

*Editorial*  
*22*

## The DU Teachers' Strike

The Dhaka University Teachers' Association (DUTA) has decided to go for a strike to protest the arrest of Sheikh Hasina and the harassment of Khaleda Zia. This is the first time that Dhaka University teachers have decided on such a course of action. Not even in 1971 did they go for anything like this. The closest they came to doing so was in 1982 after General Ershad seized power in a bloodless coup. But when the government retaliated by enforcing service rules the movement petered out. Nothing was heard about it till the end of the Ershad regime.

What prompted the teachers to go for such an unprecedented stand? There are several reasons. For the last few months fake students were being identified in large numbers and there were reports of 1200 illegal appointments to different positions in the 12 public universities of the country. Besides, there was the proposed Umbrella Act that teachers found encroaching on their rights and privileges as enshrined in the University Act of 1973.

That the country's highest seats of learning was highly politicised was no secret. That partisan politics had taken its toll in the form of admissions, appointments and performance was open knowledge. Investigations into the affairs of the university will find that the situation steadily deteriorated over the years. Many of the "influential" teachers were themselves appointed by breaking the rules. The situation came to such a point that the Public Service Commission (PSC) concluded in the '90s that the quality of education has deteriorated so much that it was difficult to find competent candidates anymore.

The teachers of the university had very little to say about all this. Their standard response was that they were not a government department. Meaning that they were not accountable to anybody but themselves. This is something the government should look into. Much as the nation values its academic freedom this is being used as a free-for-all to the advantage of a privileged few and at the expense of the nation.

In the past, it was the students who were involved in extra-curricular activities like politics. Now the teachers have taken up where the "boys" have left. And in an almost similar fashion. If the teachers had engaged in a brain-storming session and disseminated their thoughts through seminars it would have been befitting of academics. The way they announced their program of agitation from a press conference indicated the influence of student politics of yester years. It seemed that many of the teacher-leaders were reliving their days of student activism.

But this time around the nation will ask them how far they have justified their positions. How come they have failed to streamline affairs in their own institutions now that they want to take on the responsibility of the nation. As for Hasina and Khaleda, shouldn't they face trial for corruption like all the others, who have been charged? There was no reaction when Nazmul Huda, Nasim or Moudood was charged, how come it is political harassment when the two ladies are charged? This speaks of the high level of partisanship prevailing in our educational institutions. As responsible citizens, the teachers could have demanded a fair trial free from any administrative influence but to demand that they cannot be accused at all and that they should be set free without a trial is outrageous. In other words, they are saying that the two ladies are more equal than others. Not even the Asami League or BNP is saying that.

Now that the teachers have taken on the responsibility of defending the top politicians of the country despite the corruption charges it would only be fair for them to explain why the nation has come to this pass. They should remember that teachers unlike students or labourers do not have the advantage of numbers that make agitations effective. Perhaps to make up for it, they have invited students to join them. This is shameful. God only knows where the teachers are taking the students to.

Teachers should have been able to intellectually guide the nation but they have failed to do so. Now they have taken on a path that has given the country anarchy. Instead of being part of the solution they have become part of the problem.