

Campus: Past And Present—II

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THE gangrene of party politics seems to have eaten into the socio-cultural fabric of the University and College life of our country. A reign of terror now prevails in and around the Campus of the Dhaka University, because of frequent bomb blasts and cross firing by opposing groups of students. Even heavy intermittent gun shots have rocked the Campus for the last two months as the two rival factions of a particular political party in occupation of two separate residential Halls have been found engaged in their reciprocal exchange of gun fire.

In the last four days' inaugural session of the Dhaka University Senate's annual meeting, the Vice-Chancellor of the Dhaka University reviewed the causes of the Campus violence in general and the consequent death issues. He said deaths on the Campus were always mostly for political reasons, mostly due to conflict between two political parties or organisations and in some cases because of inter-party conflict. He said, "It is unfortunate that the political parties are using the Campus as a battle field in resolving their political or personal rivalry. He remarked that the Hall administrators are literary hostages to the "process of Hall capturing" in which lethal weapons are used. He further remarked that University residential Halls have become the "Sanctuaries" of miscreants who allegedly extort huge amount of tolls from Contractors working in the Campus. The frequent unscheduled closures were hampering the normal academic activities and creating session-jam. Session-jam is not only caused by causes imposed from outside but also due to internal reasons, urging the Deans and departmental chairmen to work unitedly for removing internal causes of session-jam. The Senate Session ended with a call to the government, political parties and the University authority to curb Campus violence.

The staff and law abiding students of the Dhaka University seem to have been passing their days under an awe-inspiring condition of the Campus. It seems, inflow of arms in the Campus from outside at the hands of politically motivated so-

called students is creating havoc in the Campus causing harms to the peace-loving learners with their positive goal object of life. In view of such a scenario of the Dhaka University Campus, no gentleman, not even an affluent guardian dare go to the University Campus to contact with his ward for fear of damage to his car or personal safety.

Periodical Campus violence is a common feature of the other Universities and Colleges of higher education as well. But the Dhaka University with its location in the Capital City and with its long standing tradition, stands as a radiating centre of learning and culture.

The city with its about seven million population with a significant percentage of intellectuals, foreign embassies and Govt. Offices can boast of having such a University, the light of which once radiated at different corners of the world in days past. Now because of the periodical and incessant Campus violence, education of our children is being hampered and the reputation of the University tarnished. The position has now got to be retrieved at any cost by the united efforts of all classes of people, irrespective of caste and creed, rank & life, by setting aside all questions of Party Politics and party affiliations in the common interest of the education of our children.

In view of Campus violence which caused the simultaneous close down of the Universities of Bangladesh for some time in August last, the Committee of the Council of Bangladesh Universities representing the eight Vice-Chancellors of eight different Universities was held at Dhaka on Aug. 20, 1991 which declared the violence as a political imposition from outside and as such they sought all possible guarantees from the political Parties and their student fronts for future non-violence on the Campus with also an assurance from them through the media of Press, Radio & TV to the effect that the Vice-Chancellors of the Universities together with their administrative Staffs would not be subjected to any repression or criticism for any of

their actions to be taken for the sake of internal law and order. They further insisted on the maintenance of safety and security of life and property on the Campus by the law enforcing agencies by their mutual free actions against armed outsiders in the Campus and sought the co-operation of the mass media in reporting events helpful to the cause of the peace and tranquility of the Campus.

A guardians' rally was also organised in this connection with representatives of higher layers of society on Aug 23, 1991 at the TSC in which the Vice-Chancellor of the Dhaka University remarked, "The Campus violence cannot be rooted out unless the political Parties are sincere in not sheltering terrorists in their respective folds".

From all such reports and happenings it is crystal clear that our people are not yet sensitive to the basic norms of patriotism and democracy. Our politicians and leaders of society can certainly realise that we live and die for the cause of our children whose education is our primary concern. Our College and University going children are the future architects of our society, the vanguards of democracy. Politics, therefore, can never be perverted into any kind of direct or indirect party or personal aggrandisement detrimental to the peace and progress of the country. The guardians of the majority of the College and University going students of our poverty-stricken country happen to be poor. They suffered a lot because of frequent postponement of examinations and feel frustrated to see the sword of Democles still hanging on their heads. Our present Govt. has made the highest allocation of money for education in the notice our political leaders are making all kinds of formal periodical appeals to the student community and the public, to maintain peace in the Campus, but these have appeared to be "cries in wilderness".

Though it was a pleasant surprise to see that the recent two terms of elections of the residential Halls and of the DUCSU were carried out without any violence, yet the Unions

could not be purged of the gangrene of the duel of party politics leaving the Campus violence as a legacy to the larger section of our innocent ambitious students dedicated to the cause of higher education with positive goal object of life. Hall Unions were meant for holding peaceful cultural and co-curricular functions for the development of a healthy social life of the students. But unfortunately their objectives are being jeopardised by frequent Campus violence. Our Prime Minister in a message on the occasion of the recent DUCSU convention held at the Institute of Engineers described "Terrorism as a national problem saying, democracy and terrorism cannot go side by side". She made a persuasive appeal to the Student Community as the torch bearers of democracy to uproot terrorism from the Campus.

The other opposition political leaders were also found to have made periodical appeals to the students to root out the Campus violence with the co-operation of the public. But all such appeals and instructions were found to have produced no tangible result.

In view of the present situation of the Campus, if the Govt. and opposition parties can manage to sit together with their sincere minds of firm determination to stop the Campus violence at any cost and even, if and when necessary, by sacking any political student worker or workers of their respective parties when they will be found indulging in any anti-social activity detrimental to the cause of the peace of the Campus, then and then only Campus problem many have its solution. Because where there is will there is way. Let the education of our ambitious poor children have priority over all considerations of party politics and party affiliations as our politicians happen to be the trustees of the poor guardians of our poverty stricken students. This will be their service to the cause of society at large.

These are the extracts from the speech of the writer—Principal M. N. Karim delivered on July 28 at the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh.