the twelve-day ordeal the whole nation witnessed the 'golden silence' and shameful inaction of the government. The then Education Minister Dr. Badruddoza Chowdhury along with a former student of the vice-chancellor (a minister in the present cabinet) met the vice-chancellor in his 'captivity' and to the utter surprise of everyone requested him to step down as per the demand of the 'agitators'! The vice-chancellor courageously refused, stood his ground and on the following day the education minister informed the parliament that everything is fine in Chittagong University! However subsequently on December 31st 1991, the vice-chancellor was finally removed by the government. An entire academic year was lost — thanks to the government! Well, these days the government would not take all these troubles to remove vice-chancellors!

The number of teachers taking part in national politics is miniscule. Immediately after General Ershad usurped power from Justice Sattar in 1981 the Federation of Bangladesh University Teachers Association met him in his office (currently the Prime Minister's Office). Among others, this writer, Professor KAM Saduddin (DU), Professor Ahmed Kamal (DU), Professor Sekandar Khan (CU), Professor Amanullah Ahmed (RU), Professor Shafiqullah (JU), Professor Shahjahan (BUET, late) and others (sorry for not remembering all the names) met him to discuss the problems in the

Dr. Anis Waiz : A tribute

MUYEEN-UZ-SAFA



MAJOR General (Dr.) Anis Waiz, Principal and Professor of Medicine, Bangladesh Medical College, passed away on August 13. His professional life spanned more than 42 years, almost 35 years with the armed forces and the rest in the civilian arena. In both these areas he kept a low profile. He could not afford to be much in the public eye and what contribution great or small he had or has made at large is not public knowledge.

In the army by virtue of his authority or by using his powers of persuasion he had tried and succeeded in building a bridge between the military and civil apparatuses. He had helped to establish a system where the general public could seek and get medical help from wherever and whenever various military drills and exercises of the Bangladesh Armed Forces were taking place.

He had large scale expansion of the Army Medical Corps (AMC) done. Wherever the army were stationed be it a full-fledged cantonment or a garrison or barracks he fitted it with an appropriate size medical unit. However small the outfit he made sure that there were specialists trained in the basic clinical disciplines namely a physician, a surgeon and a gynecologist and obstetrician to be on standby and what is more important, he made these facilities accessible to the general public if other medical help was not available. Such arrangements were widely available in the Chittagong Hill Tracts when the Bangladesh Army were fighting the insurgents there.

He also saw to it that specialist care at the central army hospitals was not restricted to army personnel only and that the deserving civilians also benefited from the advanced Medicare at the AMC.

He played a pivotal role in bringing the medical degrees of Bangladesh institutions to international recognition. In the early eighties he was deputed by the government in parleys with representatives of the General Medical Council (GMC) of the United Kingdom, World Health Organization (WHO) and others and his charisma and good standing played its part in earning Bangladesh medical degrees a prestigious international status.

As Chairman of the Management Board and the Board of Trustees of the Dhaka Children's Hospital (1982-1993), he was directly responsible for introducing and incorporating fully modern and advanced life support systems for neonates and premature babies in its Intensive Care Units (ICU) and for developing it into a Tertiary Referral

Centre. He, during that period, also helped and organised to constitute the Bangladesh Institute of Child Health (BICH) with himself as Chairman and which now has become a centre of excellence in child care with very close involvement of Japan and other countries.

From 1993 onwards and for more than eight years now he had been associated with Bangladesh Medical College (BMC) as its Principal and also as Professor of Medicine. This gave him a broader platform of work from and also to expand his horizon. He has successfully incorporated his well-wrought experience from the Armed Forces Medical Corps in civilian medical setup and it actually has been a very happy co-mingling of thoughts, experience and habits. Indeed Gen Anis and the BMC have had a very useful symbiotic relationship where he with his experience, dynamism, charm, charisma, his wide national and international connections and his endless vitality and energy, of course with the assistance and support of the pragmatic leadership of the BMC, helped to develop a fledgling institution into a centre of topnotch learning and high quality medical care of enormous stature. It is BMCs avowed policy to render high quality healthcare at a reasonable and affordable way. In fact 50 per cent of its admitted patients at any given time are treated free of cost.

The nature of his profession, his active association as Fellow of many governing medical establishments around the world dictated that for ethical reasons his life or his work or for that matter that of any medical person be not too publicised. But his professional competence, personal charm, compassion, witicism and personality also made it impossible for him to remain incognito and so, despite obvious reticence, he finds himself landed with a celebrity status in Bangladesh and which is also acknowledged overseas. He was a very widely traveled person.

Maj Gen Anis Waiz has been the role model for generations of medical students and still remains so for young aspiring medics.

William Carey and abolition of 'SATI'

Carey came to India at a time when the ordinary people's life was so much ridden with the curse of many oppressive and outlandish customs in the name of religion. Superstitious practices like Sati and burning of people affected by the dreaded disease of leprosy were among these. Only in Bengal on an average 7-8 hundred widows were burnt on their husbands' funeral pyres annually.

REV. MARTIN ADHIKARY



AUGUST 17 was the 241st birth anniversary of Dr. William Carey, whose tireless reforming activities earned him a great repute. He was not only one of the greatest missionaries in the then Bengal, but was also a social reformer par excellence. Many people remember him still today for his great efforts that led to the abolition of, among things other, the horrible practice of the burning of widows on the some pyre with the dead husband. It is most regrettable and utterly deplorable that still today 170 years after the abolition of Sati we read news of widow having most recently been burnt in India.

Carey came to India at a time when the ordinary people's life was so much ridden with the curse of many oppressive and outlandish customs in the name of religion. Superstitious practices like Sati and burning of people affected by the dreaded disease of leprosy were among these. Only in Bengal on an average 7-8 hundred widows were burnt on their husbands' funeral pyres annually. One day Carey saw such an incident — several people were forcibly holding a young widow to the pyre of her husband. Carey's whole being was terribly shaken. He was so saddened at that inhuman act that he ran to those people and shouted to stop forcing that ill-fated woman. He appealed to them to spare the woman's life. But who would listen to him, or paw heed to the helpless scream of the woman? Apart from all the atrocities attached to the event there was the deadening noise of the drums so that none would hear her cry! Carey shouted to those merciless people, "I will testify against you for this kind of things and barbarism on the Day of Judgment."

We note that apart from Carey there were also other voices raised against this as well as other horrible practices with great reforming zeal.

During the early stage the repre-

sentatives of government, often even in spite of their intention, were not courageous enough to abolish such bizarre rites as they were afraid of any rebellion that might come from the traditional priests. It was Sunday, December 5th 1829. Carey was preparing for the Sunday worship at the church. Unexpectedly the doorbell rang. The message that the caller brought him was of utmost importance to him and it was from no less a person than the Governor General Lord William Bentinck, who asked Carey to translate the edict abolishing Sati throughout the British Dominions. Carey was so overwhelmed with joy that, as Kelsye Finnie, Carey's most recent biographer writes: "Like a schoolboy who has just been told he has won a coveted prize, Carey sprang from his chair, threw off the black jacket he wore when studying, and sent a request to one of his colleagues to take his place at the services (worship) that day". He instantly sat down with his pundit to translate the historic document in Bangla. Carey reasoned that any delay in circulating the same in the local language might cause the unwanted death of some more women.

Many of the above-mentioned evil practices were stopped by government enactments in those days as a result of movements in which Carey took most active part. It was Wellesley, who had asked Carey to make a census on the Sati cases. In 1803, Carey took a census of Sati within a 30 miles radius of Calcutta and placed before the Governor General the statistics of 483 cases of Sati that particular year. It took many years to ban the evil practice. Eventually it was officially banned on 4th December, 1829. The credit obviously goes to great reformers like William Carey and Raja Ram Mohun Roy. Alas! stigma still persists. But, why? Are some people yet so ignorant and superstitious?