



Ban on student politics PM's JS remark triggers controversies

Varsity Correspondent

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's latest remarks on banning student politics triggered controversies among the student bodies and members of the civil society.

When contacted, some of the conscious people expressed mixed and cautious reactions about the Premier's statement in Parliament on Sunday that the student politics would be banned by enacting new law if needed, in order to free campuses from violence.

As expected, the opposition organisations vehemently opposed the Prime Minister's proposition while a few scholars and professionals advocated for a referendum on "whether the student politics should be there or not".

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PM's JS remark

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Most student bodies active on Dhaka University campus on Monday blasted the Prime Minister's statement on giving moratorium on student politics. Student leaders and activists demonstrated against the possible move to restrict the student politics, which has a glorious past in liberating the country and restoration of democracy.

Begum Zia is not the first person to spell out a governing party's or the government's stand in favour of banning "student politics" which once made her a powerful leader in 1980s and created her party's road to power in 1990-91. Gen Ershad in 1986 disbanded his Jatiya Party's student wing as a tactic to defeat the anti-autocratic movement spearheaded by the student organisations.

But in fact, immediate past President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed is the real pioneer of advocating the idea of severing the parent political organisation's affiliation with student bodies to free campuses from terrorism.

In line with the opposition stand against the remarks by the BNP Chairperson and head of the government, the leaders of the ruling party's student wing Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), though tacitly, disapproved of the comment made by Begum Zia, their statutory leader. But, none is eager to name himself.

"Begum Zia herself is responsible for the situation, for which she intends to ban student politics," said one of the vice presidents of the JCD's just-suspended central committee. "It is she who established the supremacy of the terrorists in the organisation and those notorious guys are now tarnishing her government's image," he added.

President of JCD's DU unit Monir Hossain overtly expressed his fellow feeling with his paramount leader, saying, "She was compelled to make the statement for the present situation of student politics". "We have to revive the glorious image of the student politics changing its existing culture."

Awami League-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) leaders blamed Begum Zia for supplying arms to the students. "She has no right to impose ban on student politics in the name of removing terrorism," BCL President Bahadur Bepari said.

Leaders of Bangladesh Chhatra Union (BCU) termed Begum Zia's comment as an attempt to save her from people's wrath by blaming others for her own wrongdoing. "Criminal activities by the Chhatra Dal leaders couldn't be termed as politics," said BCU President Hasan Tariq Chowdhury Sohel.

"The ruling party is running the administration by the prescription of the imperialist forces, so there's nothing to wonder at Begum Zia's remarks," said Hasan Imam Rubel, Joint convener of left-leaning Biplobi Chhatra Moitree.

UNB adds: When student leaders sharply criticised her for her intention, common students welcomed Khaleda saying that it would help free the campus from terrorism.

Begum Zia told Parliament Sunday that student politics would be banned, if necessary, in consultation with all political parties to restore academic atmosphere on the campus.

Left-leaning Samajtantrik Chhatra Front (SCF) and Bangladesh Chhatra Federation brought out separate processions and held rallies on the campus protesting the PM's proposal.

"None can deny the contributions of students in various movements and bringing positive changes in the society. Who is Khaleda to ban student politics?" Bepari asked.

SCF general secretary Khokan Das said Begum Zia was talking about banning student politics as student organisations were threatening to resist the government move to export gas.

Sharifuzzaman Sharif, general secretary of left-leaning Bangladesh Chhatra Union (BCU), said Khaleda Zia wants to cover up the terrorist acts unleashed by JCD and her party's other front organisations across the country.

Sharmeen Sultana Kumu, a 4th year student of Philosophy department, said she would be very happy if the student politics is banned. "There will be no campus violence and I'll be able to attend my classes without trouble if student politics could be banned," she said.

The same was the view of Momtaj Parveen and Rifaat Ara Zaman of Mass Communication and Journalism department. They said student politics should be banned temporarily to help efface terrorism.