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The VC's Departure Alone Is No Solution

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ALL who have pleaded for the resignation of DU Vice-chancellor

Anawarullah Chowdhury would not have done so had they remembered that it is the same man who took over at an unearthly time in the evening. No VC in the Dhaka University's history has ever shown such hastiness to assume the responsibility of vice-chancellorship. Isn't it too much to expect that he would go on his own? Others were convinced that the teachers belonging to the White Panel and even the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) had withdrawn their backing to the VC after the brutal atrocities on the female students of the Shamsunnahar Hall. It seems they too were not guided by the political realities of the day. Memories have once again betrayed such people who are incorrigibly optimists. Didn't the JCD itself brutally attack a victory procession of women students from Rokeya Hall on the DU campus and leave a number of the processionists injured a few years ago?

As for the White Panelists, the less said the better. How could none of them come out to openly condemn the police brutality in the girl students' dormitory? Do not forget there was at least one female proctor among the four who entered Shamsunnahar Hall with the police on the night of the despicable incident. Do not also forget that the proctors denied they had seen any atrocities being committed by the police—male or female. With all these hard evidences at hand, any expectation that the VC will have no supporter to back him is simply foolish.

And look at the turn-around in the on-going event on DU campus. The police have become more ruthless and are surpassing all their dastardly deeds they managed to do in the past. Not only have they bloodied their hands by unleashing their frenzy on the students, including the girls among them but also came down upon the teachers with full fury to maul them. This is not just an act of physical violence but crossing a line considered until then sacred. In this God-forsaken country journalists had long suffered the police atrocities. But never before did the po-

lice dare use their brute force on the university teachers. Now that the police have overcome the mental barrier courtesy of Anwarullah Chowdhury and his cronies, life will never remain the same in this land.

What next? Will the lawyers and judges have to suffer at the hands of the police? With no law, no respect for the respectable and no sanctity of institution as decided by collective consensus, will the country slide into gangsterism and jungle rules? If the highest seat of learning is leased out to mediocre men like Anwarullah Chowdhury for carrying out the political programmes of the ruling party, they are most likely to botch up things. How can the police show the courage to do what they are doing on the DU campus? Just think of the vice-chancellors who graced this lofty position of the Oxford of the East during the British Raj or afterwards. Was it possible for the government to cow them down and make them a party to any political agenda of its own?

Now look at the varying postures of Anwarullah Chowdhury. He had no qualms about denying flatly his knowledge, let alone involvement, about what happened in the Shamsunnahar Hall on that fateful night. Then he told the police entered the dormitory at about eight in the evening. He had to remove Prof. Sultana Shafi, then provost of the hall, because, according to him, there were allegations of irregularities and naked political instigation against her. He also felt no shame to complain that the provost did not want to oust the JCD non-residents because it might help her stay in her position. Then in a press release it was claimed that Prof. Sultana wanted to oust the JCD outsiders but not the BCL (Bangladesh Chhatra League) non-residents. If these are not enough contradiction, just listen to what the VC has been saying then on. He claims there were only 2,000 students protesting the Shamsunnahar Hall incident. Whereas the newspapers have put the number at 12,000 to 15,000. Then again, he had no hesitation to say that school students and garments workers were hired to

join the protest rally. The list is endless and the police present there have noticed how low the VC can stoop. If the men in uniform then are tempted to conclude that such men deserve no respect and need a good beating, can you blame them. If the holder of the highest position is held in contempt, other teachers whom they have not wisdom enough to treat with due deference are quite naturally going to be the likeliest target. It is exactly how inefficient men who moreover play political stooges manage to bring down the institutions and compromise the professional standard and with this the aura associated with it.

We are therefore not only living in a barren time but also passing a most critical phase of our history. Criminalisation of politics has vitiated all areas of life, including education. There were and still are respectable and reputed teachers worthy of the highest university position. The political governments have ignored them because those high-calibre teachers were never expected to do the formers' bidding. Usually such venerable teachers have preferred to opt out of the rat race for the vice-chancellorship. But there were a few who wanted to bring about a change in the quality of higher studies and the university administration. No wonder, Dr. Sirajul Islam Chowdhury was never made the VC, even though he polled the highest votes twice.

Wonder of wonders, it is such a political government that wants the student politics to be banned for ever. Installing people who would go any length to satisfy their political mentors in exchange for power and perks, in key position of the university disqualifies one from carrying out a ban on student politics. It has been reported that the VC had several meetings with the JCD leaders. Almost all the dailies carried picture of JCD cadres lending their hands in the attack against the protesting students. The JCD's joining the fray has added a new dimension to the movement. The police too were ever more ruthless to work in favour of the VC.

And look what a farce it was! Two policemen were suspended

for their involvement in attack against journalists or teachers (versions are different). Three more were transferred for failing to control the situation on the night of attack on students in Shamsunnahar Hall. On the one side a few members of the police are meted out token punishment and on the other they are ordered to go the whole hog. Who would believe that the police would dare go berserk unless they are instructed so? On the day they went berserk and managed to break a leg of a teacher and injure many others.

What everyone, including the BNP government has forgotten is that Dhaka University has ever remained the last bastion of protest and defence against injustice and all that is evil. The majority of teachers and students will definitely show their resilience and prove that they are no playthings at any political party's hand, including the Awami League's. The Orwellian vision of no respite has set in society, thanks to the alliance government's highhandedness and naked politicisation. It surely will have to pay a heavy price for this. No one has succeeded to tame the university, it has always found the right course of action ultimately. This time it is not expected to be any different.

The demand for the VC and the proctors involved to go is not enough. They have proved their moral bankruptcy and must no longer remain teachers. They are a disgrace to any institution and the sooner the ruling party admits this and acts accordingly the better for the nation. Their replacement may be as bad as them or even worse. It is necessary to ensure that the job is handed over to the most responsible pair of hands available. The teachers will now feel the urgency to fight for their moral authority and dignity. It is indeed a sad day for a university or a nation when the gurus at the highest seat of learning lose their integrity and moral authority to guide their students and society at large. So now the fight has to be for restoration of the lost respect for knowledge and wisdom that in fact are the abiding strength of any nation.