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Improving varsity education

Speakers at a round-table have unanimously expressed the view that the standard of education of Dhaka University has gone down and they have pointed accusing fingers at the overpoliticisation of the highest seat of learning. President Shahabuddin Ahmed who often gives a nudge or two at the national conscience duly identified the malaise and suggested a few prescriptions for it. Some of the remedies suggested at the round-table titled "Dhaka University on the Threshold of the 21st Century" has also echoed the President's sentiments and suggestions. Quite rightly, time has come to seriously think about the role of our universities and the students and teachers there. Should the students continue to actively participate in politics or even influence national politics when parliamentary democracy is fast taking its root? Should firearms and other lethal weapons be a part of student politics? We all know the answer to this last question, only there may be a debate over the involvement—and its extent—of students in politics.

Whatever it is, there is no excuse for the slide in the university's educational standard. The hard truth is that a large number of the university's teachers do fish in the troubled waters. Reportedly, they hardly have any accountability to anybody. Taking classes depends on their mood or preoccupation elsewhere—mostly in outside highly paid jobs. It has been alleged that some teachers even do not take classes for months and they do not have to be accountable to any authority for their acts simply because they have all along maintained political connections. When such are the day-to-day affairs, it is not difficult to imagine how the educational atmosphere was vitiated with long-term effects through political appointments over a period of two decades in the past.

Now it is a daunting task to return to the university's days of glory. If teachers are lacking in the basic quality and are also wanting in ethical considerations, there is no way they can be made to perform at the desirably high level. Students can perhaps be motivated to rise up to the occasion—because time and again they have proved they can take up challenges—but what about the teachers who have been accustomed to indiscipline and 'no work' ethics? Clearly, Dhaka University—in fact all other universities, barring the private ones, of the country—have no preparation to step into the next century with any amount of confidence. What they can do is to go about the business of a radical reform, bringing in accountability and transparency both for the teachers and the administration. The main task is to break the entrenched bad system and start a pragmatic fresh one in its place.