

Teachers Against Campus Terrorism

The much-discussed campus terrorism in the country has shown at different times how dangerous and deadly it can be. So far no effective deterrent to this dangerous development could be devised. University teachers of late, however, have started to display their firmness and a sense of purpose in the face of growing challenges from terrorism by their students. The Bangladesh Agriculture University (BAU) authority has found 24 of its students guilty of terrorism and meted out to them punishment of different terms. Earlier the Jahangirnagar University authority also punished a number of students for committing rape.

The measures the university authorities are taking are yet to be sufficient but at least the process has been initiated. When the students-cum-terrorists get arrested on various charges, the political clout and colour involved there complicate the whole matter. In most cases those arrested come out as heroes instead of villains. So the teachers seem to have decided to act on their own. After all, things have gone so far as to push the teachers to the corner where they find no room to go back but only room to go ahead. They are taking the step forward not without trepidation. But the stake is great. Only teachers can overlook the risk involved in such matters. The penalties awarded to students, found guilty of serious crimes, comprise mostly expulsion of the involved for a certain period. Only in one case has a rapist been expelled from the JU for life. Many complain that the punishments were much too soft compared to the seriousness of the crime.

Whatever it is, there is a discernible change in all these incidents. In the cases under discussion, the so-called leaders of the ruling party's student organisation have been found guilty. Of the 13 accused in the JU rape case all of them belonged to the Chhatra League. Of the 24 punished for terrorism at the BAU, 13 belong to the BCL and the rest to the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD). This is important. The government has not tried to intervene in any of these cases. On the other hand, the BCL has expelled some of the leaders penalised by the university authorities. The ruling party knows it will lose its face if its student organisation is disgraced by some of its cadres' sexual or other aberrations. At least the Prime Minister in this case has lived up to her words that terrorists do not belong to any political party.

If we read a positive political trend in the two university authorities' decisions, we can surely expect some changes in the academic atmosphere in the near future provided it is consistently maintained in dealing with terrorism. Had the previous governments also shown such tolerance and a sane judgment, campus violence could not come to this extreme. The university teachers are also partly to blame for the situation. Whatever may be the political differences between various teachers' groups, lobbies or panels, on one thing they would not hide their reservation. In fact, they fiercely guard the university's autonomy. But when it came to acting against terrorism on the campuses, the teachers were found lacking in the sense of urgency. It is because of this that the monster that campus terrorism is could go from strength to strength.

Students get slain in armed clashes between rival student organisations. And there have been quite a few such slaughters. Such plain murders are also ignored. Campus areas seem to be the places where even the law of the land is not applied. But why? The infamous killing at Mohsin Hall also had no investigation to trace out the culprits. So the teachers have given a lot of concessions and made undue compromises. They can no longer do such things. They must act now. Political environment seems to be congenial. So strike while the iron is (or seems) hot. And there is the rub. We urge the teachers to go ahead with the honest intention of clearing the campus of terrorism. We trust, given a serious move by the teachers, students will feel impelled to co-operate, whatever their initial dithering. We believe our senior groups of students have not turned yet into thugs despite some juvenile aberrations that must go away once serious initiatives start specially from the teachers.

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