

## University Schedules

In about a week or so nearly all the universities (excepting Chittagong University) in the country will start functioning again to the relief of all. And the expectation is that they will not have been reopened only to be closed again. Once beaten twice shy (as the old phrase goes) most can't help thinking such gloomy thoughts. Chittagong University is a depressing case in point, with the teachers already on strike and the university authorities dragging their feet as a case of classic indecision.

It is reassuring, though, that both the university administrations and the government have said that the campuses are peaceful and that the universities will have no trouble running as usual. One reason why we seem to share the fear and welcome the assurance is that enough damage has been done, and it is time we set about repairing it. We just cannot afford to disrupt education in the way it has been over the past two decades or so.

For universities to keep functioning undisturbed is of vital importance to: 1) students, 2) teachers and 3) the state. This bromide needs repeating because unfortunately students in this country (unlike those even in other Asian countries) tend to get drawn into some situation in a way that does most harm to their vital interests.

In an earlier editorial we pointed out the time lost in completing study courses, holding examination etc. One thing, among other things, the universities should make a point of doing is: a student should be enabled to complete his studies in time, take his examination on time and get his degree in time. An additional 2-5 years now added to his student career has, apart from increasing the financial burden of his guardians, disqualify him for government jobs. And we have reports of many such cases of failure in getting a job and the frustration resulting from it. In fairness therefore, if a student has to leave university behind schedule for no fault of his own he can legitimately claim you should increase his age-limit from the existing 25 to 30 years or so.

What is desirable, though, is that such extensions of the official age-limit should not be necessary at all henceforward. Since the number of those already so affected is considerable the proposed concession in matters of appointment to government posts has to be made.

As for the teachers, their help in making good the loss suffered by students should flow on a very generous scale. The departments concerned should draw up programmes of extra work for both teachers and students to complete courses and tutorial tests in the run-up to the end-of-session examinations. It is time the authorities of the universities decided on holding all examinations on schedule and against the officially fixed time-table being disturbed by anything other than an earthquake. This should be taken up as a policy to be irrevocably followed. The back-log of examinations will have to strictly maintain their schedules also. The amount of extra work all this would entail on the teaching and administrative staff will have to be undertaken to set things right.

The state's stake, (hardly ever taken seriously simple because the rot has become familiar enough to be accepted by all) is as great. Properly qualified personnel are not found in time to man the respective national sectors. Competitive examinations as well as tests and contests for scholarships, or opportunities for higher studies abroad, are missed as a rule by this class of handicapped university graduates. All these — from the loss suffered by students to that by the guardians and the state — are an invisible erosion whose effect on nearly every part of social life adds up to a formidable aggregate. Insouciance on the part of social, administrative and academic leaderships as well as a cynical apathy on the part of a frustrated general public accounts for no serious protest being made over this state of affairs. Any society with an average sensitiveness about its simple self-interest would demand of its leaders that they answer for it. In the ultimate analysis it is the taxpayer that has to pay for the loss and waste.