

Editorial
R 25

Student Politics

There are many important events in the history of Bangladesh such as the Language Movement of 1952, the Six Agendas of 1966, the Mass Uprising of 1969, the Non-Cooperation Movement of March 1971 and, of course, the pinnacle, the War of Liberation. If today we are passing through a difficult time in our social and political life it is because we have lost sight of the basic values that made our nation great. Amid the confusion created by communal disorder, unspeakable acts of torture, murder and the rampant distortion of history, our progressive and cultured student body has become lost in the milieu. But if we believe that the students are our future leaders we must nurture them properly in universities and any other place of enlightenment.

The mass uprising of 1969 led to the fall of Ayub Khan and the withdrawal of the treason case against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the recognised leader of the Bangalis of East Pakistan. In other words from the time of Partition in 1947 it was always the students who struggled and fought against economic and political oppression by the Central Government. But the culmination of student success was when in the 1980s they worked together to oust the autocratic government and help the nation back to a democratic system of government.

We must remember that the political development of East Bengal during the early years was conditioned by the anti-Bengali policies of the Central Government of Pakistan. The chief intent of the Punjabi-Mohajir dominated rulers was to perpetuate a colonial policy in the then eastern province of Pakistan through the use of the loyalist Muslim League Government. However progressive forces of the then East Bengal made a conscious determination to fight the evil policies and instead of being browbeaten by the anti-Bengali ruling coterie of Pakistan, the people of East Bengal began their long fight for justice that culminated in the War of Liberation.

There are well-meaning people around us who are forever reminding us of the need to bury all our differences in order for the country to move ahead. Their sense of patriotism, their love of country is a sentiment we ignore at our peril. It therefore becomes necessary for each of us to learn the lessons of history. It is said that those who do not know their history are destined to repeat it. The history of a nation is woven along some core principles. Back in 1971 and for a few years thereafter, the core principles of democracy, secularism, socialism and nationalism were the edifice Bengalis built. Once that edifice was disturbed, the past was lost and the future with it. Bangladesh was built on the rejection of communalism. Whoever buys into the notion that religion can define Bengali politics, that Bengali secularism can be replaced by neo-communalism, is actually playing into hands of those who have never wished this country well. We had freed ourselves from religious dominance through a secular armed struggle for freedom. And we must remember this concept was forged spontaneously within the crucible of the movement for independence. But now with half the population convinced that Bangladesh is a secular nation and the other half convinced it is a Muslim country practicing a democratic system the system faces paralysis. Of course, we believe that when needed, the students will again rally against injustice provided they can break free from petty party interests.