

The Daily Star

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Monday, September 10, 2007 03:53 PM GMT+06:00

Published On: 2007-09-03

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Campus police

Concept has merit but should be carefully thought through

Against the backdrop of the recent violence spurred on by an incident in Dhaka University, the government is reportedly contemplating formation of campus police in the higher educational institutions of the country.

The idea to look after security on the campus had been mooted in the past but it never got around to seeing any concrete shape in our context largely because of its sensitivity. As it is, many university campuses overseas have such internal policing squads, so that we have some best practices to model our proposed campus police on.

Let's make no mistake about it, we are all for campus police that is totally funded, administered, managed and run by the university authorities. The campus police ought to be featured by certain characteristics that set it apart from conventional police forces.

Under no circumstances, should it be an extension of and an appendage to the police force or any other security forces. This can be an internally grown security squad drawing on leadership training provided in campuses where students are groomed to be caretakers of libraries and dormitories et all. Or, it can be manned by security guards from reputable companies with the university authorities exercising the power to hire and fire them.

The sole purpose of the specialised security unit is to maintain academic atmosphere, protect the teachers, students and university property from internal disturbances and desist outsiders from physically intruding into university affairs. That being the case, the idea to have campus police must be deferential to the sensibilities of those it seeks to protect. This is very important.

In conclusion, we would like to say that the idea has some merit, but it can go astray without some safeguards built into it. We have seen how our campuses have been politicised in the past. Unless it is made totally impervious to political abuse, it is likely to end up being coercive apparatus of the ruling party within the campus. We need to be wary of such possibilities. It is a novel idea in these parts of the world, so we have to think things through before going for campus police.