

DU's Dig at the Press

The Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor and Teachers' Association (DUTA) on Friday gave a bit of their minds to the press. The former castigated 'some newspapers' for their 'baseless and fabricated reports' on alleged sexual abuse of some female students by a couple of teachers. And the DUTA made it into a chorus condemning 'the malicious campaign' and asking all concerned to 'refrain' from it 'when an investigation into the allegations is in progress'; but, let's add it is an internal probe led by Professor Shahadat Ali.

So long as I am not criticised or my dirty lines are not washed in public I am a respecter of newspaper freedom marveling at its wonderful merit and defending it to the hilt. But when it grills me, maybe in public interest, so what, I cannot help saying: 'curse be on your freedom.' That about sums up the dual attitude towards newspaper exposes. But for consistent media vigilance and reportage on sexual harassment on the campus, girl students who these days are coming forward with allegations of sexual exploitation would have been as reticent as before buckling under threats of black-mail. It can hardly be overstated that were it not for the mind-boggling exposes made of Jahangirnagar University orgies which generally sensitised people about indignities being committed upon our daughters and sisters, the DU female students who felt wronged might have preferred not to volunteer any information about the goings-on.

If newspapers had not reported extensively who would have known, for example, that the girl students had duly informed the authorities concerned about the gripping sexual perversity on the campus making a havoc with their lives? It is the newspapers' duty to place facts about such aberrant teacher or student behaviour under close public scrutiny and demand justice for the victims. So, report we must, comment we shall. All that is sought to be underscored is: please listen to the female students' complaints and respond adequately.

The tendency to blame others may be construed not only as blinkered self-righteousness but also as an attempt to cover up or shield misdeeds by a handful. If in the name of protecting image we allow the rot to continue, then will it not be a contradiction in terms, will it not be cutting the roots of the tree as we try the futility of sitting on its branches?

The public have the right to know. We urge the VC and DUTA not to stay focused on the wrong end of the issue.