

# Making DU congenial again

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The reopening of the University of Dhaka through a silent procession of the teachers, students and employees on September 27, after a 73-day unscheduled closure, once again raised hopes in the minds of guardians that this highest seat of learning in the country would be back to normal.

The university was closed since the following armed clashes between two rival groups of students in the campus on July 15. Two students and one rickshawpuller were killed in the incident.

Before the reopening, the university authorities organised a thorough inquiry into the July incident and took disciplinary action against 17 students.

The silent procession was meant for expressing solidarity with the disciplinary actions taken by the university authorities, and to grieve the demise of the two students and one rickshawpuller in gunfire on July 15. The procession was organised by the Dhaka University academic environment council.

Addressing the teachers, students, and employees, the university Vice-Chancellor Prof. M A Mannan reiterated the varsity's resolve to uproot violence from the campus at all costs and sought the cooperation of all sections of the people in this regard.

Although a section of youngmen tried to disrupt the silent procession chanting different slogans, the procession programme was a grand success. The general students who always become pawns in the hands of a handful of outsiders carrying arms to the campus were very much happy at the prospect of restoration of congenial academic atmosphere in the university which once took pride on being called 'the Oxford of the east.'

Before the September 27 reopening, the residential stu-

dents-halls were reopened following a thorough police search in the presence of hall managements. The students who returned to the halls also had their identity cards and other papers checked by their provosts and house tutors at the entrances.

It may be recalled that the Dhaka University authorities had no alternative but to close the varsity since the die and ask its students to vacate halls on July 15 as there was an armed clash around the S M hall since that morning. In the preceding night one student was shot

dead at the Surja Sen Hall gate by unidentified assailants.

Another serious armed clash between the same rival groups of students some time before the July 15 clashes had forced the university syndicate to adopt a resolution for closing the university since then. But the implementation of the resolution was withheld as the student-groups had assured to guard against recurrence of such an incident.

In fact this prestigious institution of higher learning had turned into an open ground for movement of outsiders possessing illegal arms and committing crimes under various covers. The general students and the teachers were made hostages.

Violent incidents, repeated strikes, boycott of examinations and shifting of examination dates have made things in the university uncertain over the years. A three-year course now takes more than six years to complete.

Violence in the university arena started getting worse since the beginning of 1973. Free use of fire arms, the historic seven-murder in Mohsin Hall, a double-murder incident at Surja Sen hall, seducing of a girl in a male student's hall room forc-

ing her to jump down from the second floor were but some of the ugly incidents that had together taken the image of the university to a very low ebb. The incidents of last July were just the latest manifestations of a unhealthy situation.

One may also recall that during the past few years the university classes could not be taken even for a half of the scheduled annual working days. Statistics show that between January 1, 1972 and September 1987, 319 clashes took place between rival students organisations. At least 116 students and six innocent pedestrians died in these clashes. Unscheduled and 3,581 others were injured. Closures hit poor guardians most because they found it hard to meet the educational expenses of their wards for an extended period. The students in some instances find themselves to have become overaged for government jobs when the results of their final examinations are announced.

Against such a backdrop the effort of the Dhaka University authorities for restoration of congenial academic atmosphere is laudable. One can only hope that all concerned would extend their total support to them for the success of the drive.