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DUCSU Elections And Student Leadership

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Polis for the Dhaka University Central Students Union and the Residential Hall Unions, held yesterday, marks a return to a tradition that had been the cultural heart of this residential university ever since its birth in 1921, before it was suspended consequent upon circumstances created by political change in the country. Its revival after 7 years therefore is an important piece of history that must be kept continuing, predictably, to restor the spirit and atmosphere of peace and cooperations that the campus so badly needs. The polls conducted and concluded relatively peacefully is another piece of good news.

As many as one hundred eighty-six candidates have contested for 20 seats, which need not be considered pluralism carried too far. We have seen national elections having been fought by almost as many parties or candidates in the past. As far as Dhaka University and Hall elections, reopened after a seven-year moratorium is concerned, the parties, candidates and the peaceful holding of the polls are more important to an observer than who has won and who lost and to whom. It is the democratic process starting at the grass roots—i.e. in and around the traditional nucleus of it which is Dhaka University.

Though this sounds like students plunging headlong into politics, a phenomenon nowadays blamed for the academic decline, the fact (a paradox) is this had long been the base of academic discipline provided by a pattern of student politics that helped promote both politics and education. Its absence of (i.e. of elections) instead has been marked by a declension in student discipline, campus peace and academic standards. It is for this reason that one of our pleas has always been for reopening the Hall and University Union elections to improve things on the campus.

Dhaka University, once envied as the Oxford of the East, was the first institution with residential traditions steadily taking shape in its first residential hall—S.M. Hall. It had an image in which its students took special pride. And it owed it to the corporate life growing around the parliamentary tradition set through the periodic Hall Union elections and the cabinet formed of the elected members holding their respective portfolios. The microcosm of parliamentary norms thus provided by this Hall later developed into the university union with the other halls following suit.

That was the line along which the academic life and activity of this university developed much to the benefit of students and society. Scores of student leaders so trained in parliamentary politics and possessed of good academic records manned the country's administration and played leading roles in its politics. That is how society tended to grow with its social and academic values kept intact. This need not have been disrupted in a way that nearly everybody came to regret. Dhaka University was at the centre of this onward socio-academic and socio-cultural progress. Student union activities run on purely democratic lines made such a congenial campus atmosphere possible.

There are two positive gains to be made by society from the restoration of these old value on this old academic campus: one, student leaders occupying themselves creatively with performing their roles in their elected councils will be much less of an embarrassment to the administration; two, politics and academics fused so painlessly (i.e. with the dignity, decorum and discipline befitting a rising intellectual elite) that can enable society to go peacefully from strength to strength. That exactly is the hope we, along with society as a whole, pin on the student union election held after a long intermission, the student leadership that will emerge from its continuity and the tradition of responsibility and discipline this will resurrect and help maintain for all time to come.