

Editorial # 22

Release Of Detained DU Teachers

Reports are more specific now that the release of four detained Dhaka University teachers is just a matter of time. A newly appointed adviser has indicated whatever may be the court verdict, the teachers will be released soon, though how soon is yet to be known. Why the government has been dragging its feet over this highly sensitive issue is indeed intriguing. On an earlier understanding between the government and the agitating teachers, an assurance was given for their release within a specific timeframe but that agreement fell through and in its place, charges for prosecution were brought against the detained teachers. When the university teachers have been demanding unconditional release of the teachers, the government side has been claiming that none is above law and the court is the right place to settle the matter involving the teachers. The problem is that law is applied differently for different people in this country. No wonder therefore that the Amnesty International (AI) Secretary General Irene Khan has declared the detained teachers as the 'prisoners of conscience'.

The government has maintained a position with reference to rule of law but has been unable to see the wood for the trees. However the general perception is completely different and this is where it has missed the point. Do people in general believe what the government says about the teachers? By insisting on the accusations brought about the teachers, it has only lost its credibility. The more time it takes to withdraw the charges the more the loss of credibility for it. Clearly some quarters in the government once were dead set to prove guilt, in whatever form it may be, of the detained teachers as if by setting them free it would lose its face. We believe, the earlier position has changed with the departure of some of the controversial advisers to the government and now things should be judged in a different perspective. And that perspective is very clear: university teachers deserve the highest esteem and reserve the right to protest whenever the government or any other agency errs on some basic issues.

No one denies the fact that in recent years, partisan politics has eroded university teachers' esteem but in this case, no such partisan issues were involved; rather elected office bearers of the teachers' association belonging to both sides of the political divide have been detained. That is good enough proof of the apolitical nature of the protest staged by the teachers' organisation. It is from this point of view, the whole issue deserves a review and before the court pronounces any judgment, the cases against the teachers should be withdrawn and let them enjoy freedom. There is no point straining the relations between the government and the teachers' and student community further. Teachers who have been detained will only emerge as heroes and the government will benefit in no way if the issue ends up acrimoniously. Let the government take a clear view and try to muster the support of the most progressive section of society, teachers and students.

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