

Stifling ACC role is unacceptable

We endorse its chief's concern over dilution of authority

THE present ACC has lost some of the powerful image it had acquired during the time of the preceding caretaker government despite some pitfalls. But as if to confirm that impression its incumbent chairman not long ago bemoaned that it was being a toothless tiger.

On the back of such apprehensions, comes the news of a cabinet committee's submission of 23-point proposals for amending the ACC act and the anti-graft body's objections to six of them arguing that these would seriously compromise the ACC's legitimate functions and status as a statutory body. As a matter of fact, if the suggested proposals are not dropped, the ACC's status and effectiveness as a constitutional body, by definition supposed to be appropriately empowered to combat corruption, will have been seriously jeopardised.

We are surprised how the author of the proposals could recommend that the commission would have to take permission from the government 'to begin proceedings in certain circumstances' and the list of immunity, so it seems, includes just about anybody who has been traditionally a practitioner in corruption -- public officials, policymakers, MPs, local body representatives whose offences are believed to have been "committed in good faith." First of all, it is discriminatory between corruption suspects because a whole bunch of them is excluded from the special treatment. Secondly, and more to the point is the still unreformed attitude to keep the ACC under the thumb of the executive. Pray, what difference would the ACC strike with the discredited Anti-Corruption Bureau then! The latter was structurally and operatively an appendage to the PMO, a label we would have long thought had been shed. What was wrong with the listed offences in the ACC schedule to be automatically taken cognizance of and proceeded against? Actually, while the ACC has been structurally cut-off from the PMO, in a roundabout way, the same noose is sought to be laid around its neck. This becomes clearer if one reads into the implications of the ACC being accountable to the President who, for all we know, acts on the advice of the PM except in two cases -- appointment of the prime minister and that of the chief justice.

As it is, the ACC act provides for its accountability as formulation of organogram, rules and budget of the organisation are controlled by the government. Ideally, it should be a self-governing authority subject to accountability through an annual report to the president and consequently to the parliament.

What the government should endeavour to do, for its own sake as well as that of the country which carries the stigma of corruption, like it or not, is to promote and provide for autonomy of the ACC, underpinned among other things, by a strengthening of its investigative and prosecution capacities. It is a serious matter and the stakes are high, because an independent anti-graft body is a *sine qua non* for good governance, quality public service, productive economy and above all, emerging as a competitive nation out to prosper.

Law and order situation

Don't fall into denial mode

THE home minister's recent claim that law and order situation is better than before seems not to be borne out by the latest facts and figures on the ground. Two brilliant students had already to die a premature death within the span of a week -- one caught in the crossfire of clashes in the Dhaka University, while the other was murdered in a most brutal manner by the activists of an opponent group. The undesirable death of the university students apart, the capital city itself witnessed three murders around the same time.

So, looking at the facts, the chain of events in the last week fly in the face of the home minister's claims. But if the instances of only homicide across the country in the preceding weeks and months are also taken into account, then her positive portrayal will stand more assailed. For according to statistics provided by the government itself, some 10 persons are getting murdered daily all over the country. However, the actual number of such deaths is more than that find place in the police record.

So under any circumstances, there is hardly any reason to feel complacent about the overall law and order situation in the country.

Therefore, such remarks not only belies the reality on the ground, they also send wrong signal to the public and the business community in particular, who take their decision on investment or its further expansion depending on the trend in law and order. And they want to see the authorities handling the affair competently and capably, or at least, responsibly in airing their assessments.

So, more circumspection is called for on the part of the head of a ministry as vital as the home, for on its performance also hinges much the image of the government.

It is hoped that the home ministry, or the government for that matter, would do well to avoid falling in a self-denial mode and face up to the reality at hand striving to improve things on the law and order front.

Enough is enough

Student politics, as it exists today, serves no useful purpose whatsoever. To the contrary, the corrosive impact it has had on our politics and our society, to say nothing of our higher education, is self-evident.

ZAFAR SOBHAN

IF the news of the past two weeks was not enough to persuade us that so-called student politics should be banned without further ado, I do not know what will.

First came the heart-breaking story of Abubakr Siddique, a non-political third year DU student from an impoverished background, the first of his family to attend university.

Siddique died of head injuries last week after having had the extreme misfortune of finding himself in the midst of clashes between rival factions of the Chhatro League and the police who had been called in to quell the violence at his hall of residence.

Now comes the sickening news from Rajshahi University where Shibir activists went on a rampage this week that left one Chhatro League activist hacked to death, his body dumped down a man-hole, and scores more injured, included four who had had tendons in their hands and legs severed.

The reports coming from RU especially have turned everyone's stomach. We may have become a little jaded about campus violence over the years, but the brutality of the killing of Faruk Hossain, another meritorious student from a humble background, and the pictures of maimed Chhatro League activists trailing blood as they tried to drag themselves across the ground to safety has shocked the nation.

Enough, surely, is enough. Frankly, I am tired of hearing people defend student politics by pointing to the glorious role played by students in 1952 and the run-up to 1971 and during the 1980s. That was then, this is now.

In the first place, we are no longer living under Pakistani colonial domination or martial law, when the only opposition to brutal and autocratic regimes could be mustered on university campuses.

When we live in a parliamentary democracy, there should be no need for

political parties to rely on shock troops or for the issues of the day to be fought out on university campuses.

Let me ask this question: what good does student politics actually do in today's world. Please point me to one recent instance where the existence of student front groups has worked to the advantage of the nation.

Of course, student cadres are like nuclear weapons. The other side has theirs, so you have to have yours. That is why simultaneous disarmament of all political parties' student front organizations is the only solution.

It is true that student politics is only one piece of the greater problem of violence that is committed by political party cadres. As long as each political party keeps cadres of armed thugs as an integral part of maintaining their power and authority, the nation's political discourse will continue to be disfigured by violence.

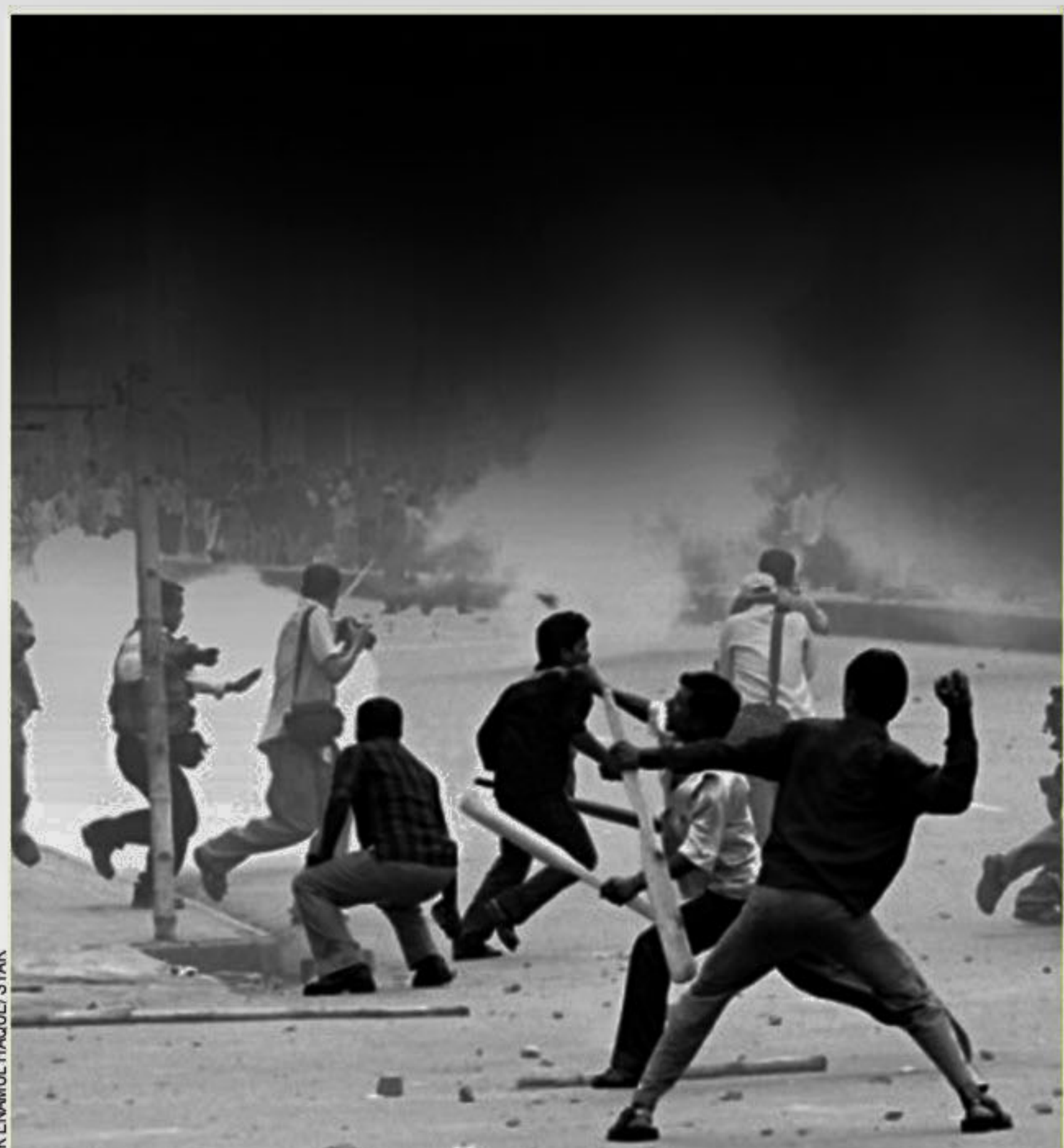
But cleaning up the campuses is a good place to start. Turning our colleges and universities into politics-free zones is something which would be very popular with the public and would do more to benefit higher education in the country than any other measure.

If students wish to join a political party or a youth front, that is their business. But there is no reason why we cannot make public colleges and universities safe for ordinary students and ban any political activity or organizing on campus. Student politics is banned in private universities, without any ill-effects that I have noticed.

Let's get one thing straight. The political parties' student fronts are nothing more than criminal organisations. They illegally influence the admissions process, control the residence halls, and even corrupt the examination process.

It is a national disgrace that we have allowed so-called student politics to completely destroy the fabric of public education in the country.

Student politics, as it exists today,



It's time to turn the campuses into violence-free zones.

serves no useful purpose whatsoever. To the contrary, the corrosive impact it has had on our politics and our society, to say nothing of our higher education, is self-evident.

It is true that the Shibir are the most brutal of all the student front groups, with tendon severing a specialty of theirs, as they have amply demonstrated this past week.

But it would be quite incorrect to state that the other parties' student fronts are not also criminal organisations with an almost equally frightening record of violence.

Ultimately, it is the government which will benefit most from a ban on student politics. It will mean moving against its own student front organisations, which cannot be easy.

But, in the first place, polls have shown that the rampant criminality of

their student front organisations is the government's Achilles heel. And the rout at RU has shown that when it comes to viciousness, the Chhatro League still must take a back seat to its rivals, specially the Shibir.

If the government were to ban student politics, clear out the musclemen and gangsters (almost all of whom are not even real students), and turn the campuses into violence-free zones, it would, at a stroke solve the problem of its own unruly student factions, ensure that the opposition could not use the campuses to launch anti-government agitations, and take a strong first step towards fixing our broken universities.

Such a move would be enormously popular with the public, as well. It would be win-win-win-win. What's not to like?

Zafar Sobhan is Editor, Editorial & Op-Ed, The Daily Star.

The anxiety of devouring children

Terrifying but true, the forces we create, create us in the end. In selfish anxiety, everybody forgets other men's children need an upbringing too. That selfishness hardened into sickness, nobody minds killing so long as victims aren't chips off his own block.

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

TWO small children died in road accidents within the space of two days. Two lives were nipped in the bud, two projects demolished in mid-construction. The bereaved families are mourning their losses. One of the children was a schoolgoing boy. His classmates will sorely miss his presence. For some time, his teachers will fumble in class during roll calls. Then the reality will catch up with everyone. We shall let bygones be bygones again.

Do we have a choice? In this world 25,000 children die everyday, 9 million every year. Poverty, hunger, diseases, and wars kill them. Between natural disasters and man-made havocs, these buds wither before their chance to open. What is the use of holding onto the memories of two children in the face of such large-scale deaths?

It's not their death that should make us sad. Sooner or later death is a given in life. But we should be sad for our handling of children. Grownups inflict cruelties on them. Even a bigger sadness is that we take pride in our civilization when we're unable to protect children from insensate hands.

Within the past month only in this country, a stepmother scorched the flesh of a little girl with a hot fish turner. Two underage girls took their lives because lecherous adults harassed them. Throw in the two road accidents. This is by no means an exhaustive list. Many more must have gone unreported or escaped our attention for some reason.

This is just a crack in the window to a ruthless world where progenitors prey upon progenies. Sick and deranged minds rape, kidnap and kill young children. Countless of them are sold to prostitution. According to U.S. State Department data, between 600,000 and 820,000 people are trafficked across international borders each year, up to 50 per cent being minors. A far greater number is sold in their own countries. Children are also victims of broken homes, abduction, politics, wars, and ersatz abuses.

These are but a few examples of the garden variety of brutalities regularly faced by children. And, this is a global phenomenon. Nearly 800,000 kids go missing in the United States every year, more than 2,000 in

a day. If anything, it shows that a lot of people in this world aren't in their right minds. They seek release by hurting children.

Myths are often mirrors of the future, and this Roman story puts that in context. It had been foretold that one of the sons of Saturn would overthrow him, just as he had overthrown his father, Caelus. To prevent this, Saturn ate his children moments after each was born.

We must be eating our own children out of somekind of an anxiety. Those adults who hurt children are an unhappy lot. They must be uncomfortable with their own lives, incapable of coping with their own horrors. They must be reluctant to leave a better world for their children. Even better,

they must be unwilling to leave children in this world at all.

So, the driver speeding his bus must have felt the reflex of that nihilism in his feet when stepping on the gas or brake. The woman must have felt that same reflex in her hand while applying that turner to her stepdaughter's flesh. The same goes for others, who do other atrocious things to children, driven by that same pathetic instinct.

It's nothing new that adults take out their frustration on children. Children are easy targets. They are weak and guileless. Adults find it convenient to let children take the fall for their own lost innocence. It's a kind of depravity. Blossoms are trampled by savages for no less than the same reason.

One particular driver or woman or gang of pedophiles isn't to blame when kids are badly treated. It's our collective insanity that percolates through the impaired minds of reckless people. "This is not an issue. Thing like that happens", our honorable Home Minister riposted when asked about a university student killed in police

action. The same repulsive impulse must have gone through their hearts before the drivers knocked down two innocent children.

Market principle that works for products also works for people. Supply chasing demand, drives down prices. That explains why human lives are dirt-cheap in this overpopulated country. That explains why the Brazilian police use street children in Rio for target practice.

Many of us probably need psychological evaluation for bad conscience, limitless corruption and abnormal greed. Here is the contradiction. They do these mindless things to mind a perfect upbringing of their children.

Terrifying but true, the forces we create, create us in the end. In selfish anxiety, everybody forgets other men's children need an upbringing too. That selfishness hardened into sickness, nobody minds killing so long as victims aren't chips off his own block.

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What are we leaving for their future?