

CAMPUS TERRORISM

Campus violence is undoubtedly one of the major problems confronting the nation. It not only disturbs the academic life of the students and strains the finances of the guardians but also causes incalculable harm to the nation. The loss to the students isn't only in terms of years. Caught in the quagmire of campus unrest they lose even their future. The political atmosphere in the country attracts some to the destructive course. The ever lengthened courses brings about frustration among others. They give in to unhealthy practices and finally turn into anti-social elements. That way our brightest children on whom the mantle of future leadership would fall go astray. What it costs to the nation can be well imagined.

One can see that the campus unrest is essentially an urban elite concern, as most of the other major ills—like money laundering, loan default culture et cetera—are. It is again the urban elite who mastermind the trade in contraband goods, foment labour unrest and create cleavages in the society by fuelling non-issues. The rural illiterate poor even though half-starved, feed the nation, keep the wheel of the economy moving and contribute overwhelmingly to the gross national product. They aren't really involved in the major national vices and do not contribute in any way in aggravating problems. To our shame it is all the doings of a section of the educated urban elite.

The campus situation hasn't developed just in a month or a year. It has been with us for nearly three decades now. Begun in the Ayub-Monem days, it has not only been getting worse day by day but also more and more complicated. The rot set in with the pumping in of intelligence money to create dissension among the students. These days the source of finance for agitational activities is international. They cannot get into a consortium just because each has to hide its interests from the other.

The guardians are obviously affected immediately and directly by campus situation and they talked in a frank and forthright manner with the Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia Saturday last. Besides the representatives of the National Guardians Association, the Minister and State Minister for Education and the Vice Chancellors of Dhaka University, Jahangirnagar University and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology were among those who took part in the three-hour long discussion aimed at finding ways of ending terrorism in educational institutions.

Begum Zia sought the active cooperation of all including the guardians and teachers and leaders of political parties in containing campus terrorism. She said that the government alone could not accomplish the task and assured all out support to any decision the teachers and guardians might take to this end.

Begum Zia asked the teachers to enforce the relevant rules including intensification of identity card and roll call system in the residential halls to restrict outsiders and terrorists and to alert the law enforcing agencies of the presence of unauthorised weapons on the campus.

The Vice Chancellor of the University of Dhaka, Prof Emajuddin Ahmed recalled the report of the Committee of the Vice Chancellors on campus terrorism and session-jam. The committee recommended limitation on political activities of the teachers and modification of the 1973 University Ordinance.

The guardians pleaded for strict enforcement of the academic calendar by all the educational institutions, introduction of regular class tests and distribution of hostel seats on merit. They also favoured forging national consensus on maintaining peace on the campus.

There could of course be no open opposition to the idea of eradicating campus violence. But the fact remains, it is the political atmosphere in the country that spawns violence on the campus and the parties are reluctant to see any shirkage in their respective sphere of influence.

The suggestion for setting up a committee headed by a judge to identify the causes of campus violence and suggest remedial measures is a good one. But that should not delay known preventive and remedial measures. The committee may, however, try to reach the root of the problem. It is the finance that can buy arms and foment trouble even where there is no apparent cause. That is at the root. The source of finance has to be identified and the pipeline snapped. The political forces must commit not to interfere in the academic life and live upto it. The educational institution as such should also try to maintain political neutrality.

We hope the dispassionate views of the Prime Minister on the vital issue would have resounding support of the people irrespective of political persuasion.