

DU Teacher Under Attack

The shooting of former vice-chancellor of the National University and a senior teacher of political science of Dhaka University in his residence on Fuller Road should serve as a grim reminder of different facets of our unstable politics and its corroding influences on our education. It also exposes how insecure lives are on the university campuses despite the presence of heavy contingents of law enforcers there. What is most tragic is that the once highly respected profession of teaching at the university level is no longer sacred. Narrow, biased and partisan considerations – weaknesses teachers now give in to so easily – have compromised their status for long. The inviolability of university teachers' integrity and intellectual height has gone and they are treated like anyone else in society. Politics of vengeance now haunts them.

Renowned DU teacher and writer Humayun Azad suffered a terrible machete attack on his way home from the Bangla Academy book fair and although he survived the attack, there is no doubt it actually prompted his premature death in a lonely hotel room in Germany where he sought refuge from his tormentors. Prof Aftab known to have enjoyed favours from the government for his pro-BNP political stance may not be equal to Dr Azad's standing but he also made enemies on both sides of the political divide. He may have advanced his career with BNP backing but he had to take leave of office rather unceremoniously amidst charges of corruption involving the appointment of employees and officials to the NU and a scandal concerning sexual harassment of a woman official.

After his removal from the NU, Prof Aftab's role has been questionable to the party he was so long loyal to. A leading figure in the BNP-supported white panel group of teachers, he was alleged to have worked for the Awami League-supported blue panel, precipitating reversal for the ruling party-supported teachers. Also he was controversial for his demand that the national anthem should be changed. In addition, in recent times he is known to have criticised the government in several of his interviews with different TV channels.

Whatever may be his opinions or views, they should not warrant his physical annihilation by criminals. He expressed his opinion in public and if it goes against anyone's belief or view, it can be repudiated as is done in civilised society. Socrates and Galileo had to suffer at the hands of establishment and papacy because their views were inconsistent with the conventional ideas. But we do not live in ancient time or the Middle Age. Democracy has recognised freedom of speech and views. We may not agree with the view of someone else but we must defend his or her right to express the view. The essence of true democracy lies here. Without sitting on judgment on dissenting voices, it is better to bring forward rational argument against the view and detect its weakness.

An increasing tendency now noticeable is that apparently gentle people are growing irritant and intolerable on the slightest pretext. This happens when society runs out of steam and falls off balance. Clearly politics has taken more than its fair share of national attention and it is unduly interfering in areas that in civilised societies are better left alone. Time our policy makers and planners gave a thought to this important issue and made a vow to keep their hands off from areas like education.