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Campus In Days Past And Present

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RECENTLY a meeting of the Standing Committee of the Council of Bangladesh Universities was held on Aug. 20 to consider the possibility of reopening of universities, particularly the Universities of Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi, closed down following Campus violence. Eight Vice-Chancellors of eight different universities of the country representing the Committee declared this Campus 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 and T.V. to the effect that the Vice-Chancellors of Universities together with their administrative staff would not be subjected to any repression or criticism for their actions to be taken for the sake of internal law and order. They further insisted on the maintenance of safety security of life and property on the campus by the law enforcing agencies by their neutral, free actions against armed outsiders in the campus and sought the cooperation 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 on Aug. 23 at the TSC, in which the Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University remarked that "the campus violence cannot be rooted out unless the political parties were sincere in not sheltering terrorists in their respective folds" (BSS).

From all these 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 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 country, the vanguards of our society. Politics cannot be perverted into any kind of indirect party or self-aggrandisement, detriment to 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 now feel frustrated to see the sword of Democles hanging over their heads. Our present democratic government has made the highest allocation of money for education in the budget. But the process of implementation is being jeopardised by campus violence. It is reported that in the wake of university campus violence and close-down many colleges are also closed because of campus violence. The Jagnath University College seems to be the greatest sufferer in this regard.

Adolescence is a period (between 12 to 23 yrs) of storm and stress. The youngsters follow the directions of the leaders of society without thinking the pros and cons of their adventure under some Utopian ideas breathed to them by their leaders. Can we not look back to the history of the last few decades of the present century for guidance? It is an irony of history that men do not take lesson from it. There were movements in this country in the past both at national and international levels in which our people and students participated without instance of campus violence or postponement of examinations. We have seen the Congress and the Khilafat movements of 1921-22, the Pakistan movement, the Language movement of 1952, the movement against the education reforms of 1962, and the six-point movement of 1966-69 etc. in which

our students and people participated. But as far as I remember in no such movement there was violence on university and college campus and no university examination was postponed. There were political differences between men and men but at the campus level there was unity of action and purpose among the teachers and students of all parties for the cause of education and no scheduled examination was found to have been shifted.

During this long period under review the educational campus was not polluted. There was a sweet relation between teachers and student, between student and student and between teacher and teacher at campus level. No outside interference was noticed in the internal administration of a college or a university. In 1962, for example, as many as eleven students were expelled from the Dhaka College for their agitation for boycotting a periodical college examination. There was no interference from outside. Because the decision was a united decision of the teachers to maintain the serene atmosphere of the college. The student leaders of those days had the greatest regard for their teachers because of their scholarship, dedicated service to the cause of their pupils as their real friends, philosophers and guides. Many misguided students were brought back to the right path by persuasion and proper guidance of their teachers.

In those days past there was discipline even in college hostels and university halls. No student was allowed to stay without admission within the specified time. There was no illegal stay of outsiders or mischief-makers which would require police help for their expulsion. I happened to be the House Tutor of Salimullah Muslim Hall in 1936-37

and Superintendent or administrator of then Iqbal Hall (now called Zahirul Huq Hall) in 1950-53 on Government appointment. Iqbal Hall was primarily meant for the Law students. I used to maintain a congenial cultural atmosphere of the Hall by holding periodical seminars among the boarders. Mr. Badrul Haider Chowdhury (now Retd. Chief Justice), a near relation of mine, used to take leading part in such seminars. He was known for his eloquence and argumentative discussions. Ex-Prime Minister Shah Aziz also resided in this Hall as one of my appointed Hall monitors of the Joynag Road-wing building of Iqbal Hall.

These are sweet memories of the past. To quote W. Cowper, "What peaceful hours I once enjoyed: How sweet their memories still." These are thought-provoking memories indeed. Can we not now restore the congenial atmosphere of the campus of the college and universities if the two of our democratic lady leaders are bent on maintaining peace on the campus. We understand they have already made appeals to their party leaders and student fronts to help the restoration of peace on the campus and thus help the cause of the education of our children. We hope in the context of the present campus violence they will play a more dynamic role in this regard. At the same time, the poverty stricken guardians of most of the college and university students, who so long suffered terribly from frequent campus violence and postponement of examinations, should also make fervent and frequent appeals to the student and political leaders to help the cause of the education by maintaining the sanctity of the campus. We hope their frequent emotional appeals in this regard will not go in vain.