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Better Late Than Never For D. U.

There is a piece of academic good news that must gladden the hearts of those who have been missing very much the good old days of Dhaka University known as the Oxford of the East. DU is thinking of introducing what it calls an academic audit system as reported by a Dhaka contemporary. This is purported to improve the teachers' accountability in their university job of teaching which has lately been a butt of searching criticism in the press and outside.

One specific charge brought against the teachers is that of moon-lighting at the cost of their professional obligations to their classes and students in the university, as consultants with some NGOs or teaching in private universities. There are reportedly as many as about 500 teachers so engaged and earning according to a survey report, out of a total strength of 1200. About 150 teachers stay abroad for a whole year. As a result the class-teaching schedule cannot be maintained and courses of syllabi cannot be finished on time.

Maybe, teachers take full advantage of a provision in the 1973 university ordinance providing for teachers doing extra-university jobs, which is being ostensibly abused more from a propensity to earn, for instance, from consultancy and such other services. But the provisions of the ordinance in question explicitly demand of a teacher doing such 'outside' jobs against no 'pecuniary' benefits and that she/he gives to the university 10% of what she/he earns from these services. The ordinance has other important provisions such as those specifying class work hours for professors, assistant and associate professors and heads of faculties and departments, as well as the schedule within which courses of studies would have to be completed.

Understandably the reduced work hours put in by these teachers account for not only courses remaining uncompleted on schedule, resulting in the students concerned being put to unnecessary additional strains or spending on private coaching and so forth. Among other problems created by this use or abuse of time by a university teacher is markedly less time available for completing evaluation of examination scripts accounting often for unusual delays in their publication.

One could add to these drags on the university's academic work the politically inspired campus unrest escalating from session to session, year to year, apart from the hurt done by the continuing political division and tension between teachers running parallel to that splitting the students into fighting factions.

All these are as obvious as that. The pity is Dhaka University has been kept going as an institution burdened with such improprieties and abuses to not a little loss suffered by the students, therefore the nation.

Thus the university teaching time table as well as academic business embracing teachers, students and the latters' families and guardians stay disrupted on this scale with no one at the university or national administration level doing anything to remedy it. No wonder students passing out of the university even with honours or masters degrees more often than not fail to compete with those from other universities in contests for jobs in the country or outside. There are stories of Bangladeshi university-passed students not being eligible for admission to higher courses of studies in foreign universities or of being sent down even after admission to higher courses of studies anywhere abroad.

All this is centrally a question of quality of education delivered by our academic institutions generally and the universities in particular. Needless to say, Dhaka University seems at the top of such academic futility speaking nationally or internationally. It is rather an irony that with so much staying in such a mess for so long, the university authorities have woken up to their own accountability so late, starting with and raising the question of the accountability of the teachers.

It seems to be a case of damage that is almost too late to repair. Better late than never. The university has to be kept alive and kicking. For that accountability plus a good deal more will need doing.