Dhaka University Convocation And Vista Of Hope

The 40th Dhaka University convocation held amid exceptionally security arrangements after a 30-year gap, on December 18th was conspicuous both in its own right as well as because of the politically-motivated incidents on its eve, Friday. Held in a highly colourful festive milieu the first ever general convocation of Dhaka University, since after its birth, could have been kept free from the contentious political preamble, had in the meantime the country's political differences been resolved by the right kind of democratic initiatives taken by the political party in office and the Opposition.

The pity is: it is precisely this answer to the nation's continuing unquiet political situation has scarcely been the leaders' quest along right i.e. democratic lines.

Friday's spectacle of the police swoop on the opposition party activists and the specific sight of some party top leaders, including its president and secretary tortured and physically bruised (one arm and leg reportedly broken etc) was immensely avoidable and could scarcely be endorsed as proper (democratic) political behaviour. This needs to improve if we have to have such other great academic and national celebrations go through with the dignity, discipline and honour due them. And it is national leadership's duty to see them do so. Even where the party-leadership would have their national functions pass off without trouble, the police, it seems, would get in the way to frustrate them. This needs to be contained. Our university campuses are specifically in need of it.
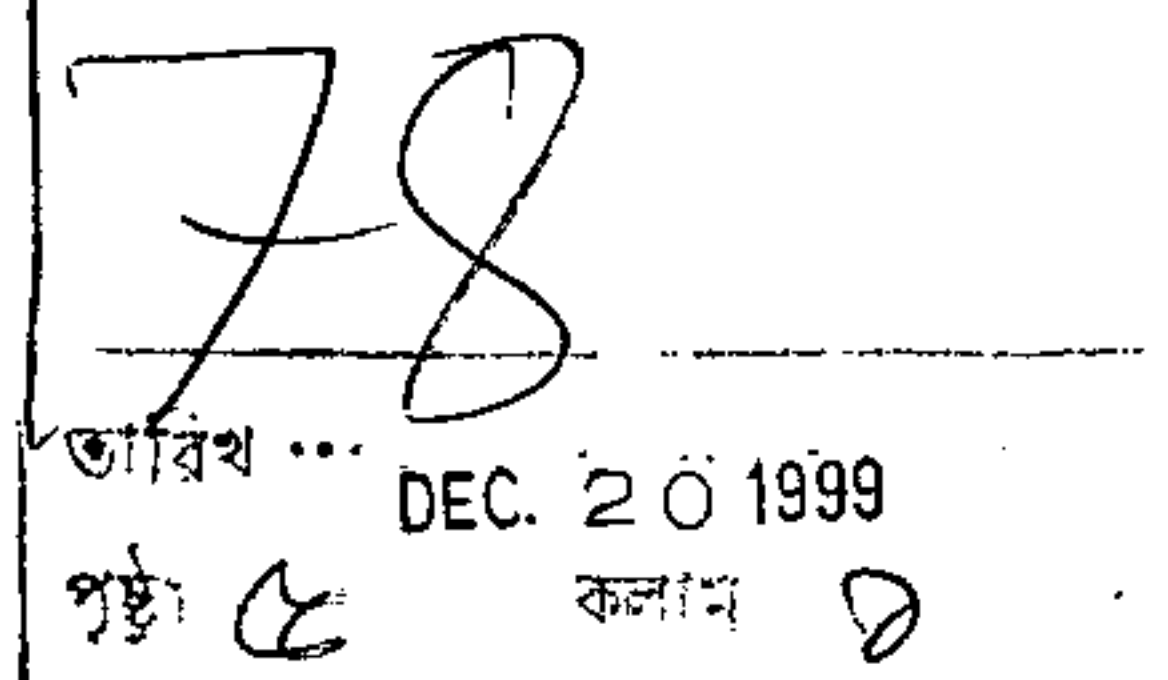
We have a little dilated on this aspect of an otherwise great national event, the Dhaka University general convocation, held after long three decades and that from one basic consideration. We want to see such university academic get-togethers held regularly each year, as the Prime Minister in her speech emphatically stated.

Comes pat in this context the imperative of the country's academic world, its higher education institutions, the universities being kept free from politics and political influence from one or the other party. It has done us a lot of harm and it is time the two were kept separate from each other and free from political rivalry for academic peace to be restored. A great academic, Professor Amartya Sen, now among us, will, we hope, agree with us. And he must have had this as well as a healthy growth of political dissent in the country on mind while addressing the convocation audience.

Now to the business proper of the 40th general convocation. Its highlights include, most notably, the conferring of the Honorary Doctor of Law degree on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Honorary Doctor of Science Degree on Nobel Laureate economist Amartya Sen—Sheikh Hasina for her contribution to 'peace' and social development in the country and Professor Sen for his contribution to 'human knowledge in general' and to the discipline' of economies in particular. One whose ancestry is also warmly welcome to us as one of us doing his ancestral home the honour not only of his formal presence amid us just now but as one to whom we would look forward for all necessary guidance in helping solve our problems in shoring up our sliding economy.

We offer our warm congratulations first to those on whom the Honorary Degree of Law and Science were conferred—Sheikh Hasina and Dr Amartya Sen respectively—then to all the registered graduates who received the well-earned certificates at this general convocation of Dhaka University. It is to be regretted that as many as seven thousand or so graduates could not attend the function reportedly because of the prohibitive fee for registration.

What remains, though, the focus of our anxious hopes is that the university will have emerged recognisably rid of its campus problems for all time to come. That is the most-longed for vista of hope for our universities now plagued with their yet-unsolved problems.