

Reopening Dhaka University

Even after more than weeks since the incident on February 25th that led to the closure of Dhaka University there is hardly any visible sign for it to be reopened. A meeting of Provosts of the Halls and a DUCSU meeting at the university end of the scale and a high level one at the government have reportedly discussed the university situation; the former, among other things, demanding the reopening of the university, holding of examinations during Ramadan and ensuring campus security for returning students; the latter forming a 5-member committee to ensure such security conditions on the campus as would be effective in controlling violence, stressing quite rightly the law and order side of the question.

Clearly, the one accent common to both endeavours is a peaceful campus, but while DUCSU and the Provosts' meeting insisted on the reopening of the university (of course with a guarantee of security on the campus) the Bangladesh Secretariat meeting seems to have concentrated on law and order with no explicit word or suggestion about the reopening of the university.

The case for reopening it and the interrupted academic session to resume its routine work is strong for very obvious reasons of loss of studies during what is the busiest part of the academic year, i.e. the eve of the summer vacation. For the Faculties themselves the continued closure of the university will only add to the mess (session jams, examination tangles, among other problems) they are yet to clear.

Besides, the ostensible lack of serious interest in reopening the university and probably allowing the unscheduled holiday to merge into the scheduled ones of Ramadan and Summer, a very facile step for the authorities (university and government) to easily tend to, would be yet another blow, fatal enough, to the university. It is left to everybody, particularly the general public, guardians and the mass of students and those individuals and quarters in society that are not involved with politics or student politics but want to see their premier institution, Dhaka University, saved from this slow but sure process of destruction, to reflect on the consequences.

Neither the university authorities nor the administration (the Education Ministry immediately) can in all conscience opt for such a cynical way of dealing with the university. The university syndicate has certainly a positive role to play as well as DUSCU and student leaders of different groups. A conciliation move through a bilateral initiative and a meaningful dialogue across the table is the immediate need, while the law and order authorities have to get down to the task of freeing the campus by such concrete measures as stopping the flow of arms into it. Student leadership in collaboration with the university authority should be able to produce at the students' end conditions congenial to the return of normalcy. Past cases of violence committed to the proper course of law and the above measures taken in right earnest, there can be no reason why the university should not be reopened immediately and the academic life of it resumed.

One wonders if campus violence, both in Dhaka and other universities, has not yet reached saturation point. Neither these institutions nor the nation can afford it any longer. If, as is universally known, the political parties also have a vital role to perform in saving the universities (Dhaka University in particular) from collapse then the nation expects of them to give serious thought to it as a matter both of moral responsibility and national obligation to the student generation of their time.

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