

## Heavy-handedness of partisan politics at JU

THE instability that has stalled academic activities at Jahangirnagar University over the death of students in a road accident marks an alarming development in public universities. Two students of the university – Nazmul Hasan Rana and Arafat Hossain – died in the accident on Friday at a bus stop on the Dhaka-Aricha Road passing by the campus. One student died on the spot, the other injured lay on the road while the university administration allegedly dawdled over sending the university ambulance. The authorities, as New Age reported on Sunday, denied the campus community their right to participate in the fellow student's namaz-e-janaza. Aggrieved at the move, students took to streets to push for a three-point demand that included compensation for the students killed and road safety near the campus. Considering that campus community has lost seven students and teachers in 1994-2004 and four students were killed on the road near the campus during the term of the current vice-chancellor, the demand for strict road safety is more than legitimate. It is shocking that the university administration has failed to negotiate with other government bodies and ensure safety of students on the campus.

The demand for an adequate number of speed-breakers and other road safety measures is, therefore, legitimate. Their action to block one of the major highways causing public sufferings is, however, not acceptable. In such a situation, the university administration was expected to ease the student unrest in a graceful manner, instead, in its watch, protesting students were repeatedly attacked by the members of the Chhatra League, the student wing of the ruling Awami League, in which at least 10 students were injured. Not only did the administration allow the Chhatra League to assault the students, it also ordered the police to use teargas shells and rubber bullet to foil the protest. The fact that the administration confided to the Chhatra League and the state security forces, instead of engaging in a dialogue with the students, is sign of moral failure of the university administration. This failure also marks a change towards the worst in which public university vice-chancellors are politically appointed thereby relies on ruling party activists and the police to quell protests and run the administration. It is in this context, any crisis on campus, including the situation at hand, becomes part of a complex equation of partisan politics. When the university administration was expected to join the larger campus community in grief, it is shocking that the authorities chose to deny their right to participate in the funeral prayer that triggered the whole unrest episode.

Jahangirnagar University must immediately negotiate with the government and arrange for compensation for the families of the deceased and come to an agreement with the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority on permanent speed-breakers near the campus. From the evolving situation in the university, the incumbent must note that partisan politics will have disastrous repercussion in higher education. Citizens at large must also organise against the partisan power politics in public universities.