

B for boycott

Boycott of B Com papers has become a regular feature. This year it took the form of a riot. The question is how to prevent

it in future

By Awais Saleem

Mystery shrouds the boycott of the B Com Cost Accounting paper almost three weeks back. The boycott had been followed by rioting.

The paper of Cost Accounting (new course) as part of the annual examination 2003 was boycotted by a group of candidates at six of a total 46 examination centres in Lahore on the pretext that the questions in the paper were out of course.

The candidates maintained that questions numbering 6, 7 and 8 in the paper were completely out of course while figures in the question number 9 were wrong. Some candidates tore off their answersheets and also forced other candidates to do the same. The boycott was observed at Hailey College of Commerce (Punjab University New Campus), PU Old Campus, Samanabad College, Pilot High School Allama Iqbal Town and Model Degree College Model Town.

The examination for Auditing (old course) which was being held simultaneously was also boycotted. The candidates tore off their answersheets and left the premises. They regretted that the investigating staff on duty at the centre paid no heed to their complaints. The paper of Cost Accounting (old course) was also boycotted a week earlier on the ground that it had questions which were out of course.

B Com examinations are replete with protests and boycotts. This has been going on for years. The boycott of the paper on June 24 was unprecedented in the sense that it was violent in nature. For once, a particular student group that was always held responsible for such acts in the university, was not found guilty this time around. The protest was apparently pre-planned.

made by a violent group of candidates at around 3:15 pm, second at around 4:20 pm and the third at around 5:00 pm and the number of protesters kept increasing with each attack.

"Not all of the protesters were B Com candidates. It seemed that some outsiders were also accompanying them," he said. The Law College staff, security guards and the vice-chancellor himself managed to get hold of as many as 13 agitators who were handed over to police. An FIR was registered, he stated.

An inquiry was also ordered by PU administration. The inquiry team consisted of the Dean of Sciences, Dr Waheed Akhter, Dean of Law, Dr Muhammad Naeem and the Dean of Chemical Engineering

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and Technology, Dr Arif Butt. The inquiry report was submitted to the university administration later and it has been learnt that most of the blame for the violent episode has been placed on the police authorities. It is said the situation could have been brought under control if the police had arrived in time.

Moreover, some responsibility has also been placed on the administration of Hailey College which allowed the situation to become serious, inside sources revealed. The absence

sion of the vice chancellor," he said. "According to our log-book, the first call from the university was received at around 2:30 pm. A sub-inspector immediately rushed to the spot but he was told by the university registrar that they did not need the police around."

Aftab Cheema said the next call was received at around 3:30-3:45 pm, and SHO Muslim Town immediately rushed to the trouble spot. "He was told by the registrar that more force was needed to bring the situation under control. Half an hour or so was spent on arranging anti-riot reserve force and everything was under control by 5:00-5:15 pm. SP Saddar, Raja Riffat had also reached the spot by then," he stated.

The police arrested more than 200 B Com candidates over the next two days. It seemed the police had arrested almost every youngster they suspected of having anything to do with the B Com examination. This created a problem for the university administration, of telling the guilty from the innocent, a university official said. The legal adviser to the university had to file a request before the court for granting interim bail to the arrested youngsters in order to allow them to appear in the remaining papers.

SSP Operations refused to take blame for arresting the innocent. "When the university administration gave us a list of candidates appearing at the respective examination centres,

their students to agitate because the paper was not conducive to their style of teaching. All he said was, "Students of some private commerce colleges showed more aggression (during the boycott episode)."

He said this was after two years that the examination of a B Com paper was boycotted, otherwise it was a routine every year, the real causes of which could not be known. But TNS found that Cost Accounting paper was boycotted in Hailey College New Campus even last year. And two years back another paper of B Com Part I was cancelled due to hooliganism.

Zaheer Butt, a senior professor of Hailey College who had set the controversial Cost Accounting paper, said the questions in the paper were taken from the course book approved by the Board of Studies of Commerce. When asked about the possibility of any external influence in effecting a boycott, he said he could not say anything with surety. "Private colleges and academies prepare notes of 10-15 short questions and offer a guarantee of success to their students," he said.

A university official said on the condition of anonymity that education had become a business and mafias had started exerting pressure one way or the other. Many academies and colleges teaching commerce subjects had made an effort to ensure that papers were set in a manner that would help their students achieve better grades. When everything went according to plan, no confrontation occurred. "Boycotts and agitations erupt when their plans are disrupted," he remarked.

TNS tried to contact the principals of various private commerce colleges in the city but none of them was willing to say anything with reference to this controversy. When pressed for some details, some of them alleged that the PU administration was dragging them into the controversy which was totally uncalled for.

"Students choose to come here because of the peaceful atmosphere that we offer them and because of our outstanding track record," one of them, seeking anonymity, said.

Meanwhile, all the arrested students are on interim bail and are waiting for the verdict of legal proceedings and university's internal probe. Their future hangs in balance. One of them, talking to TNS, said he along with many other candidates was attempting the paper when the attacking group forced everyone to boycott it. He said those who resisted the attackers were beaten up and humiliated.

The PU Board of Studies in