

Interference in DUTA affairs

The action was inexplicable, abrasive and uncalled for

THE nation has of late been rather surprised at the way the government has interfered in the elections to such independent bodies as the Supreme Court Bar Association and the Dhaka University Teachers' Association. Such action has not gone down well at all and is in glaring contrast with the oft-stated desire of the government to introduce democratic practice and transparency in national affairs. The high-handed manner in which the authorities acted on Wednesday in the matter of the DUTA polls has taken us aback. We believe that the action, at once inexplicable and abrasive, was uncalled for. We will not be surprised if citizens now begin to think that there is today an invidious desire among the powers that be to harass the teaching community. Where politeness in dealing with university teachers should have been the norm, there now seems to be a clear intention to show them disrespect.

That the DUTA polls were to take place has been public knowledge for weeks. In such a situation, for the joint forces to visit the residence of the election commissioner, himself an academic, and ask him to postpone the polls or resign comes as a rude shock to everyone. We can legitimately ask, at this point, why members of the joint forces should be getting involved in university matters and demonstrate the kind of behaviour which has now left everyone outraged, not to say appalled. We do not think that the government should be getting involved in SCBA and DUTA polls. However, if it had any reservations or questions about these elections, it could simply have made contact with the relevant individuals earlier and explained its views. On Wednesday, or even earlier, a dignified dialogue could have been initiated with DUTA. There was absolutely no need to create an atmosphere of intimidation or panic here.

The action taken over the issue of the DUTA elections certainly does not augur well for the country and does little credit to the government. It sends out the disturbing message that the interaction earlier expected between the authorities and the people is not there or the idea is systematically being pushed aside. The government is on record with its stated intention of ensuring an institutionalisation of democracy in the country. What has now happened over the DUTA affair threatens to undermine that possibility. The people of Bangladesh had expected this caretaker government to heal the deep wounds caused at Dhaka University in August last year by reaching out to students and teachers. Regrettably, the DUTA affair only shows up the inability of the powers that be to be the moral force we require to handle such situations. Or is it that they simply do not care?