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Academic Spin-off From Campus Politics—And More

The campus situation in Dhaka University has taken the course predictable from the run of things over the past week of confrontation between the student groups on the one hand and between the Vice-Chancellor and the government on the other. The Vice Chancellor has made good his resolve to resign if the campus violence leading to the occupation of some halls by rival groups of students were not vacated within forty eight hours. There is, therefore, an academic-administrative vacuum created. It is yet to be filled, and in the interest of higher education the decision by the Chancellor to fill it needs to be made without delay.

Relatively, the more crucial point to be made is that the (academic) spin-off from the politics on campus threatens to affect the academic programme in Dhaka University more grievously than ever. From the pure academic point: with the provosts and house tutors of some halls having already resigned and the trouble continuing in these halls over their occupation, the prospect of the university classes and courses being run regularly is getting murkier by the day. Problems bound to arise from this campus instability are, among other negatives: a repetition of the session jams which meanwhile had looked like easing to a considerable degree.

The political core of the current campus situation, however, remains still unaddressed, either locally between student leaders or at the national leadership level, for which we had made a fervent appeal in an earlier leader not long ago. It appears to have fallen on deaf ears. The response naturally was expected to come in the first place from the national leadership represented by the government in office and the opposition.

The expectation was that the initiative would come from the administration for the simple reason that the primary responsibility for tackling situations like this is the incumbent government's, while the role of the opposition tends as a rule to stay restricted to protest either in Parliament or outside, or at both points.

One thing which is being very scantily perceived is the extent of damage being done to university education generally and to Dhaka University in particular, in the country. Needless to say, or some may be disposed to say: why worry about it? It has been so almost always over the past decades with intermission now and then. The point is it has to change and must be seen doing so viably and stably; if higher education or academic culture is not to be disrupted without repair. Or, to put it more plainly, campus politics, which is a stream flowing from the country's mainstream politics, is not to continue to do the damage it has been doing. Unfortunately, till date this seems to be nobody's concern or, if at all, a very remote one (concern).

Not that, what we are saying, or, for that matter, our contemporaries have, or may say, will strike a responsive chord in the hearts of those for whom these comments are meant. Yet, hoping against hope, we are repeating our earnest appeal for our leaders to help end the brawl in the student world of Bangladesh.

This seems to have been given a long lease of life and may end up not only crippling the universities (the seats of arts, sciences and technology providing the foundation of the nation's intellectual and scientific culture). Its political fall-out also is bound to be eventually disastrous if we care to see or foresee.

Since the campus problem is undisguisedly a political problem, leaving it to the police alone to sort it out is anything but a recipe for a solution. So the solution can come only the political way. It is time, not for placebos and palliatives, but a permanent answer.