

Hold regular polls to student unions

Urge educationists, political leaders for qualitative change in student politics

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Political parties must cut off relations with student bodies to restore student politics to its former glory, noted educationists and political leaders yesterday said.

They also stressed the need for regular elections to the student unions at public universities and colleges, and councils of student organisations and their units.

Speaking at a roundtable discussion organised by The Daily Star, they said elections in time will bring in regular students in leadership, paving the way for a qualitative change in student politics.

However, chiefs of the two major parties—Awami League and BNP—must reach a consensus for that to happen, observed the speakers.

Mahfuz Anam, publisher and editor of The Daily Star, was the moderator at the discussion

attended among others by Dhaka University Vice-chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, Rajshahi University VC Dr M Abdus Sobhan, Jahangirnagar University VC Dr Shariff Enamul Kabir, Dhaka College Principal Prof Siraj Uddin Ahmed, DU professors Syed Anwar Hossain, Dr Anwar Hossain, MM Akash and Asif Nazrul.

The discussants also included political leaders Rashed Khan Menon, Mujahidul Islam Selim, Mahmudur Rahman Manna, Akhtaruzzaman and Rahana Akter Ranu, student leaders Mahmud Hassan Ripon, Manabendra Deb, Bappaditya Basu and Sonika Sharmin Swarna, and DU students Kaniz Fatema Chowdhury, Ohidujjaman Moin, Kajal Abdullah and Shanta Tawhida.

"Cut all relations with student bodies. It is the only way to bring back the glory days of student politics," said RUVV.

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Hold regular polls

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"We have to get to the root of the problem. Students alone are not responsible for the present crisis in student politics."

Prof Syed Anwar Hossain, a leading historian, said he shares the opinion that political parties must sever the relations with student bodies to bring about a qualitative change in politics.

But, he cautioned, cutting the links overnight might lead to members of the de-linked bodies getting involved in extortion and violence at an even more alarming rate.

Dr Anwar Hossain, a former general secretary of Dhaka University Teachers Association, said a consensus between the ruling and opposition parties is a must to bail student politics out of its sorry state.

Mujahidul Islam Selim, general secretary of Communist Party of Bangladesh, said a key reason for decaying student movement is links between the student bodies and their parent political parties.

He and the other speakers however said they are against banning student politics. They said they rather want efforts to free politics from money and muscle.

Students played the leading role in all achievements of the nation—from Language Movement in 1952 to restoration of democracy after 1/11 political changeover in 2007, they observed.

Prof Siraj Uddin said, "Ban is not the solution. We have to work for restoring its past glory."

But student leaders and workers must not be allowed to get away with their involvement in tender manipulation, extortion, admission trade and other misdeeds.

Manna, a former VP of DU central student union, said, "Definitely, student politics could not be put on right track without the good will of the two leaders [Hasina and Khaleda]."

Muscle and money hold huge sway over student politics. To see off the menace, the chiefs of the two parties must reach a consensus, as "nothing happens without their consent", he observed.

A few speakers urged political parties to practise democracy within organisations to bring change in the political culture. They also wanted student politics to be about educational institutions.

They also said that student politics should be called "student movement".

"The political parties must practise democracy and sever links with student bodies, among other steps, to bring back the past glory of student politics," Asif Nazrul said. He pointed out 17 kinds of crimes that take place in the name of student politics. He said these crimes must be stopped.

He stressed the need for action against troublemakers on campuses as per law and proposed forming of a "Campus Crime Trial Act" for ensuring immediate punishment to

"We have been demanding elections to Ducsu since the present government came to office but the university authorities have taken no effective steps so far," Bangladesh Chhatra League President Mahmud Hassan Ripon said.

Vowing to hold the 20-year-due elections to Ducsu, the DU vice-chancellor said, "If Ducsu election is held, it will help produce country's future leadership." He, however, said a congenial atmosphere and cooperation of all student bodies are a must for holding the election.

Prof Arefin said if the basic needs like accommodation of students can be fulfilled, the quality of student politics would improve gradually.

Menon, president of Workers Party of Bangladesh and a lawmaker, said student politics should be independent of influence.

Prof MM Akash placed a six-point recommendation to put student politics back on track including the involvement of students in development work and movements that concern students' problems, cultural activities, and distributing their subjects on merit.

The JU VC suggested that aged people be excluded from student politics and intruders be expelled from student bodies.

Akhtaruzzaman, a central leader of AL, said students act very nicely when the army rules this country but they cannot act as well when there is democracy.

Ranu, BNP lawmaker from women's reserved quota, said only students should get involved in student politics.

Ripon said everybody sees the negative role of student politics but just a few months ago during 1/11, students protested the emergency rules and helped restore democracy in the country.

Manobendra, president of Bangladesh Chhatra Union, alleged that the parent organisations of student bodies are exploiting student leaders in their own interest and backing them in tender manipulation and other illegal activities.

Bappaditya, president of Bangladesh Chhatra Maitree, blamed teachers' politics and politicised university administration for the deteriorating student politics.

Mamun, former president of DU JCD, expressed frustration over the fact that meritorious students prefer paying attention to their studies rather than joining student politics.

"Once they join student politics, the top positions will be filled by them."

Imran, an advocate of Supreme Court and former BCL leader, said student politics and units of student bodies should be centred in educational institutions rather than wards, unions, upazilas or districts.

Sonika Sharmin Swarna, a master's student of Fine Arts Institution of DU and a central

the offenders.
 The Daily Star Editor said the glorious past of student politics has to be restored. He identified two major reasons for the current dismal state of student politics: deterioration of the quality of student politics and money and muscle.
 He said once student politics played a role in building bright future for students but now it is destroying their future.
 The speakers said the nation would get its future leadership through elections to student unions. They said election would also help stop the criminalisation of student politics.
 BCL leader, said the power of the student bodies is concentrated in two or three leaders; it has to be decentralised.
 Shanta, a student of DU linguistics department, said those who are involved in student politics rely on muscle power now.
 Kaniz Fatema, DU student of computer science and engineering department, said key student bodies do not talk about the development of the university.
 Kajal, a student of finance department of DU, said they are forced to get involved in student politics for a bed in any of the dormitories.