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DU — and Sheikh Hasina's move

Sheikh Hasina Wajed has made a remarkable move. By declaring her intention to suspend all activities of the Chhatra League at Dhaka University, she has shrewdly left it to other political parties, notably the ruling BNP, to take care of their own student wings. There is certainly the question of how much of the dramatic was there in the Opposition leader's announcement. All politics, in this country and elsewhere, is by and large a matter of drama. Every politician brings something of the emotional and the sentimental in the propagation of his or her politics. Sheikh Hasina cannot be an exception to this rule. For this reason alone, one is quite willing to accept her view, made on the floor of the Jatiya Sangsad, for what it is—a statement of intent. At the same time, one expects that she means what she says, and that her decision will be enforced without question. If she is able to have her way, and if her young followers in the Chhatra League go by her directive, she will certainly deserve to be complimented. There is no question that her stature will stand to gain from the whole exercise. Besides, she will be able to show; yet once again—and unlike other politicians in present times—that her writ runs large within her party. From these points of view, therefore, any citizen who is fully conscious of the nation's needs and the ailments that constantly assail it, will welcome Sheikh Hasina's move. That citizen will also be led to expect, and quite naturally too, that other politicians will take the cue from the Awami League chief and do all that is necessary for the future of democracy in the country.

And now to deal with the details of a situation that has already caused a good deal of commotion in the country. The latest victim to die as a sequel to the campus incident of last Sunday was Mizanur Rahman. The number of people killed in the shoot-out, or as a result of it, is therefore four. The incident, like so many others before it, ought to leave a lasting, grim impression on the collective consciousness of the nation. There has been, mercifully—and we trust we are not mistaken—a faint shadow of remorse among the different sections of the population. Politicians and students alike have condemned the grisly incident, and all this has led many to believe, that a change could come over the whole country, for the better. One hopes the feelings will not be misplaced. Even so, there is the glaring truth that the responsibility for guiding the country back to moralistic politics lies with the politicians. The history of the last nine years has been a simple and a crude one: it was an autocratic regime that negated all our attempts to lead lives of decency. But now that autocracy is gone, there is no ready target of ridicule that we can focus our attention to. And so if now students, affiliated or attracted to the Awami League and the BNP, choose to battle it out among themselves, we cannot but put the blame squarely on those who give them political leadership.

The time has now come to reconsider the whole gamut of student politics in the country. The recent incident at BUET, where several vehicles were burnt by rampaging students, shows amply that things have come to a pass where complacency cannot be taken matter-of-factly anymore. Who will compensate the owners for the loss of not only their cars but also mental peace? And who will reassure the families of the four who died in the Sunday shoot-out that their children's death shall not have gone in vain? These are questions that need to be answered. Processions with bullet riddled bodies, inane expressions of condolence at street corners and meaningless pledges about rooting out terrorism from the campus today do not satisfy citizens any more. And all the while we are reminded—the police, of all people, took to the mike the other day to do the job—that Dhaka University is called the Oxford of the East. Students do not get killed at Oxford. Politicians do not engage in verbal duel about their unruly followers at Oxford. At Oxford, intellectual men diligently go about the serious business of helping to sharpen the intellect of the young. We ask all: after all this mind-picture of Oxford, can Dhaka University still have pretensions to immortality, or stand comparison with one of the greatest institutions of the world? Only the self-righteous will argue with us; but the self-righteous are also people who can be self-deluding at times.

Sheikh Hasina has decided to put the activities of the BCL on hold at Dhaka University. Would it be too much to expect Begum Khaleda Zia to go one step further, and call for a suspension of student organisation activity—every bit of it—on the campus for a good length of time? We do not know the answer. But we do know this: if the women who dominate the nation's politics today cannot be in command of their followers, clouds—dark and ominous—will soon appear on the horizon. And no one likes to be caught in a sweeping storm.