

## President On Campus Unrest

It is a President's institutional—if not constitutional (in a parliamentary system that needs a rethink in some contexts) obligation to say the right thing in the right way and at the right moment. And that is what Justice Shahabuddin forcefully said last Sunday. The campus problem has long been festering and those with whom the answer lies have been seen looking the other way whenever trouble erupted on the campus, or even rival student parties fought their gun battles to kill each other. These rivalries have mounted according as the national political climate waxed and waned.

The President, for about the third time over the past months, pointed to the state of unrest on university campuses and rightly blamed it—and its continuity—on students being drawn into the vortex of national party politics. He wants the universities kept free from politics, and the political leaders to help bring about this most-needed change. Commenting on standards maintained by university education in the country, he said degrees and diplomas awarded by them are 'hardly recognised abroad'.

The President, among other things, asked for some necessary amendment to the university ordinance, restructuring the student and hall unions and student representation in the Senate. Obviously, his was no 'political' interference in student affairs. It was only an expression of his serious concern over a spiralling decline in one of the most vital national areas—higher education.

Speaking on the same subject the Education Minister however struck a slightly different note stressing the need for "autonomy, transparency and accountability". This however relates to generalities of which high-ranking members of the administration have been seen to be more fond, shying away from specifics. Coming to grips frontally with them is a rare sight in the administration's handling of some old or new problems. The one on the campus is eminently one of them.

This newspaper has from the beginning been urging the end of campus unrest that has long been gnawing at the very foundation of the country's higher education. In a number of leaders so far on the subject, we have tried to bring into focus the fact that the trouble on the campus is a political rather than academic problem and could be only politically resolved. Which could be done only through a 'consensus' between the major political parties—AL, BNP, JP—putting behind them their political differences—over this vital national issue. A joint declaration by the leaders of the three parties pledging that violence on the campus should be a thing of the past from now on—and that so far as university or, generally, education campuses are concerned, they will stay non-political and be kept unaffected by party politics and that no political party will make use of students to actively work for them on or outside the campus. The campus in Bangladesh as are those in other countries must return to their lively old days of teacher and students and books and intellectual activity, at the centre—and politics or other matters, if at all, at the circumference. Does it sound to ambitions—or Utopian under present circumstances?

To boost standards, as we have suggested in an earlier leader,—restore English to its original place—but with a difference: Let the medium of instruction be bilingual, rather than monolingual as it had been. Use freely both Bangla and English. Comprehension and technical vocabulary in international subjects is the main problem with our students with a poor knowledge of English. And the students should also be advised to be bilingual, meaning whatever they will study on a given (world) subject in Bengali notes and books, should be complemented by a study of the authorities on the subject in English.

This is how we have to make a start in this neo-revolution on the campus not merely turning around things from the bane of politics but giving them a positive intellectual twist, driving them in the desired and needed direction.

This is the simple addition we make to the President's very useful counsel for the universities to head and workout.

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