

*Full Length Research Paper*

# National development and student politics in Bangladesh

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Student politics is one of the ignored areas in the international scholarly debate. In the late 1960's to early 1970's, some authors made some contributions in the context of South America and Africa. In 1968, Altbach also made very little contribution on the Indian student politics and its impact on development. The institutions of HE (higher education) in southern Asia is experiencing a high volume of student politics and teacher politics. In the discourse of institutional management and national development, people often make links between teacher politics and students while they talk informally. As the academics of HE in Southern Asia whom mainly conduct research are also rigorously involved with the politics, therefore, they often ignore this area. Factually, student politics has a serious impact on the institutional management and education system itself. This also provides a high volume of impact on the national development, education and state business in overall. This paper explores the impact of students' involvement in 'party politics' on national development and state business of education in Bangladesh, while answering some specific research questions through the data gained from an empirical research work.

**Key words:** Politics, national development, party politics, higher education, Bangladesh autonomy.

## INTRODUCTION

What is politics? Most introductory textbooks for students of politics begin with this question. There is, however, considerable disagreement regarding how it is being answered (Burns, 2000). One view is that politics has to do solely and uniquely with the activities of the state (Crick, 1979; Laski, 1931; Pickles, 1964; Miller, 1962; Heywood, 1997). There are, however, those whom challenge this view because they consider it to be too narrow. Indeed, they have different ways sought to broaden our understanding of the nature of politics. For example, one account points that politics has to do with the resolution, or at least the regulation, of conflict between individuals or groups. A related view is that politics has to do with the preservation of order within a particular society or group (Crick, 1979). There is also the view that

politics involves processes of collective decision-making in societies and/or groups (Alam, 2003). The fourth view talks about politics, which has to do with the exercise of power (Duverger, 1972; Leftwich, 1984; Lukes, 1981). As such, politics is an integral aspect of all social life. This is the understanding of politics that one finds in much of the current literature produced by post structuralist writers such as, for example, Chantal Mouffe (Mouffe, 1993). Heywood has claimed recently, that this last view is both the broadest and the most radical definition of politics available in the current literature (Heywood, 1997).

## Student politics

In this research, we focused on the students' involvement with the 'party politics.' To clarify the concept, it is important to distinguish different levels of student politics. As we mentioned earlier, politics is an activity that requires at least two people; therefore, student politics also

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requires at least two students. Consequently, merely two students' united activities in pursuance of certain aims can be identified as student politics. Then again, there are different types of student politics and it must be borne in mind that the types identified by different authors are based on time/region/country/culture (Alam, 2003). Further, we will distinguish three types of student politics.

### ***Student unity***

It is probable that student unity is one of the oldest structures of student politics (Altbach, 1974). When a number of students, whether some or a whole unit of student body in a school, country or region, form themselves into unity for executing a certain aim or a number of aims, or campaign in favour of their rights or even to agitate in order to receive their entitlement; they can be characterised by the term "student unity" (Altbach, 1974, 1993; Ottaway, 1968).

### ***Students union***

In some countries, the student forum/club is also known as union (Altbach, 1974; Hamilton, 1968). When a group of students have religion, region, or any other interest in common, forms an organization under certain conditions within a school, country or even an international context, this is known as a the students' union (Altbach, 1974). So, every different group of students having one or more interests or aspects in common can form a different student union within a school, country or international context. Each student union will campaign in favour of its own outlook or agitate to receive its entitlement. Therefore, sometimes student unions can be in competition with each other.

### ***Students' involvement in party politics***

Every country has different national political parties, except for countries whereby martial law or dictatorships exist (Heywood, 1997). These national political parties usually have their associated or affiliated organizations for different professional groups. To discuss this situation, we shall use examples from the Bangladeshi context. In Bangladesh, there are four major national political parties, namely, Bangladesh Awami League (BAL), Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Bangladesh Jatio Party (BJP) and Jamayati Islam Bangladeshi (JIB). Each of them has an affiliated political organization for students. For example, Bangladesh Chartro league (BCL) is an affiliated or associated student organization of BAL. The afore-mentioned three types are not exclusive. For example, if some students form a unity, based on a particular issue, thereafter, they can be divided into

different groups for their further interests or purposes that vary. And then, different groups can form various student unions. In underdeveloped countries, students' unions are always biased towards national politics because of their socio-economical and overall social conditions (Altbach, 1993; Glazer, 1968; Hamilton, 1968). In the case of Bangladesh, Hannan (2000) believes that student politics ought to be associated with the national politics.

But authors such as Altbach, Ross, David, Glazer, Hamilton, Marr, Emerson, Myhr and Ottaway believe that students' involvement in 'party politics' has created political atmosphere in HE institutes in most countries and that has an impact on the educational atmosphere. In this context, Hamilton (1968) states:

"The extensive involvement of the student movement with partisan politics in Venezuela makes it exceedingly difficult to draw a boundary line between indigenous and outside elements in the movement or between a "trained communist agitator" and ordinary student leaders. Most students would not object strongly even to the presence on campus of a politician with no pretensions of student status, for the simple reason that student leaders are expected to be in contact with the machinery and authorities of the party they represent".

On the other hand, some students involved in 'party politics' would agree with the views expressed by Jaime:

Jaime rejected the view that student organizations should be concerned only with "student issues", such as financial aid and housing, and denied the charge that student political groups were merely party tools. He also disagreed with those who believed students could never be politically relevant (Glazer, 1968).

The two stated quotes contrast different views on students' involvement in 'party politics', one negative and the other positive.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND PRESENT SITUATION OF BANGLADESHI STUDENT POLITICS**

The findings and discussion of this paper will mainly illuminate the Bangladeshi student political context, while focusing on some special aspects. However, a brief discussion will help to understand the discussion of the leading sections.

Virtually no academic research has been conducted on Bangladeshi student politics. Apart from the newspaper articles, three authors based in Bangladesh have made some contributions on Bangladeshi student politics. However, their work only focuses on student campaigning.

Two of them claimed to be student leaders (Ullah, 2001; Hannan, 2000c; Alam, 2003), so the contents of their publications are not wholly neutral.

'Unofficially recognized Bengal student politics' is older than Bangladesh (Hannan 2000b; Ullah, 2001; Shmasthanrik Chartro Front-SCF, 2001). Student politics in the Bengal region was established while it was under the British ruling (Alam, 2003; Ullah, 2001). After the 'British chastisement', it came under Pakistani governance and was named the East Pakistan. Being an independent nation since 1971, it has been administered by both the elected government and martial law. Consequently, student politics has always been associated with campaigning for social change because of the 'demand of the times' (Hannan, 1994; Alam, 2003). Different types of student politics have existed at different periods (Hannan, 2000a).

Both Hannan (2000c) and Ullah (2001) point out that the 'British chastisement' enforced laws for all aspects of Bengal, which were not generally appropriate. Particularly, the educational policies imposed by the British administration on Bengal were different from the internal policies which have existed within the UK; and this was the cause of concern to Bengali students (Hannan, 2000d, 1994). Again, Pakistani rules also force the students to campaign in favour of their rights (Hannan, 2000c; Ullah, 2001). Moreover, Hannan (2000a) and Ullah (2001) note that under the martial law, students continue with the revolutionary tradition of student politics.

Under circumstances which have been arisen under the British ruling, Pakistani governance and martial law, students are forced to campaign in favour of their rights and their country's rights. However, the recent upsurge in student politics is different: national political parties have established affiliated student political parties to use the students as their political tools. The available literatures have shown that until the 1930s, there were no student unions in the Bangladesh (Hannan, 1993; SCF, 2001). During this period of time, students were collectively facing challenges from different student movements (Ullah, 2001; SCF, 2001; Hannan, 2000b). In 1941, students were divided into two main groups, namely the 'leftist' and the 'rightist'. Rightist students did not engage themselves in much political activity within the campus (Ullah, 2001; SCF, 2001; Hannan, 2000b). The Bangladesh Islami Chartro Shibir (BICS) was the only student organization which was rightist. On the other hand, there were two leftist student unions; namely the Chartro union and Chartro League, which they have principally dominated and controlled the campus politics (Hannan 1993, 2000; Ullah 2001). In 1952, both leftist and rightist political groups are united and played a vital role in achieving the victory for Mother Tongue Revolution (Ullah, 2001). In early 1960s, Chartro league was divided into different groups and each group was headed by different Chartro league leaders (Hannan, 2000c, 1993; Ullah, 2001). Moving on to 1971, leftist

political students played a vital role in achieving victory for Independence Revaluation. 'Rightist students' were inactive on this occasion.

After independence, Bangladesh Awami League (BAL) formed the government and campus politics were controlled by their associated organization, named the Bangladesh Chartro League (BCL) (Hannan, 2000d; Ullah, 2001). In 1975, the president of the country was assassinated by military officials and a few days later, the martial law was established. In the meantime, the 'chief of the army' formed a new political party named the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). In addition, another associated political party named "Jatiotabadi Chartro Dall" (JCD) was established for the students; as a rival party to BCL (Hannan, 2000a). The country's president, whom was BNP president himself, was also killed by the military officials and after period of time, the martial law was reinforced once again. The new chief for the military government also established another political party named "Bangladesh Jatiyo Party" (BJP). The BJP were committed not only to the establishment of an associated student political party but in the 1988, students engaged in a big revolution against the 'so-called elected BJP government'. Since the party had no affiliated student political party, the president alongside with his advisers have thoughts to establish one in order to compete against the other student political parties involved in the student revolution. BJP's affiliated political student party is called "Bangladesh Jatiyo Chartro Shamash" (BJCS) (Hannan, 2000a). However, after toppling the military government in 1990, every successor has been elected by election conducted under the 'Caretaker Government'<sup>1</sup>.

Considering present circumstances, it can be concluded that the present Bangladeshi student politics is an activity which is guided by and for the national political parties' competition, interests and outlook. Therefore, to examine these issues, we conducted further investigation in order to find the answers of the following research questions with the pursued research methods:

- Why are students involved in politics?
- What are the disadvantages for students involved in politics?
- What are the advantages for students involved in politics?
- What is the impact of student politics on education management and institutional management?
- What is the impact of student politics on national development?
- How can students be encouraged not to join in 'nefarious party politics'?

Since the key phase of this research is about national

<sup>1</sup>The caretaker government is formed after every five years by neutral enlightened people of the society for a period of three months with special authority to conduct the national parliament election

development, it is thus important to make clear the concept of national development before justifying the adaptation of research design to discover the answers of the aforementioned research questions.

### Concept of national development and role of politics

National development is a key agenda for many countries, especially the underdeveloped and developing countries. According to Alam (2009a, b) and Alam et al. (2009a, b, 2010a), the core business of education is to work as the key agent of national development, either as a way of developing human capacity, increasing the skilled workforce for modernization or as a matter of personal freedom, development of capacity and empowerment.

### National development from various perspectives

According to Thomas and Potter (1992), "all definitions of development contain the central notion of a process of change from a less desirable to a more desirable kind of society... development of what? How and what is "desirable" defined, and by whom? How the progression can be achieved?" Hence, the primary concern for national development is about the development of "what".

From the literature, it appears that the intention and underpinning concept of national development evolve over time. According to Alam et al. (2009b), since 1950s, there have been at least three main schools of thought on the concept of national development. They are the (a) economist's perspective, (b) sociologist's perspective and (c) human needs theorists' perspective.

Primarily, the economists (for example, Bernstein, Shultz, Psacharapoulos) view development in terms of the nation's relative prosperity, which is measured by the gross national product (GNP), as highlighted by Alam et al. (2009b) and Rabby et al. (2011). However, there is a concern that greater income does not guarantee greater buying power, more choices or better quality of life. This is partly due to globalization and free economic trade that made it challenging to maintain a reasonable inflation rate. An interesting point is noted by Alam (2009a, b) which states that if there is an exceptionally high gap exists amongst the value of GNI (gross national income) and GNP and GDP (gross national product and gross domestic income), national development will not sustain or would halt the development ultimately for two reasons:

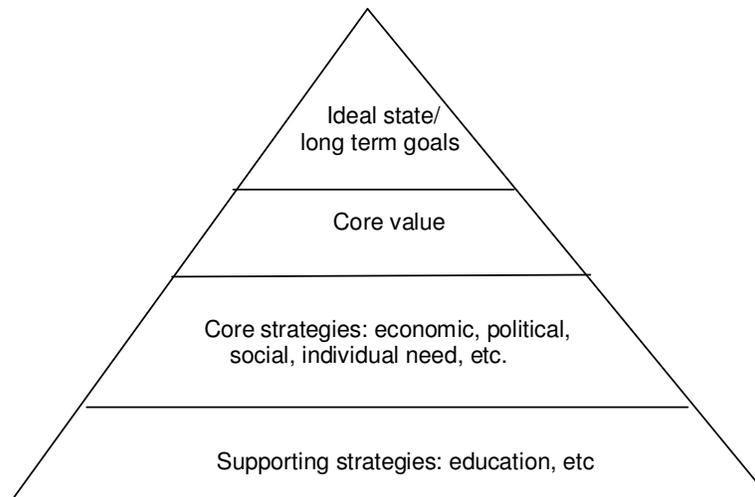
- i. If the value of GNI is enormously lower than the value of GNP and GDP, people of the producing nations cannot survive since a higher cost has already been paid off for the GDP and GNP.
- ii. If the value of GNI is extremely higher than the value of GDP and GNP, the competitive nation will take the advantages supplying the desired products to the international community once they find out that a specific

producing country sells a particular product at a higher cost to the other nations. This is easier to find out as the recent explosion of IT and ICT become available to all.

A further point was raised if a number of nations increase their GDP, GNP and GNI with the help of importing raw materials and other inevitable supports needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (such as, internet, global transit and protocol) from one specific region or nation, it would not help them greatly as it will provide compound escalating benefits to that specific region or nation. Therefore on balance, those countries will face gruelling challenges on bilateral and multilateral business competition due to shortage and low value of foreign currency. This situation would be graver with more globalisation and internationalization.

More importantly, growth in economy without development in politics and society may lead to corruption caused by lack of transparency, maturity of the society and participation of the individuals within a nation (Alam, 2009b). Development in politics includes separation of power among the executive, legislature, and judiciary, judiciaries' transparency, free and fair election etc. Development in society includes maturity of the society wanting transparency, fairness, security, knowledge, freedom of choice and participation in the decision making for the society. The concerns rose from all these aspects have led to the emergence of another school of thought, such as the sociologists' perspective.

According to Alam et al. (2009b), sociologists (for example, McClelland, Weber, Inkeles, Smith) propose that a country's modernization leads to economic development and a modern society, which has similar economies, societies and politics as those in the prosperous West (Thomas and Potter, 1992; Buzan and Little, 1999). The modernization transformation agents are education, technology and industrialization. However, the word "modern" is an abstract and broad concept, and can be interpreted from different perspectives in different contexts. Even the different developed countries from the West interpreted it differently. For example, USA promotes liberty or freedom of choice much more than harmony and unity of the society. Comparatively, Finland is regarded as a more wholesome society, with richness in economies and mature social behaviours. According to the UNDP (2002), Finland is top ranked in terms of Transparent Country Placing (Transparency International) with high GDP per capita. In short, developing countries, such as Malaysia, need to have a common understanding within the society, regardless of the race, ethnicity, religion and culture, as well as their definition and choice towards modern society. In addition, this consensus needs to be well-supported by the national development and educational strategies (Alam, 2009a; Alam et al., 2009a). On the other hand, the social contract should not undermine the individuals' need and free will to practice the freedom of speech and choice, which is the core belief of the human needs theorists.



**Figure 1.** National development model (NDM).

Human needs theorists (for example, Seers, Sen, Edwards) consider national development from a human needs perspective. According to Alam et al. (2009b), the emphasis was not so heavily focused on economic growth as the primary indicator of development, but more on assessing the needs of individuals: their freedom, equity, participation and empowerment to fulfil their potential capabilities (Thomas and Potter, 1992). However, the understanding of freedom, for example, may differ from context to context, especially between the West and East. Some positive freedom from one country's perspective can be viewed negatively in other countries' and even within the same country, given the differences in race, age and religion etc. Therefore, it is important for the developing countries to have a clear understanding of human needs that is rooted in the culture of the countries. It is also vital to recognize that the prospect of an individual is heavily dependent on the economic, social and political development of a country (Alam, 2009b). For instance, the primary focus of many underdeveloped and developing countries is to increase the Gross National Income and to reduce poverty within the countries so that the entire citizen can live a decent life. Some developing countries believe that it is more crucial to maintain the harmony and unity of their respective countries, instead of promoting individual rights and freedom. In those instances, individual freedom and equity may not be the primary concern at that point of time.

In short, the three schools of thought have their own roles to play in national development. However, due to the primary fundamental role of the government in ensuring that its people have access to basic fundamental goods, utilities and services for survival; governments around the world tend to put their primary focus in economic development, before addressing their social and political development as well as the individual human needs. Apart from that, it is also observed that economic

development without the complement of social and political development may lead to corruption and eventually, the economics of the country may not be sustainable (Alam, 2009b). At the same time, modernization of a society relies on the economic wealth of a country too. Hence, economic, social and political developments are highly interdependent. However, it is also important to take note that the ultimate purpose of national development is to improve the quality of life of the individuals' in the country, by enlarging the people's choice (UNDP, 2002). Thereby, economic, social and political development without addressing the individual human needs cannot be considered as truly achieving a meaningful national development.

### **National development model**

As highlighted earlier, in order to achieve a balanced and integrated development, a country must firstly define the ideal future state is from the aspects of economic, political, social and individual needs point of view; including the society's core values. This consensus within a society or nation must be achieved through active participation of its people, especially those with higher ethical standard, intellectual capability and forward looking (Alam, 2009a). Only then the core strategies in terms of economic development, political development, social development and individual needs development can be planned accordingly. Once the agendas above are clearly defined, the role of education from primary, secondary, tertiary to lifelong learning can be defined too. This model is summarised in Figure 1.

Due to unique scenario and culture of each country, the focus of development may differ. For example, by looking at the human resources development policies implemented at Japan, Cummings (1997) proposed "the

Eastern Asian approach”, the J-Model. Among the core components of the J-model, Cummings (1997) highlighted the importance of the state to coordinate education and research, with a firm emphasis on indigenous values of transmission.

There are countries who have clearly defined their unique future ideal state, albeit there is still a concern that the ideas of development are dominantly influenced by the developed West (Altbach, 1984), which may or may not be relevant or culturally fit for the Asian countries. To make matters worse, lots of underdeveloped and developing countries are still lacking in its ethic and intellectual capacity to define what it wants to be actively involved upon its achievement. The purpose of education is to ensure national development but since student politics has impacted this core value of education in Bangladesh, this issue will therefore be discussed in the latter section of this paper.

## RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

The methods of data collection are qualitative. We have chosen these methods that would allow the respondents to express their views in a free and personal way, giving as much prominence as possible to their thematic associations. Thereby, we chose to use semi-structured telephone interviews and email questionnaires. Another method of data collection we adopted was the document review. The interviews and other methods of data collection were conducted from abroad while main researcher was on study leave. Only for a few days of field work, did the researcher had taken leave from universities to mainly concentrate on observation. The observation was conducted through checklist and non-checklist method. In some extent, the observation was very challenging and risky; thus staying with the ‘cadres’ is a must.

## Interview samples

As mentioned earlier, there are four major student organizations in the Bangladesh, namely BCL, JCD, BJCS and BICS. It is proven that in order to receive proper and reliable data, triangulation of samples is an important issue (Cohen et al., 2002). We selected our respondents from the four main major student organizations mentioned. We intended to interview two students who were involved with the ‘Chattro Union’ but unfortunately we failed to find anybody whom are prepared to be an interviewee. We selected two persons from each organization: one person holding a more responsible position such as committee member or coordinator/ secretary, and the other with a less responsible position. In addition, we have chosen two students whom were not involved with the politics. Moreover, we chose to have one college principal and one lecturer as our respondents. We had also contacted the national political leaders but they were not interested to talk about this topic.

Robson (2003) makes a point that, sometimes, guaranteeing confidentiality helps the researcher to elicit valid data. During the selection of respondents whom were involved in politics, we chose students from the Dhaka College (DC), Dhaka University (DU) and some other institutes, which are currently experiencing a high volume of student politics. We had also selected those respondents whom were not involved in the student politics from private HE institutes, whereby student politics does not exist. The college principal and lecturer selected had teaching experience at both types of institutes. In consideration of confidentiality, we labelled the respondents (Cohen and Manion, 1997; Hammersley, 1996). So in

the findings and discussion of this paper, the 12 respondents will be referred to as R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, R10, R11 and R12. R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, and R8 are involved with BCL, JCD, BICS and BJCS. R9 and R10 are students whom are not involved with politics. R11 and R12 are the lecturer and principal, respectively. Further information about the respondents is as follows. R1 is studying a short language course in a university after the completion of his Master’s degree. He is also an established businessman. He is almost 37 years old and has already spent 22 years in HE by taking various courses. He started student politics at 15 years old when he was a student at HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate) level. Meanwhile, R2 is about 41 years old and has started politics when he was a student at HSC level. His HE period spans almost 25 years at various courses and he is currently studying in a college. R3 is 31 years old, recently passed her Master’s degree and is now pursuing a short course. Her experience in HE and student politics totalled up to 14 years. Also, R4 has completed his Master’s degree almost 10 years ago. In the meantime, he has taken a number of short courses and has 16 years of experience in the student politics. R5 is now completing his final year in the undergraduate’s course and his experience in politics is about 2.5 years. R6 is a student of the Master’s programme and his age is almost 29 years; his experience in politics is about 7 years. R7 is a 36 years old student studying a short course under the law department, after five years at a law college. His experience in student politics is about 12 years. R8 is a student who is now an established businessperson at present enrolled as a student of a short course and involved with student politics since 1981. It was difficult for us to make contact with the students who recently joined in politics because:

- i. Traditionally, they usually need to seek permission from their senior leaders but instead, their seniors would mostly be the respondents.
- ii. To make initial contacts with the respondents, we usually phoned their ‘party office’ where the officials are senior students, rather than juniors. However, some of the senior leaders allowed juniors to talk to us upon our requests.
- iii. Lastly, R9 and R10 are studying respectively a Master’s and an HSC programme at the ages of 26 and 15.

## Significance of research techniques adopted

Some may question why a large sample or quantitative approach was not used to make allowance for greater pool of information. There are, of course, particular reasons for the preference on a fairly small sample. This is explained below. Firstly, this research investigated some issues that are very new and unique in their nature. Lack of relevant previous researches posed restrictions on the researchers to have ideas that help design quantitative tools. Investigation on a completely new area often demands qualitative approach, since many successful works done by qualitative approach provide parameters or metaphors to design the tools applicable to quantitative approach.

Secondly, the nature of inquiry requires an in-depth insights rather than straightforward or simple opinions or statistics. Thirdly, funding and time limitations were also important factors to note. However, since the issues were important to be highlighted, quantitative interviews subsidised by case study style brought many insights of problems that would help further researches to be conducted in this field.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

We attempted to answer our research questions by

considering and comparing our interviewees' responses, altogether with the results of the document review (DR) and the email questionnaires (EQ). The answers to the research questions are dealt with as a result.

### **Reasons motivating students towards 'party politics' in Bangladesh**

R1, R3, R4, R5, R8 and R11 placed heavy emphasis on the 'diplomatic' advertising methods practised by different political student organizations. Most of the student organizations distribute their publicity leaflets to the examinees when they took part in the 'admission test' for their enrolment into HE. In addition, the institute's student leaders usually meet with the examinees at the 'test centre' of the college or university to inform them regarding on the facilities provided for students once they are members in their 'party'. R5 pointed out that it is very hard to get accommodation in college/university halls of residences. Each 'hall' is controlled and occupied by one political party. For example, Mujib Hall at Dhaka University (DU) is controlled by BCL, while on the other side of the DU, Zia Hall is controlled by JCD. Therefore, student leaders often offer newcomers accommodation, on the condition that they join their political party. To add on, R5 also mentioned that a party offers 'preparatory coaching for the admission test' and that the instructors also put pressure on new students to join their party. A few student organizations also provide free clothes, books and stationery for newcomers (R1, R7 R3 and R8).

R4 says "Since I was not involved with any party, I was informed that I would have to join their political party otherwise I would lose my room in the hall. And the threat was very real. My family background didn't allow me to afford private accommodation; therefore I had no alternative but to join their party". In addition, R7 included that "my family didn't provide me with sufficient money even though my father was solvent, so I joined the politics to earn extra money" (but what R7 means by the term extra money is unclear). On the other hand, R9 and R10 mentioned that they manage the money provided by their families by themselves. They also noted that sometimes it is hard to manage the amount of money received from the family, but it is not impossible. They held the view that "parents are under no obligation to send the money which is needed to buy 'addiction goods' such as drugs, or to enjoy a luxurious life, aren't they?"

We felt that investigation on the issues raised above requires quantitative research because this will reveal the attitudes of a wide range of students, and the role of family background comes into play in the involvement of students in politics.

R10, R11 and R12 gave heavy emphasis to the existing educational system. R12 mentioned that if an HE institute allows 'such students' (who are not academically brilliant) to 'take' the course, they would usually join in the

politics. Even though the 'admission test' exists, students can be enrolled into HE without sitting for the test, simply by joining the 'powerful political group' (R10). Moreover, R11 said that, if lecturers and institutional support staff are involved in politics, they also 'pushed' the students to join politics. Sometimes, they themselves are involved in 'irregular activities' to help political students to enrol in HE or to stay within the system. The points made by R10 and R11 indicated the reasons for the enrolment of non-brilliant students into the HE system. R12 also pointed out that HE institutes which receive funds from the government experience a high volume of student politics because more often, the active government and their political leaders put pressure on the institute's authorities to introduce student politics. R12's responses raised issues on autonomy and corruption in the HE institutes. With the exception of the universities, the management of HE institutes in Bangladesh is not autonomous and is politically corrupted. However, as mentioned previously, the universities' management is ostensibly autonomous.

Active student leaders are usually national parliamentarians. Moreover, traditionally, student leaders would be national politicians. In this regard, R11 and R12 pointed out that in order to establish a national political platform for themselves, students enter politics at HE level. The above points raised a few questions. If students are national parliamentarians, how can they concentrate on their studies while they are busily engaged in political and social activities? It must be borne in mind that the Prime Minister is the chancellor of the universities in Bangladesh. Senators are elected politically. VCs (vice chancellors) and college heads are selected politically. Therefore, how do the faculty members legislate, and then enforce the laws on the 'so-called parliamentary students' and how can they guide them. Of course, faculty members cannot guide them; on the contrary, they must be guided by parliamentarian students. As a result, university and college halls of residences are often occupied by the 'bhahiraghata' armed cadres, not by the students per se (R9, R10, R11 R12 and EQ). So, students have no alternatives but to become followers of a political group.

E-mail questionnaires (EQ) also generated two vital points with regard to the course contents and facilitates provided. In primary and secondary textbooks, the articles are biased in favour of particular political leaders. R12 also mentioned that with every change from the government, the content of primary and secondary textbooks is changed with a view to 'brain wash' the students to join their political philosophy once they become 'adult'. Let us give an example. From 1991 to 1995, primary and secondary books contained articles in favour of BNP leaders, with special focus on their party founder General Zia. Their successor, BAL, changed the contents of the primary and secondary books in 1996.

The new contents mostly focused on their leader Sheikh Mujib. Having said that, R2 added that he was

motivated to enter politics with the knowledge gathered about Mujib from books, newspapers and family.

EQ also revealed that Bangladeshi HE is not capable to sufficiently pressure their students to concentrate in their studies. Students do not need to write any assignments; nor need to undertake research work nor any practical activities. Moreover, Bangladeshi HE does not usually offer many technical, professional or job-oriented programmes, so the students' future employability is under threat. In addition, the facilities provided by HE, such as libraries, Internet access, sport and recreation, are very poor. Consequently, students experience many difficulties in getting through their HE courses, and they become motivated towards politics.

Since most of the teachers at primary, secondary and HE level lack the competence to 'foster' their students' humanity, the result overwhelmed in the sense that students do not have a strong sense of their duties and responsibilities as students of HE (R6, R3 R11, R10 R12 and EQ). In addition, R11 and R12 said that once students are enrolled into an HSC programme, their parents' influence on them has weakened. Most of the colleges are urban, so rural students in particular live away from their parents. Therefore, they lack proper direction and turned to student leaders for guidance. R1, R2, R5 and R6 also mentioned that family political background influences students to join in politics. But, adolescents need good guidance from their seniors. These accounts have shown that inadequate or inappropriate education system, family background and age also play a role in influencing students to join the politics.

### **Major advantages created by student politics in Bangladesh**

It was only the student unity which 'campaigned and fought' for 1952's Mother Tongue Revolution, because Bangladesh was not an independent nation at the time. Therefore, no established national political parties exist in Bengal in 1952 (R1 to R12 and EQ). In addition, all respondents mentioned that even though in 1971, a few political parties had become established, their activities were not well organized and united. They had also mentioned that these political parties were not established enough to lead the Independence Revolution. The student unity, in contrast, was well organized and established. Some of the student leaders were very intellectual and well known and they travelled around Bengal; trying to raise awareness in people, especially adolescents, about 'our' rights and the concepts of independence and national development. The student leaders acted on that occasion very cautiously and 'technically' (R11 and R12). These circumstances created a unity in the Bengal population. In consequence, the collective 'awareness and fighting' role of the Bengal people helped to attain the Independence (R1 to R12 and

EQ).

Since its emergence in 1990, Bangladeshi students united and played a vital role in addressing the autocratic government (R1, R3, R4, R6 R5 and R12). However, R7 and R8 challenged this view. They argued that the government was elected and was directing the country very smoothly. So there were no opportunities for BNP and BAL to come into 'power' by election. Therefore, they 'used their parties' students as the political tools' to campaign and to promulgate calumnies against the government. R9, R10, R11, R12 and EQ maintained that student politics have not contributed any advantages to the nation apart from the three occasions mentioned. But these respondents stated very clearly, that the type of student politics which played an influential role on occasions mentioned was 'student unity'. On the other hand, R1, R2, R3 R5, R7 and R8 mentioned that sometimes they were involved in organizing other kinds of social and political activities, and this has provided them with opportunities to learn the skills of 'public communication', coordinating people, participatory approaches and leadership. R4 and R1 mentioned another advantage: by maintaining 'good and diplomatic' liaison with the privileged people, they could promote their business. In addition, R2 mentioned that his party work helped to secure students' rights. He noted that faculty members in government universities and colleges offer private coaching to students or they can also work with private institutes to earn extra income. As a result, the quality of education provided by government HE institutes is deteriorating. Therefore, BCL campaigns to address these issues.

### **Major disadvantages created by student politics in Bangladesh**

The disadvantages of present Bangladeshi student politics are manifold (R9, R10 and R12). The prime concern is regarding on the constraint as a result from the student politics, that was placed by the unrest and other inevitable circumstances in which it has deteriorated the quality of education (Table 1). R1, R10, R11 and R12 said that DU is the apex of the country's HE institutes. Therefore, the student politics of DU control student politics for the whole country. But emergencies created by DU's student politics have resulted in the establishment of a 'police camp' within the campus (EQ, R3, R1, R10 and R11). Moreover, the present situation of the unrest created by student politics has forced the authorities to move Dhanmondi police station closer to the university campuses. It should be mentioned that Ramna and Lalbagh police stations are already located closer to the campuses. Dhaka University, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) and Dhaka Medical College are located adjacently. If a situation requires stationing the police within the vicinity,

**Table 1.** Numbers of 'Hartal' days, weekend and national holidays and total school working days by year.

Year	Numbers of 'Hartal' days	Weekend and national holidays	Total school working days
2000	63	104+120	$[[365-(120+104+63)] = 78]$ (78)
1999	76	104+120	$[[365-(120+104+76)] = 78]$ (65)
1998	63	104+120	$[[365-(120+104+63)] = 78]$ (78)
1997	64	104+120	$[[365-(120+104+64)] = 78]$ (77)
1996	91	52+120	$[[365-(120+52+91)] = 102]$ (102)
1995	171	52+120	$[365-(120+52+171)=22]$

In 1997, weekend holidays increased from one to two, other national holidays include Ramadan, Christmas, summer vacation remained the same; Source: Data compiled from DR of different newspapers.

**Table 2.** Results of HSC examination of Dhaka College, Notre Dame College and Dhaka City College.

Name of the college	Year	Number of students having first division at SSC to enrol in HSC programme	Number of students passed HSC securing first division	Percentage of HSC first division holders (%)
Dhaka College	2002	835	571	68.38
	2001	671	476	70.93
	2000	635	401	63.15
Notre Dame College	2002	1144	1108	96.85
	2001	1205	1158	96.09
	2000	1160	1011	87.15
Dhaka city College	2001	1220	940	77.04
	1999	835	763	91.37

Source: Personal communication.

how can the HE institutes perform their regular activities (R1, R10, R11, R12 and EQ)? Student organizations often fight amongst each other to establish their parties' authority within the campus and surroundings (R3, R9, R12 and EQ). It is now common for HE institutes to be closed down due to the strikes caused by student politics.

### Impact of student politics on education and institutional management

R12 has also mentioned that in an academic year, a minimum of 20 days is usually lost due to student political unrest. Additionally, he said that within a year more than 30 days are futile as a result from Hartal being called by different national political parties. Student organizations' affiliation with the national political parties has indeed forced the HE institutes to be closed down during these Hartal periods (R9, R10, R11, R4, and EQ) (Table 1) R10 and R12 also mentioned that at Hartal students involved with student politics' work as the 'picketers'. But R1, R5, R6, R7 and R8 linked student unrest with the country's overall situation. They pointed to the country's overall 'miserable degrading situation' as the main causal factor of student unrest. R1 stated that "student unrest is not a separate issue; it is a part of the country's present

unrest". R10, 12, R11, R5 and R1 made a point that campus political unrest sometimes leads to accidental death.

If circumstances have forced the HE institute to be closed down for more than 50 days in an academic year, how will the institute provide appropriate HE? Obviously, it cannot do so. To illustrate this problem, we used the data of HSC examination results of different years from three colleges, namely the Dhaka College (DC), Notre Dame College (NDC) and Dhaka City College (DCC). It should be noted that Dhaka College's students are involved in party politics, while the students of Notre Dame College and Dhaka City College are not involved in party politics. However, their students can be members of different educational clubs that is, Science Club, Arts and Social Science Club, and Debating Club organized and directed by the faculty members and students. We had provided the data on SSC (Secondary School Certificate) results because students enrolled in an HSC programme after the completion of SSC.

R9 and R10's points are important to note before analysing the Tables 2 and 3. Students studying at a college where student politics are available can unusually do 'nakal' in the examination which helps them to secure 'duinambari' (better performance), rather than their actual performance. They sometimes sit in a different room

**Table 3.** Achievement of public university graduates from primary to tertiary level.

Variable	Primary (Score in %)	SSC (Score in %)	HSC (Score in %)	Bachelor (Hons.) (Score in %)
Boys	77.1	74.6	68.2	57.1
Girls	74.7	72.4	68.4	59.8
Total	75.9	73.2	68.3	58.7

Source: Compiled data.

where 'open book' examinations are available (R10, R9 and R12). The percentages of HSC first division holders are higher in NDC and DCC than DC. R12 said that before liberation, the performances of DC students were better than NDC and DCC students. Therefore, it can be concluded that present student political involvement not only encroaches on their study time but brings an inappropriate educational atmosphere altogether.

Tables 2 and 3 also supplemented the earlier table and a concept was established by analysing the earlier table. The trend shows that the result of the university graduates is a declining feature in the Bangladeshi education system. The differences between primary to junior secondary is not very higher. A slight higher differences starts from secondary level. From higher secondary, the declining feature of the result is comparatively higher than secondary level. In the university level, this trend is in utmost position therefore it can be testified that the quality of education in the university level is not at a level of expectation. A number of factors can be blamed, however, student politics is one of the prime factors which have also influenced the difference since Bangladeshi education system experiences student politics from higher secondary level and this is extreme in the tertiary education provision. By analysing the trend of some countries (such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore), the increasing features is found in the tertiary education provision since these systems are more conception-based. Therefore, securing the good score is possible in tertiary level if someone can precisely grasps, manipulate and disseminate the concept in a precise way. Example can be cited from the Western education system where CGPA or distinction/merit system has been introduced as students' are receiving more than 80%.

Moreover, student leaders are sometimes engaged in corruption or criminal actions. For instance, communications received from the 'New Market Businessman Association' and 'Elephant Road Shop Owner Association' indicated that they could reduce the prices of their goods by 15% if they did not have to provide 'chada' (extortion) to student leaders, especially at DC and DU. Students involved in politics not only create a miserable degrading atmosphere in HE institutes, but also their abominable practices which cause much social decadence. R3, R5, R7, R9, R11 and R12 related that a student leader at Jahangirnagar University had 'scored a century' of rapes. But R1 and R2 claimed that BCL had expelled

him from 'our party'. The question that should be asked, however, is how was the student allowed to achieve such a shameful record? It is important to ask why the party did not take necessary action after the first rape and how was this student allowed to pursue his education abroad (DR). Certainly, it is proven that he had received illegal support from his political party. Not only that, a student leader from JCD had killed a student of the BUET in June 2002, yet he has not been arrested (R1, R2, R5, R6, R9, and R12). R11 and R12 also mentioned that students involved in politics have no respect for their teachers and elderly people. They have also been known to kill their teachers if the teachers try to prevent them from committing abominable practices. However, R1 to R8 said that only a few student leaders are involved in abominable activities and it is the people, police and journalists whom are the ones to have generalized these exceptions as a characteristic aspect of student politics. R1 also said that "I was arrested in 1988 and 1994 but the police didn't try to understand that I am a constructive student leader. And they punished and injured me seriously". Students involved in politics are continuing HE for a longer period by enrolling into different programmes because to be a 'high level of student leader, it takes a longer period' (R1, R5, R6, R3 R10, R11 and R12). R2 stated that he had waited almost 20 years to be the president of BCL of Dhaka region.

Involvement in party politics forces students to work as the 'party tools' (R5, R6, R3 R9, R10, R11 and R12). They are commanded by their leaders to campaign in favour of their party, especially during the election period. Students involved in politics are also known to be the hijackers of the 'ballot paper'. They forced people to contribute their votes to their party. Moreover, they oppressed the minority groups and non-privileged classes under the instruction of their leaders.

EQ, R9, R10, R11 and R12 held views that students involved in politics force teachers to provide them with a list of key questions prior to the examinations. Moreover, R10, R11 and R12 also mentioned that they are doing 'nakal' in the examination but the authorities cannot take effective action due to their connection with the political leaders. R11 said that "I was furiously threatened by a national politician that if I take any action against any of his party students, I will be sacked from my job". Brilliant students are threatened with the 'competition of the job market' since it is the student leaders whom get the jobs

because of their association with the national politicians.

### Impact on development

Discussions from previous sections have already illuminated the impact of student involvement in 'party politics' on national development (ND) and quality assurance in HE. Nevertheless, a brief discussion in this section will help to explain some specific points. Student politics is not self-directed. It is now working in collaboration with the national politics. Therefore, the impact of national politics and student politics in ND are interrelated. We will not discuss the issue of national politics, but a simple view of Clinton (2003) and World Bank and BCAS (2002) points out that the Bangladeshi people's greatest enemy is the political instability of their country. Political leaders do not bother about the country's development. They are only concerned with their own development and most of the political leaders have shady backgrounds as holders of 'black money'. Honest and competent people are not interested in entering politics because of the present 'polluted situation'. In addition, R10, R11, R12 and EQ believed that political leaders have enough money to send their children to pursue their education in developed countries; so political leaders have no worries about the miserable degrading atmosphere in the country's HE institutes.

It is in our expectation that student politics would bring a prosperous life for Bangali and according to that, it was contributing to ND. But the present activities of student politics are very disappointing (R1 to R12 and EQ). Student politics hinders not only social freedom but also economic development. Before elaboration on this, it is important to note that education itself can play a significant role for ND, so any threat to education is a threat to ND.

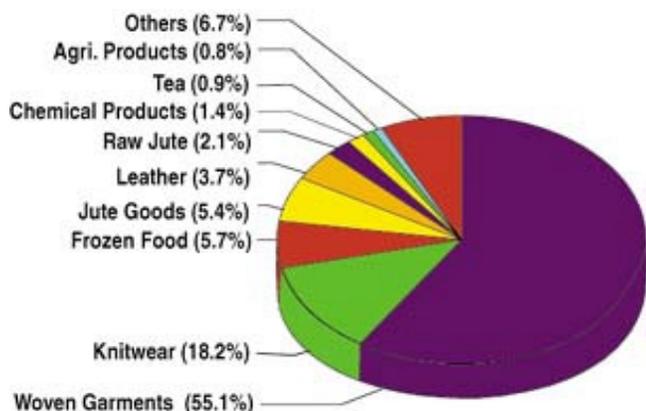
Rashid (2001) notes that large numbers of students have been killed as a result of student politics, since 1971. It is very simple to understand that if students are frequently killed in situations of unrest caused by student politics, the unrest does not remain confined to HE campuses but widespread throughout the country. When a daughter reaches adulthood, parents are afraid to send their daughter to school and away from home because of their fear towards the student leaders (R10, R9, R3, R12 and EQ). R9 also said that "My parents are not only worried for my sister but also for me. Nobody knows when and where the fighting will be started". Such circumstances hinder not only the development of HE but also of the overall social freedom.

In addition, in their haste to become affluent overnight, student leaders employ corrupted practices (terrorism, 'jamidakhal' 'baridakhal' 'Chadabasi') and denied poor people of their rights to access basic goods (R5, R7, R10, R12 and EQ).

The impact on economic growth and the development

of HE is serious. The honours bachelor degree is a four-year programme and the Master's programme requires another year to complete (BANBEIS, 2002). But students need at least 8 years to complete the Master's degree due to the so-called 'session jam' created by student politics. Let us provide an example to illustrate this: a student was due to complete his/her Master's degree in 1988 from DU's economics department (assuming that he/she passed the examination) but due to the 'session jam' no examinations could be conducted before 1993 for the 1988 cohort. The problem is that the certificates of the students concealed this appalling situation, because the year inserted on the certificate is 1988. So how can the educational budgets possibly meet the demand of these additional HE periods? If every student has to spend an extra 3 to 7 years pursuing HE, how will he/she be funded? Who will support their old parents in their family maintenance? Who will bear the educational and accommodation expenses of their younger brothers and sisters? Another important point to note is that the enrolment age for candidates whom wish to hold a government job is 30 years old (in Bangladesh, a government job is more prestigious and once secured; there is virtually no chance of dismissal). To be a 'first class' government officer, a candidate has to have a Master's degree with necessary experience, but if a student is over 30 years by the time he/she passes his/her Master's degree, due to the so-called 'session jam', how can he/she apply for government jobs? Consequently, most of the master's degree holders are jobless or in a job which is not relevant to his/her qualifications. R12 pointed out that "even though 'session jam' has comparatively reduced by now, students have to sit for examinations without proper preparation because 'we' cannot provide them with enough seminars, and cannot allow them sufficient time for reading". On the other hand, World Bank and BCAS (2002) suggest that by utilizing manpower properly, Bangladesh can gain strong economy. But under the circumstances as described, it is sheer fantasy to think that WB's suggestion could be implemented.

As a consequence of 'contractors' having to provide 'chada' to the local student leaders to execute the developmental works (that is, construction/repairing of building and road etc.), the quality of the developmental works is deteriorating. Entrepreneurs not only have little incentive to establish new businesses but they are also unwilling to extend their existing business because student leaders often impose a larger amount of 'taxes' (illegal subscriptions) on them. The Daily Prothom-Alo, Daily Star and some other newspapers reported on 21st December 2002 that a few leading garments and leather industries were going to be closed down because JCD leader and parliamentarian Nasiruddin Pintu imposed a huge amount of extortion on those industries. It should be noted that garments and leather sectors earn more foreign currency than others by exporting their manufactured products



**Figure 2.** Exports from Bangladesh during 1997-98 (BGMEA, 2002).

(Figure 2).

Students who are involved in politics tend to travel without paying their fare (R1, R5, R9, R7, R9, R11 and R12). They even like to impose extortion on transport owners (R9 and R12). So, fighting between transport workers and students involved in politics is now a regular activity and it leads to transport strikes for uncertain periods (R11 and EQ). Hampering of communications has also hindered the country's usual activities.

### Corruption

As we mentioned above, Bangladeshi student politics and corruption of the HE atmosphere are interrelated. As described earlier, corrupt activities (that is illicit admission to and retention in the HE system of students involved in politics, illegal distribution of accommodation in halls of residence, pressure of illegitimate distribution of government budget, illicit changing of textbooks' contents) are perpetrated by faculty members, support staff, and political leaders whom provide incentives to students to join in 'party politics'. So it is quite natural that a 'student politics' which was born and has grown up with corruption will continue to play a role in creating a corrupted educational atmosphere. As a result, students involved in politics are conducting a wide range of corrupted practices, such as, nakal, baridhokal, jamidhokal, and Chadabasi which brought upon pollution and corruption not only within the HE, but also in society in general. So, how could such a corrupted HE atmosphere/ management possibly provide a quality education to the students and develop their capacity to be significant actors in promoting ND? Moreover, any corruption itself never failed to hinder ND.

### How can students play a constructive role in building an appropriate educational atmosphere?

There is no doubt that the present HE atmosphere in the

country is not good enough to provide quality education (R1 to R12 and EQ). But it is related to the overall situation of political unrest in the country (R1, R2, R3, R5, and R7). To create a better educational atmosphere in HE institutes, R1, R5, R2, R6 and R9 suggested that brilliant students are needed to join the politics so that the 'so-called' students would not have a place in the student politics. They also mentioned that their involvement with the student politics would ensure that the country has good political leaders in the future. But to us, as observers, the problems appear to be besetting the issue. The involvement of brilliant students in the politics would not only encroach on their study time but also, to challenge the rival group due to the existing circumstances of student politics. As an example, two brilliant students named Avi and Niru joined the student politics and they became known as the most 'dangerous' student leaders who love 'killing and raping'. And now, Avi is a parliamentarian of notorious reputation.

On the other hand, R9, R10, R11, R12 and EQ's views are that 'banning student politics is a must' to solve the problems and to reinstate the appropriate educational atmosphere (BRAC, 2002). We believe that banning student politics is not a solution for the following reasons. Student politics on campus are not officially recognized. So if government wishes to ban that, it would first have to accord that official recognition. Once the government officially recognizes student politics, the chances of banning them would be almost zero because the student leaders would have legal issues to campaign against that. Therefore, if a government tries to impose a ban, their rivals would incite their students to create situations of unrest. Moreover, "anybody who has voting power can be involved in politics" (Rashid, 2001). So, 18 years old students have the right to be involved in politics. However, in Bangladesh, most students start politics at the age of fifteen.

Students' basic responsibility is to study. 80% of their time should be used for study or study related matters, leaving only 20% to be used for other activities (R1 to R12, and EQ). As mature citizens, students may have interest in politics just as they are interested in sports, music, films etc. But that does not mean that they have to be engaged with them as a full time professional (R9, R7, R10, R12, R11 and EQ). If HE institutes insisted that all of their students should spend 80% of their time in study, this would create conditions for fostering an appropriate HE atmosphere. In return, this would also encourage HE campuses to be freed from national politics. We do not need to deprive students of their rights but we could create so-called politics-free campuses - just as we can create smoking-free campuses - by keeping students busy in studies and other social activities.

HE institutions could keep their students busy with studies and other social activities by implementing the following suggestions:

i. Teachers need to put in more time monitoring their

students' performance, with regular use of 'tests' and assignments. They should also strive to foster their students' humanity. They should also act as 'mentor' to their students (Alam, 2003; Altbach, 1974; Ross, 1969). HE institutes need to ensure sufficient educational facilities. They should establish a number of different clubs for science, arts, social science, debate, sport and culture (for example, football, cricket, music clubs). Every student should be a member of at least one club in accordance with his/her particular interest(s). These clubs should be led jointly by teachers and students. The leading positions in these clubs should be occupied by competent and interested people on a roster basis. There would be no permanent leader positions in the clubs (Altbach, 1974; Glazer, 1968).

ii. For students whom do not making satisfactory progress, extra support would be provided. HE institutes need to introduce knock-out rules, so that students whom were not sincere, committed or able would not be permitted to stay in HE institutes without satisfactory progress achievements (R12 and Altbach, 1974).

iii. HE institutes need to introduce not only examinations to judge students' academic performance but also competitive occasions to judge their performance in terms of social activities (i.e. sports, music, debate) and general knowledge. These measures would foster social identity in students and as a result, they would not turn to politics to find a social identity (Altbach, 1974; Altbach and David, 1973; Ross, 1969).

## CONCLUSION

The final comment is that to address the existing problems, Bangladesh urgently needs a united and strong political commitment; otherwise there is no hope of achieving an appropriate HE atmosphere. We have to remember that the students who died as a result of the fighting caused by student politics are our own sons/daughters or brothers/sisters. And they are our assets. Therefore, every professional member of society should be committed to help build the best prospects for our students. Moreover, everybody needs to bear in mind that self-development cannot be an authentic development until Bangladesh is no longer a developing, but a developed country. Furthermore, a situation of unrest knows no laws, so students' unrest is a threat to anybody's life, even that of the political leaders or their children (Ross, 1969).

## GLOSSARY OF BENGALI WORDS USED

### Bengali word translation or explanation into English

**Baridakhal:** When somebody or a group of people (terrorists) occupy other people's home by force, the activity is known as Baridakhal.

**Bhahiraghata:** The people who are not students who work as the armed cadres of a political party.

**Cadres:** An individual provided with illegal arms to carry out evil activities with the order of student leader.

**Chartro:** Student.

**Chada:** Collection of subscription by force, also known as 'political tax' that is, Mujibuie tax, Zia tax, Aslam tax.

**Chadabasi:** When somebody or a group of people force someone to provide subscriptions, the activity is known as Chadabasi.

**Duinumbari:** No genuine way or path.

**Hartal:** Strike.

**Jamidakhal:** When somebody or a group of people (terrorists) occupy other people's land by force, the activity is known as Jamidakhal.

**Nakal:** Plagiarism in various ways.

**Tutatine:** If a student earns money or food/ accommodation by providing private coaching to privileged peoples' dependents, the activity is known as tutatine.

**DR:** Document Review.

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