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Peace On Campus Cannot Wait

Since Tuesday afternoon the university campus has evidently developed signs of student violence over occupation of residential halls. Thank God, the eruption has not been as lethal as it might have been, judging by rising passions in both camps of students—Chhatra League and Chhatra Dal. That it may be cannot be ruled out unless peace-brokers on either side, especially the leaders of the rival student groups sincerely mean peace and set about establishing it on the university campus.

We propose this with the best of intentions, holding no brief for one side or the other, and encouraged by the news report that Tuesday's inter-party scrap was sorted out amicably in a reconciliation bid by the student leaders of both groups, assuring each other of safe conduct over their stay in their respective halls and abjuring all kinds of provocative slogans or actions against each other. But the truce did not hold. Reportedly, new signs of eruptions have emerged, making everybody apprehend the worst on the campus.

The subject came up for a heated debate in parliament on Tuesday evening. But the debate was in the main recriminatory rather than conciliatory. One watched it with a good deal of disappointment and that for one simple reason: incriminating references to the past, or similar reiteration of offences committed by one political group or another can only exacerbate feelings, increasingly eliminating the chance of resolving this continuing campus crisis.

While student leaders on their own ought to do what is needed to restore peace on the campus as they have just done, political leaders of the two major parties have also a duty to perform in this context. This is because campus violence (at the universities) is at bottom of a political problem. And there should be no shying away from this truth about the situation, however unattractive this might be to the political leadership in either camp.

This being so, the need is for a summit of national leaders and student leaders, together with some senior teachers for an open-minded discussion, all in the interest of university education and the nation.

And this most-cherished goal of campus peace is highly achievable given this condition of student plus political leaders taking an initiative like this, putting behind them years of political rivalries. They must all join in this peace effort, considering seriously the cost this endless campus violence has caused the universities, the students and the guardians.

The miracle happening under a new government and through an unorthodox initiative launched by consensus at the national political leadership level will go down as perhaps the greatest political achievement of Bangladesh for the past two decades or so.