

A BLANKET ON STUDENT POLITICS

Cutting the head to cure a headache?

STAR WEEKEND DESK

The history of student politics in Bangladesh is a story of its rise and fall. Its glorious past exists in monochrome memories where sari-clad, rifle-bearing ranks of women marched the streets, language martyrs defied oppression and took a stand when nobody else did, and democratic ideals had to be upheld even at the cost of human lives. Its current face encompasses a gamut, from the masses of general students occupying the streets to demand civic issues to mindless party goons beating one of their peers to death. While BUET has taken a stance to prohibit all student politics in its campus, opinions are split on the issue. One faction of students, teachers, politicians and civil society believe that party politics should be prohibited on all campuses. Another faction fear that this will further shrink the space for democracy, curtail people's right to organise against the state and lead to the creation of an apolitical citizenry. Is a ban on student politics justified? Is there a middle ground, an alternative? That is what we ask.



GRAFFITI: INAN ANJUM SIBUN

DHAKA UNIVERSITY CENTRAL STUDENTS' UNION VICE PRESIDENT, NURUL HAQUE NUR

Ban student party organisations, but revive student associations and parliaments
Speaking as a representative of the students, I want to reiterate that the BUET students are demanding that only party politics be banned on campus—not student politics in general. To be more specific, they are demanding the ban of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL).

The students should have demanded a student association based on clean politics and meritorious leaders. When we say student politics, we actually mean student activism—we are not talking about the student political organisations. These in-campus party organisations work for the agenda of their parent organisations, not for the students. They work to make sure that students cannot protest against the state and the political parties, and so they oppress.

Since student party politics has had a glorious history, one might wonder, how are we here? Even before Abrar Fahad, BUET has previously seen how Sabikun Nahar Sony was killed on campus during in-fighting between two political factions. Over the last two decades, the political parties have always recruited their armed infantry from the campuses, so as to

dominate the students.

There is no alternative to having student parliaments on campus. The parliaments will give us clean student political leaders. I myself never had political backing, and I came to the spotlight when working with civic issues that affected the interests of the general student body. The general students won seats in spite of the fact that the election was unfair.

The ruling party student organisations are not letting the student unions or student parliaments be revived. Even during the autocratic regime under Hussain M Ershad, the students' unions existed. But when democracy took over, both the ruling parties stopped the unions, refused to allow union elections to take place. If the students strongly demand that students' unions be revived, then the ruling party will be forced to give in—like they did at DUCSU.

MUJAHID ISLAM SELIM, PRESIDENT OF COMMUNIST PARTY OF BANGLADESH
Student party organisations need to be given independence, not banned

One issue needs to be cleared up—no student party organisation except that of the ruling party has ever existed inside the BUET campus. Our student wing, Chhatra Union, for example is prohibited. Currently, only BCL exists in BUET. They do not do student

politics—they are a fascist organisation. In fact, they exist the way they do precisely because there is no other student political organisation to counter them. The torture cells and ragging are possible because there is no proper student politics. Similarly, the apolitical campuses of private universities have bred the kinds of the students who could perpetrate an incident such as the Holey Artisan Bakery attack. These situations arose because there is no proper student politics. Depoliticalisation will create a political vacuum that can be filled with anything.

It is not a question of student party organisations, or even BCL. This is a question of power. Power oppresses. All of this happened because the administration, teachers and students came together to form a syndicate to protect the interests of the state, and not the students. If students are given independence to do any type of student politics they want, then these forces will be countered. We should take steps against the criminal organisations—and student political organisations are a natural ally. There should be elected student representatives to help the administration.

MAHFUZA KHANAM, PRESIDENT OF ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BANGLADESH, FORMER DUCSU VP OF 1967-1968
Hold the administration accountable, don't ban

student politics

Student politics has a particular framework, and it has to be limited within it. But when they came out of that framework and started acting as the muscle power of ruling parties, it became problematic. In colleges and universities, the administrative heads have kept these boys as their muscle power or their pets, just to be able to hold on their chairs. Where were the provosts when the dormitories were bursting into violence?

When we were student politicians, our teachers guided us, showed us the way. I myself was a professor of physics. Teachers nowadays need to reflect on whether they are playing an ethical roles. Many of them are culpable of transgressions that does not go with the ethics of the profession. Teachers are now branding themselves in different political colours just to retain their positions in the universities.

What has been happening here is not student politics. This is crime. This is not the same student politics we had done to liberate the country. This is an insult to the student politics we had done. There is no question of banning student politics—instead we need to bring back the old ways of doing it. We need to change the way the administration functions. Our university administrations have been chasing money without conscience.

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