

The Bangladesh Times

RIDDING THE CAMPUS OF ARMS

The raid by police and other security forces on the residential halls on Dhaka University campus which led to the seizure of a large cache of arms on Wednesday is the outcome of a national consensus that has grown up on the imperative need for corrective measures against those who have undermined the academic atmosphere. The haul of illegal arms from the dormitories of the university includes sophisticated weapons like submachine guns and automatic carbines. This reveals the extent of the deterioration of situation on the campus.

Recurrent gunfire rocked the campus in the past few weeks and often open skirmishes between rival student groups caused deaths and serious injuries. A very small minority of students who had in their possession illegal arms and were even merrily using them kept the campus terrified. Many of these elements were outsiders and some of them were expelled from the campus for breaking academic discipline. They were virtually holding the large majority of students hostage on the campus.

Wednesday's action shows the seriousness with which the government has decided to deal with the menace. That there is an overwhelming public support behind the measure is evident from the relief felt and expressed by a large cross-section of people. The university authorities have themselves denounced gun running on the campus and the terrorism by a handful of students and outsiders who had taken refuge in the residential halls. The raid to rid the campus of illegal arms was designed to meet a great urgency and was in response to the public outrage over the desperate campus situation.

It is obvious that however stringent the measures are, they must be applied to rid the campuses of terrorism and such efforts should be part of a sustainable process. While implementing the steps the authorities need to convince all about the honest intentions of those corrective measures and must appear impartial. It must be said the raid was planned and conducted with great care and with that important factor in view. But the government alone, despite its sincerest wishes, cannot tackle a problem like gun running on the campus as effectively as one would wish it to be without support of all sections of the population to such measures. It is apparent that political parties, students unions, teachers, parents and guardians have welcomed the security measures already taken. This support should not only continue, but must be strengthened from all forums so that the national consensus on the issue is more solidly built.

The universities are the highest seats of learning in the country, whose goals are the achievement of academic excellence, the training of intellects to understand the meaning of life more fully and the grooming of minds of the students who will be able to shoulder the responsibilities of the society in the future and take the nation to new heights of glory. Certainly, these goals which any university worth its name strives to reach cannot be achieved in an atmosphere marked by violence, terrorism and an utter disregard of order and academic discipline.

There is a groundswell of support for actions which are being taken now. Prime Minister Kazi Zafar Ahmed who heads the Cabinet Committee on Law and Order has expressed the government's firm resolve for eliminating arms from the campus. He said the government was committed to free the educational institutions from illegal arms so that these can perform their sacred role in an atmosphere fully conducive to academic pursuits. It is only sustainable corrective measures which can build confidence among the general body of students, their guardians and the academic staff, thus helping restore the academic climate which promotes the pursuit of knowledge and excellence.

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