Questions for a Conscientious Citizen

OMAR CHOWDHURY

I saw a huge billboard at the Kakoli intersection sponsored by the newly elected Chatro League Joint Convener of Titumir Government College expressing his heartfelt gratitude to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. I got to pondering, how can a young college student afford such a large advertisement in such a prominent location? How much money is there in student politics? I suppose the admission and hall *dokhol* (possession) business must be booming. Even seasoned criminals would be 'incentivized' to seek higher education.

Chatra League, Chatra Dal, Jubo League, Jubo Dal take turns by rotation at control of the criminal underworld; and the usual *chadabaji*, *shontrashi* and *tenderbaji* (extortion, terrorism and racketeering). Armed and blessed by the ruling party, protected by police, sheltered from the lower courts –the Italian mafia could learn a thing or two from these guys. The Chatra League goons who hacked Biswajit to death were only arrested because of media exposure, public outcry and a high court order. Otherwise, they would have gotten away with a pat on the back and elevation within the cadre hierarchy. It remains to be seen if justice will be served.

It is exactly this kind of vested interest that has swelled the ranks of AL and BNP. There has been a drastic decline in the quality of membership at all levels in both parties. When the core ideology of both parties is to grab power and hold on by any means, it is only natural that people with vested interest will join. Nobody joins politics to play a constructive role in the opposition. The main culprits in this sordid game are businessmen and retired civil/military bureaucrats who grovel at the feet of the *Netris*, beg for nomination and then spend copious amounts of black money to win elections. Nominations are bought and sold, and the victors gorge themselves in corruption. In exchange, they surrender the interests of the country and give their leader free reign and absolute power.

Sheikh Hasina has jeopardised our democracy by unilaterally abolishing the Caretaker Government, followed by one fiasco after another – Padma Bridge, Hallmark, Destiny, share scam, Grameen Bank etc.

Sheikh Hasina has jeopardised our democracy by unilaterally abolishing the Caretaker Government, followed by one fiasco after another – Padma Bridge, Hallmark, Destiny, share scam, Grameen Bank etc. Yet no one from within the party dare criticize her, let alone challenge her for leadership of the party. Instead, she is elected unopposed as President of AL! Trial of war criminals is a brilliant diversionary tactic and a blow to the opposition, which has taken on a whole new dimension with Shahbagh. We are just pawns in their game of politics – pawns being the first to be sacrificed. I voted for AL in 2008 – if there is an election in 2014, do they expect my vote again?

In 2001, BNP under the leadership of Khaleda Zia came to power with a two-thirds majority in Parliament. Tarek Zia ran the country for the next five years from Hawa Bhaban. Hawa Bhaban are the alleged masterminds behind the 21/08 grenade attacks on Sheikh Hasina and AL, promoters of corruption, nepotism and militant zealots. They