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Crime on the Campus

The Dhaka University authority's decision to suspend a teacher accused of sexually harassing a female student has established the fact that teachers, no matter how high an esteem they may be held in society, are not above the law. Teachers are supposed to be the guardians of students, and any act of indiscretion by the former against the latter should naturally invoke a great deal of revulsion in the public mind. Dr Shahiduzzaman of the department of international relations was accused last month of having sexually harassed a student. The teacher has stoutly defended his innocence and called the whole thing a "conspiracy". But the probe committee set up by the DU authorities has found enough evidence to take action.

The students themselves have launched a campaign to expose teachers who may be indulging in the same loathsome activity. If the sentiments of ordinary students are any indication, then it is clear that sexual harassment is not an isolated event, nor one confined to one teacher in one department. In that context, what is surprising is not that a teacher has been found guilty of sexual harassment, but that it has taken so long for this matter to come to public light.

The problem here is that, the misdemeanour of a few teachers now threatens to tarnish the image of the academic community as a whole. This is what the DU authorities need to guard against. But guarding the reputation of the teaching profession must not involve any attempt to cover up the extent of the problem. On the contrary, the authorities should immediately respond to the concern expressed by students, and launch a probe into the issue as a whole, rather than just against one teacher. A comprehensive investigation and rapid action can cleanse the campus of this perversity, and preserve the reputation of the academic community. The DU must establish the principle that sexual harassment by teachers is not acceptable, and any one indulging in such activities would face expulsion and criminal proceedings.