

## CAMPUS CRISIS: HOW TO HANDLE IT?

The recent grand conference of nearly forty political parties held at the Prime Minister's behest was a unique but a truly commendable method of reaching a consensus on the necessity of weeding out terrorism and mercenary political activities from the campus and restoring the academic atmosphere.

Almost everybody agreed that effective actions should be taken but there was precious little on how to snap the lifeblood of trouble-mongers. One may begin with the identification of this breed, and the Education Minister, Dr Badruddouza Chowdhury's attempt couldn't have been more apt. He remarked that terrorists in essence have no party. They are simply mercenaries, prized for their nuisance-value by politicians, for whom clean, honest manoeuvres are not as expedient as dirty little games with guns handbombs, ramdaos and other handy weapons.

Since these misguided or moneyguided—youth put themselves on sale, their loyalties are fragile and fickle, and on that count they are easily bought and let loose among unsuspecting groups, to infiltrate the rank and file and make mischief. One party's hired hoodlum can easily change his colours for better benefits from other quarters, broadening the scope for double-crossing and confounding Frankenstein himself when it comes to identifying his own monster.

According to the conference participants, every major political party has its hoodlums, both within and outside their student wings. Nobody admitted the fact, however, neither did any party refute the allegation, and BNP, Awami League, JSD and Jamaat have pledged cooperation in cleaning the campus.

The CPB leader suggested going for a joint declaration that terrorists would not be patronised or harboured by any party. It was well received and a joint declaration is expected to be worked out soon. This positive effort would get the support of most students who are peace-loving, and join the universities for academic purposes, and not for permits and political profiteering.

But it would be wrong to pin the blame entirely on opportunist students. They are what they are because their leaders encouraged them to be so. Unsullied youth is always ready to die for an ideal but such has the state of politics become in Bangladesh that precious life is lost for the most innocuous things like, a seat in the hostel or a democratic expression of opinions.

Sadly, wilfulness, the fatal flaw of autocrats, is present even among "democratic" leaders and the led. Reasoned words, thoughts and deeds have not yet replaced old habits. In a fundamentally feudal political order members do the bidding of partybosses without questioning its merit. Questioning is tantamount to sacrilege.

To discipline delinquent student-politicians the elders must first heal themselves of their tendencies to misuse youth—as cannon-fodder, muscle-power and mindless agitators rather than as an ideological force. Would our elder politicians unlearn old ways and come of age now that a consensus to cure the campus has been reached?

If the power-hunger of politicians is tempered by patriotism, the well-being of their disciples, and the nation's good, would be the first considerations. Those who indulge in politics must be students first and politicians second—politicians who are intellectually bright enough to appreciate the merit of becoming truly educated rather than acquiring a certificate.

Let not the primary purpose of the universities—higher education—be compromised in the bid to win political power bases within the campus. It is this crude competition that leads to blood-letting, strikes, closures, session-jams and the criminal waste of youth and scarce resources. Some quarters suggested establishing a campus security force for exclusive trouble-shooting, a point worth considering as students resent police action against them. Needless to say, nothing short of radical strategy can resolve the campus crisis, but not without the cooperation of all, and unflagging sincerity.