

Dhaka, Friday, July 17, 1987

Murder on the campus

The midnight murder on the Dhaka University campus Tuesday and the gun-battle that followed in the morning between rival student groups come as a great shock to all and deserve to be squarely condemned. They remind one of the university's tragic record of bloodletting, including the ghastly death of seven students in 1973. For the last one month, when a semblance of academic discipline appeared to be returning, the campus heard the sabre rattling by militant groups trying to establish their supremacy by terror tactics. What happened on Tuesday and Wednesday were the culmination of the tension that was being built up since the beginning of July.

The trail of events which took two valuable lives, a student and a rickshaw driver caught in the crossfire, clearly indicates that armed groups had taken virtual control of the campus. The nation has been shocked by the senseless killing which show that the calm on the outside covered deep-rooted problems of lawlessness in the university. A tendency to evade the university's disciplinary code started when the provosts seemed to relax their control over the student hostels and armed groups, some flaunting themselves as students. There are instances when groups roamed the campus in broad daylight with firearms challenging the university administration and the laws of the land. This has been possible because no actions were taken against such arrogance.

It is a great tragedy that the Dhaka University whose lecture theatres once echoed the voices of such intellectual giants as the physicist Prof Satyen Bose and the mathematician Prof Kazi Motaher Hussain should degenerate into spawning grounds of violence and terrorism. In the process, the university has lost many academic sessions and the students some very valuable years from their lives. It was only recently that the university's academic council were taking serious steps to deal with "session jams" created by overlapping academic years. Unfortunately, the university has to go for another unscheduled closure cancelling all on-going examinations.

The government and the opposition parties inside Parliament had reached a momentous decision recently that violence would be eradicated from the campus and that peace would be restored in the universities. This had raised high hopes. But despite such a consensus, no measures could be taken to implement the decision. The consensus inside Parliament had opened a window of opportunity for bringing back a proper academic climate. That window is still open but the nation which is visibly concerned at the situation must act in unison.