

CHECKING CAMPUS VIOLENCE

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There is a distinct national consensus that the educational arena has to be rid of violence and a congenial academic climate must be restored. The national concern over the present situation in the universities and other academic institutions was reflected in the general discussion on the educational institutions in Parliament this week. Members from both the Treasury and Opposition benches spoke of the need for a united resolve to eliminate campus violence. The discussion led to the formation of a parliamentary committee comprising members from the political parties represented in Parliament whose task will be to work out a plan to combat this malaise affecting the campuses in the country.

Four major universities have been forced to close down and 67 other colleges were given forced vacation recently because of the fighting among different student groups. This fighting emanates not always from the differences in the political ideologies of the groups but the unhealthy competition among them to maintain their sway over a particular campus, if necessary, through the show of strength. Because of the availability of firearms, these clashes often lead to bloodshed. But it is evident that the general mass of the students are not involved in these terrorist activities and are devoted to their studies. It is only a very small minority who are involved in polluting the atmosphere of the educational institutions.

This minority are often aided by "outsiders" and "non-students" who are involved in gun running on the campuses. Members regretted that the authorities of the educational institutions affected by students' violence were failing to take appropriate actions for various reasons. The committee which is headed by the Law and Justice Minister will have to find out why these institutions are not being able to take effective steps against violence and are increasingly becoming hostage to the groups indulging in violence. The fallout from the forced closure of the educational institutions is session jams which are the result of the frequent postponement of examinations.

The committee has a difficult task to perform. But they can count on the unstinted national support that will be forthcoming. This support should come from the worried guardians, the concerned teachers and the ordinary taxpayer who wants his money spent properly in the educational arena. Questions like to what extent political activities should be permitted on the campuses and how much the students can get involved in political activities have to be considered by the committee. The issue of the presence of 'outsiders' on the campuses has to be resolved once and for all.

It is apparent that the government has taken a serious view of the deteriorating situation in the educational institutions. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia told a group of students on Wednesday that her government would spare no efforts in dealing with unlawful activities on the campuses. She stressed that an atmosphere promoting learning must be brought back to the educational institutions. There is no doubt that the political parties in the country have a vital role to play in the process of eliminating violence on the campuses. There is no scope for the political parties to shrug off their responsibilities.