

Youth, Education And Politics

With the February 27 polls electing a student leader student power in Bangladesh politics emerges as an event of more than ordinary interest for this country. Traditionalists will find it hard reconciling with political innovation, while it must delight youth to see their leadership set up as a social force to complement that offered by age. The rather arcane fact that accounts for this development is ought to be both a reprimand and an education: it is a reprimand in the sense that national politics tended to be so frustratingly contentious as to make youth, not with its comparative immaturity of experience or expertise, but mainly with the idealism that goes with youth step in. The circumstantial convergence more than justified itself by the results it produced; an opposition consensus that helped end an authoritarian tradition and launch democracy through a fair election. This was and is also an education for all. In other words elders having failed, youngers had to come in to save the situation.

Though fairly before its time and a rarity in political history, student power so institutionalised can yet be a useful adjunct to the leadership provided by the senior politicians in running the country. In the first place, the new idea and fact can be a base for future leadership to grow, which has been kept stunted by more than forty years of an inhibiting political climate. But that is easier said than achieved in a country like Bangladesh where power has been more abused than used in the interest of the people and country. The slogan has been democracy or the people's welfare but in practice it was for the most part a contradiction — and a disappointment. Rivalries on party and personal grounds intensified on a scale that made sound government unachievable in a foreseeable future.

And there's the rub: for youth politics to grow along sound lines two things would have to be very conscientiously kept in view: the elders or seniors setting examples in good and sound government; the youngers or juniors offering their cooperation and service keeping the national interest above any thing else.

This need not be vaguely general: the specifics for the student representatives to work for are, in order of priority, (1) campus peace which will call for more than usual effort and energy to ensure on a stable basis (II) unity of view on a student's need for quality education, cooperation among all student groups (III) keeping this goal in sharp focus (IV) in pursuance of it, work seriously for an overall improvement of campus' peace and discipline.

The danger however lies in letting power ever go to the head, or youth leadership falling into the ruts left behind by corrupt and selfish leaders of the past. There is a natural law which works unfailingly in politics: authority once it deviates from idealism into by ways of power-abuse and self-aggrandisement it ends up destroying itself. The sad fact is: however common is this lesson of history few care to learn it.

But we can hope it would be refreshingly different with our leaders this time—particularly with our youth student leaders now saddled with bigger and well-defined responsibilities. And the overall national leadership, soon assuming formal power we hope will see to it that it will be visibly — different from the past.

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