Crackdown on Black Flags

What is the issue?

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- The government seems to be displaying a zero tolerance attitude towards political activism among students.
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- This is a worrying sign, as suppressing peaceful dissent might lead to the build of political stress that might seek a violent vent.
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What are some of the significant incidences?

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- In July, two girls from Allahabad University waved black flags in front of BJP president Amit Shah’s convoy to express dissent.
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- But the response from the government was brutal, it slapped cases agaisnt them on charges of rioting and disturbing peace.
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- Further, the girls were also dragged by their hair and beaten up by a mob of party workers who have gone scout free till now.
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- This is not a one off case, and previous year, another student had to spend a year in jail for having waved black flags against the UP CM.
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What are the pertinent points that are to be noted here?

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- The symbolism of black flags, and the profile of the dissenter (not politically connected students), are two very significant things in the above cases.
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- **Black Flags -** Waving a black flag is perhaps the most innocuous form of non-violent protest, and is far less potent than a dharna or a public rally.
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- It doesn’t involve the narrative build-up of a rousing speech — all of which are legitimate means of protest protected under the Indian Constitution.
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- Dharna’s and rallies are collective expressions of dissent, requiring resources and coordination among a good number of like-minded people.
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- Contrarily, waving a black flag requires nothing more than a piece of black cloth or a rag and could even be an individualistic dissent against the state.
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- Further, unlike a hunger strike, waving a black flag doesn’t even need publicity from the mass media to build pressure in favour of the demands.
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- All that is needed is for a few others — fellow citizens, onlookers — to witness the few seconds of the gesture, and it is done.
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- But today even this modest symbolic protest seems intolerable to the public servants of a country that prides itself on being a democracy.
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- **Students -** As the students who protests were acting on their own with little connections, they are bound to be vulnerable.
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- One of the students has alleged that she was denied admissions to a PG course because of government’s pressure to block her prospects.
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- Police cases and jail time, in addition to being academically disruptive, are bound to damage a young student’s career prospects.
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- This is a steep price to pay and might damage our polity in the long run by nipping off potential leaders in the bud.
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Source: The Hindu

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