

Campus Worries

Student politics has become a major source of worry for those willing to think about the future of the country. Once the vanguard of popular aspirations for political freedom and social progress, the student groups have, over the past couple of decades, degenerated into small factions characterised by a penchant for criminality. Yet, there is hardly any perceptible move by either university administrations or the government to cleanse the campuses of the gun-toting, bribe-extorting criminality that have come to characterise student politics. Political parties, with which these student groups are aligned, have found it convenient to allow things to degenerate this way. The students are now mere pawns in a power game that often involves violence.

One person who seems to have made it a duty to speak out against this degeneration of student politics is President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed. In one interesting observation on Sunday, the President pointed out that student leaders were becoming millionaires through their ill activities on the campuses, and asked what impact this could have on young students going for higher studies. After all, if one can become a millionaire, member of parliament or minister by engaging in politics of the underworld, then where is the incentive to study, learn and become a good citizen? But the question is, are the political leaders of the country, who are largely responsible for this state of affairs, listening?

Society can no longer allow criminality such as armed violence, routine extortion, even rape, to continue without legal actions being taken against the culprits. Criminality, of whatever kind and committed by "cadres" of whichever party, should be rooted out ruthlessly. But the point is, who will bell the cat? As long as major political parties continue to nurture their own gangs of goons under guise of "student party", the administrative machinery is likely to remain powerless. The political parties themselves have to take the responsibility by publicly severing links with their groups on the campus. Political parties may even consider putting a 10-year moratorium on political activities on the campus. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has already captured the imagination of the nation by making a non-hartal declaration. Now she can set another example of visionary politics by taking the lead in severing her party's links with student groups.