

Banishing Campus Terrorism

Nothing brings political ambivalence in sharper outline than the gap between rhetoric and reality. Two news items carried in different dailies yesterday have amply proved what really wrong with our political scene. In her speech at the inaugural function of the Dhaka University Alumni Association Convention Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has again reiterated her oft-repeated stance that her government is determined to root out campus terrorism and no terrorist irrespective of his party affiliation will be spared. Then we stumble on a news item carried in a Bangla daily that the police were forced to release two youths who had been earlier arrested with illegal fire arms. The two young men had in their possession a revolver of foreign origin with bullets; and they had to be freed from nowhere else but from the office of the detective police on Minto Road. Why? The answer is plain and simple—under pressure from a political party.

If this is correct, then any promise of an effective measure against terrorism only rings hollow. We do not know which political party exerted so much influence as to frustrate the detective police's attempt to send the two youths to the place where they belong. If this is the ruling party so much the worse. The incident exemplifies the inconsistency between the preaching and practice. This goes to show that it is the political parties which manipulate the course of law and deal a blow to democracy.

If this is how the police are asked to perform their duties, there is little hope that the criminals with political connections will ever get punished. Terrorists roaming on the university campuses of the country are a special breed who enjoy blessings from the party hierarchy. Their huge following and strong political clout only give them almost an unassailable immunity from legal intervention. Despite her solemn protestation that the Chhatra League is not constitutionally acknowledged by the Awami League, the Prime Minister has no way to deny the association and the special relationship between the two. She has not done so. In fact, she has referred to her unilateral decision to impose a moratorium on the Chhatra League in 1993.

In this context we would like to mention her offer for banning student politics from universities consensually. The offer is laudable. But what is needed is the initiation of the process. We have no idea that the proposal first advanced by the country's President has been pursued with any kind of seriousness. There is no reason to be satisfied with the relative calm now prevailing on Dhaka University campus. Campuses elsewhere are not quiet any more. And even the DU campus appears to be in a state of lull before the storm. The convention of the alumni association may have tremendous value but only other than practical. In fact, such a happy occasion demands a peaceful and congenial environment. Does Dhaka University boast any such environment? So the more important and urgent task is to attend to the undesirable political interference in the academic activity of the universities. As the chief executive of the country the Prime Minister can initiate the process of a political dialogue with the aim to do away with student politics at the universities. True to her claims, she will once again show the way to others. If they fail to adequately respond to her move, people will know who are responsible for what.

Happily, people have started to think that reigning in politics in the universities—both student and teacher politics—is the answer to the problem of campus terrorism. It may still take a little longer to become a popular idea but then politics will have to depart from the campuses. We find no other alternative to this hard decision to deal with the problem of campus terrorism.