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The Islamic University

A press release saying that the Islamic university has started functioning since Thursday at Shantidanga Dulalpur of Kushtia notwithstanding, the subject calls for public discussion in view of what has become a highly controversial issue. An otherwise innocent, academic issue seems to have been blown up into a contentious one with regional overtones. This is unfortunate, to say the least. At times the administration seems better at creating problems than solving them, as if it has not problems enough and quite sizeable ones at that, crying for greater attention.

The simple fact about this issue seems to be: about seven years into operation the university has developed enough to form an incontrovertible claim to staying on in its place rather than be shifted. With 1500 students plus 150 officials, a faculty building, residential halls for students, a mosque, a Medical Centre, an administrative building and residential accommodation for teachers and officials it is complete with practically everything a university needs. It has struck root.

No one in his senses could conceive of pulling up such an establishment by the roots and plant it in another place. The question of cost of moving house (which a poor country like ours cannot just take lightly) apart, you would not only transplant it physically; you would disrupt most avoidably a pretty well-settled institution (and milieu) of university status besides causing enormous hardship to students and teachers and staff that have already become part of the whole thing. Certainly shifting of university with all its paraphernalia is not the something as the shifting, say, of an office or a residential house on emergency or similar grounds.

Besides, the chance of the university being shifted has set off local public reaction of a size that cannot go unnoticed. It shows how strong are the feelings aroused by it.

Points have been raised in public speeches and newspaper articles about the neglect that the southwestern region has suffered for long and the university under question would go a long way to redeem it and that it has to be developed on the same lines as other regions are. These are very sound questions and worth the closest consideration by the state authorities, in their own right. But to put them across, as we have seen some doing with what seems to be a regional or political bias, is most undesirable.

The administration is already committed to the development of this region and, in fact, some development projects have been underway including the Jamuna bridge. In fairness to the region we would plead for at least half as many universities in the region to be at par with the developed North-Eastern part that has as many as seven universities. So Shantidanga in Kushtia could justly claim a full-fledged University. And the infrastructure of a university already out in place there could be one for Kushtia University.

We have in our comments on the country's higher education needs been stressing the imperative of more universities to ease the pressure on the existing ones.

Added reasons for the Islamic University at Gazipur to be allowed to function where it is now are: (1) its proximity to the main academic and cultural capital of the country with Dhaka University serving as a complementary institution with its books, research documents, libraries as well as expanded training and teaching facilities. As an idea and institution an Islamic University will have to have links not only with local standard academic and research centres (all located in Dhaka) but also with the rest of both Islamic and non-Islamic worlds. Therefore the controversy can be easily ended by the compromise formula of a full-fledged University for Kushtia as we have said and more ones of the region, and the Islamic university at Gazipur kept functioning as it is.