

MORNING SUN

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How is the campus?

The happiness that one would have liked to voice after the reopening of Dhaka University has not come to pass. The incident of the raid on Jagannath Hall of the same university by police on Tuesday night makes it clear, yet once more, that there is still no sign of normalcy returning to the campus. The Vice-Chancellor, Prof Maniruzzaman Miah, must be a sad man today because the commitments he had sought from political parties regarding the reopening of the university have obviously not come his way. One does not blame him if the nation's politicians, both in the government and the opposition, find it difficult to arrive at a modus vivendi by which the university can go on functioning, in the interest of the thousands of students who have seen academic years go by with no examination in sight. The question that arises here is, however, one of whether the VC was judicious enough in his decision to close the university forty seven days before it opened again on Tuesday. And now that students have begun trekking to the classrooms again, is there any guarantee that the doors to the institution will not slam shut again on some pretext or the other?

This last question arises out of the feeling that what the law-enforcing personnel did at Jagannath Hall the other night was not quite expected on the part of those who wish to see academia get back to normal. The police were of course looking for an opportunity to nab the alleged killers of Dr Milon. The nation is at one with them on the issue, for the very fundamental reason that any crime that goes unpunished serves only as a catalyst for other and, possibly, greater crimes. For months now, the police have sought in vain to pull the absconding killers into their net, and they have tried doing the job on tip offs from people who have believed that the fugitives are stowed away in some residential hall of the university or other. Nothing has helped, which is only another way of saying that the police must gear up their efforts if the murder of Dr Milon is not to be consigned to the memory. But those efforts cannot be of the kind that was observed in Jagannath Hall. The point that everyone, and particularly the police, must take into cognisance is that it is a risky job antagonising the general students. To the argument that the law enforcing personnel raid halls only in search of the fugitives, there is the answer that if a search for fugitives turns into a harassment of students who had been sleeping, there is something definitely wrong about the whole method. In the Jagannath Hall affair, allegations have been made about the police beating up students and even teachers at random. A proper inquiry into the facts is thus called for.

The issue at Dhaka University, and in other educational institutions of the country, is one of dealing with terrorism. There is hardly anyone, in the responsible quarters, who does not subscribe to the feeling that if education is to get back on the rails, a resolute handling of campus terrorism is absolutely necessary. Who will do the job? Obviously, it would be naive to expect the teachers' community or officials such as vice-chancellors to carry out the task of maintaining order on the campus. A teacher, be it in any institution, has no business being a policeman. His discipline is an aspect of education that is solely concerned with the pursuit of academic excellence. It is not the responsibility of a teacher to ensure order on the campus when the ingredients of terrorism are supplied by outside, mysterious quarters. That being the situation, one turns to the government since it is the men in power who have a moral obligation to ensure peace in the country. And how should the government do its job? It can deploy police personnel in the institutions, particularly universities, and the policemen can then swing into action. So far, however, all efforts by the police to recover arms and apprehend campus terrorists have largely turned out to be futile. Which all goes to convince one that putting an end to terrorism in the academic arena is a task which calls for a national consensus which will again be based on a sincerity of purpose. It is for politicians to understand that when they cannot, or do not, bring their students' wings under control, they are themselves becoming hostage to terrorism. Whether it is the JCD or the BCL; or the Shibir or Chhatra Moitree, the point that must not be missed is that whoever in such organisations strays from the path of a decent pursuit of education and enters a region where lethality is the decisive factor is a terrorist. The authorities should go after this young man — or woman. The opposition should have no business crying foul if its own people fall into the hands of the law. There is always the court that will decide the innocence or otherwise of an arrested individual.

There is a simple truth that the nation must face today. It is that our politicians, at least those who unitedly put the Ershad coterie to flight nine months ago, need to come together again to defeat the sordid legacy of campus terrorism the years have left behind. It is pretty disquieting coming across a sign, and quite frequently too, on the road leading to the university, warning people to stay away. Road closed — that is what the sign says. It reminds one of many doors and windows that need to be opened, to let in the sunlight.