

## Higher Education Under Grave Threat

The public universities are making news for all the wrong reasons now. How vitiated the academic atmosphere in these highest seats of learning has become can be gauged by the political overtone running through the various developments. In Rajshahi University and Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST) in Sylhet however the politics has been flagrantly naked and ugly. Rajshahi University long held hostage by the Islamic Chhatra Shibir have even witnessed gruesome murder of at least two teachers in recent times. In one of the murders, the alleged involvement of a Shibir leader has prompted the student front and its parent party Jamaat to go for all kinds of political manoeuvring for saving the accused.

Similarly in SUST a Jamaat-BNP-supported vice chancellor had to leave the campus in the face of the general students' movement. But he has returned to the campus and the Jamaat teachers and Shibir cadres are desperate to reinstate him by any means. The latest deplorable incident concerns the physical assault of general students by the proctor, his party colleagues and the Shibir cadres. It was shocking to hear that the university teachers could resort to physical violence against their students. But that is exactly the teachers appointed on consideration for loyalty to the Jamaat-BNP alliance are expected to do. The first such brutality was practised by BNP-supported teachers of the Fine Art College under Dhaka University. They were only too willing to prove their party loyalty for the favour they received at the time of appointment. It has become customary not only to appoint candidates of inferior quality but the process begins much earlier through distribution of favour to party students at Honours and Masters levels. Only the other day a candidate with better academic results was rejected appointment to the Arabic and Islamic Studies Department because he was a son of a freedom fighter.

Political loyalty has been taken to the extreme but at a price. It is because the cadres are so politically indoctrinated that they feel no qualms about uttering what is unutterable against revered teachers like Hasan Azizul Huq and Zafar Iqbal. If this is how the atmosphere of education is vitiated, there is no prospect of quality teaching and high standard of education in the country. If the teachers also start behaving like hooligans or gangsters, the day will not be far when the students too will strike back. Imagine the scenario where the students and teachers are locked in clashes against each other. The Shibir goons have already proved their ability by crossing the boundary that separates the teachers from the students. They started the process much earlier at Chittagong University and have been carrying on from where they left on December 14, 1971 through the killing of the country's illuminaries in different areas of intellectual excellence.

The Jamaat-BNP is on a misinformation campaign in all the universities. They are resorting to all kinds of tactics to keep their men in positions. From coercion to machiavellian manipulation—everything is being practised. It is because of this, some of the most shameful incidents could take place in different dormitories of female students of some of the public universities. Under this government values and standard of education have seen a steep decline. The rot set in motion has already done in calculable damage to education, it will end up destroying it altogether if urgent measures against the process are not taken.