

Campus Co-existence In Dangerous Uncertainty

A small incident involving a boy and a girl on the University campus Wednesday exploded into a gun battle in which one was killed and 15 injured. Judging by the hail of bullets from the rival sides casualties in dead and injured could have been far greater. A five-men probe body has been appointed to enquire into the incident and submit a report within a week. Meanwhile both BCL and JCD student activists have announced programmes of action including gheraos and demonstrations, that is bound to keep the campus as tense as ever and a repeat of the Thursday battle cannot be ruled out.

The case is clearly one for adequate policing measures to be put in place to preempt repetition of violence and for the campus to return to peace and co-existence. But these lines of remedial action, routine as they are, have a dismal record of being more honoured in the breach to keep the campus as irredeemably unquiet as ever. What is needed is to get to grips with those causes of provocation which are fuelled by political animosities.

One very familiar such source of provocation is the occupation of the residential halls and the ejection of the residents plus alleged vandalism resorted to by the raiding rival student groups of one party or the other. Over the years such operations have happened in cycles, one party or the other dominating. In the Thursday battle the BCL is reported to have captured some halls expelling their inmates. The expellees are threatening a show-down in a bid to reoccupy their hall or halls. Into the bargain is also the death of a BCL leader, stirring retaliatory impulses that cannot be contemplated with equanimity. Incidentally, the campus eruption came at a very bad time for the University now set for its admission tests involving thousands of students, apart from linking up circumstantially with the SSC examination question scandal, all together dealing a blow to education as a whole.

The case is one for the administration, the University authorities and the student leadership on the campus to launch a concerted move to restore peace on the campus on which to securely build campus co-existence.

By now, all concerned, the above three sides in particular, must conclude that police measures plus those deployed so far by the University authority to cope with such campus explosions have at best been palliatives and, at worst, a serious negligence of duty by all concerned, specially by the administration and the University authority.

It is time to face up to the grim truth about this recurrent campus violence. At the heart of it is the national party politics, which is an open secret. And a viable remedy could emerge only by a public acknowledgement of it and adopting precise political measures to end it and rebuild peace.

As we have done in the past, we propose yet again the same recipe: a multi-pronged attack on the problem organised at (i) student leadership, (ii) university authority (Senate and Teachers' Association) and (iii) government and opposition levels. The fact is nothing short of it is going to work, as it has not so far.

What is at stake is that the state's highest seat of education, Dhaka University, is in real danger. Ending the present state of dangerous campus co-existence is the direct responsibility of the Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor with whom all others must cooperate as a matter of national and moral obligation. What we have said and proposed is what the people at all levels of society feel, and do so with a deepening sense of frustration over the failure of their leaders in the administration and outside. Certainly the incumbent government has to do the ice-breaking and insist on a response from all quarters including the opposition and academic and intellectual circles.

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