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DU now almost violence-free

By Abul Kalam Azad

Once maligned as a 'battle field' and a place for frequent violence --Dhaka University (DU) -- has now become almost violence-free. Had the law enforcing agencies been a little more sincere, the university could have been entirely terrorism-free, believe many.

Gunfight between rival student organisations was once a common phenomenon in the university even two or three years back. But such gunfights are getting rare these days.

At least two persons were killed in gunfights between rival groups on the DU campus, every year, on an average, till 1997 eversince independence. As many as 60 persons were killed in gunfights between rival student groups on the campus since independence, according to available statistics.

Most of the killings occurred during the '80s. The first such incident occurred in September 1973 when four people were shot dead by unknown assailants following the aborted DUCSU elections, earlier that month. Seven students were killed in the infamous Mohsin Hall murders in early April '74, allegedly by the then general secretary of pro-government Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and his cohorts, following intra-party feud.

The last killing took place on April 23 1998 when a ruling party backed BCL leader Partha Protim Acharya was gunned down by armed activists of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) supported Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD). The incident was a sequel to a long rivalry between the two arch-rival student organisations.

This was virtually the last blood-letting on the campus barring some stray incidents of beating and exchange of gunshots between rival factions of BCL. The last gunfight took place on May 6, this year, when two rival groups of BCL fought over the capture of a dormitory that left three persons injured.

After the killing of Partha, activists of BCL backed by police ousted BNP-backed JCD activists from the campus and occupied three residential halls in the university's northern zone known as the 'den of JCD'. The ousted JCD boys made several desperate but unsuccessful bids to regain their halls, but they failed. All the 11 male residential dormitories of the university are now 'controlled' by dif-

ferent groups and factions of BCL.

DU authorities have almost been successful in maintaining law and order in the "virtually opposition-free" campus where the law enforcing agencies are launching almost regular offensives to nab terrorists and outsiders.

As part of the special drive on the campus, police along with its detective branch (DB) personnel have so far raided all the 'troubled' residential halls in the last couple of months. At least 30 persons including 18 outsiders were arrested since the DU authorities opened the halls for police operation without prior permission about two months back.

DU syndicate also directed the hall provosts not to allow outsiders in the halls. The instruction seems to be implemented almost strictly, sources said.

General students of Bangabandhu and Fazlul Haq Halls brought out processions after driving out the outsiders who had long been causing trouble till last month. Both the halls were also raided frequently and plainclothes' policemen arrested at least 10 outsiders.

"I am very pleased to see my hall terrorist and outsider-free and also want to see the other halls of the university like my Fazlul Haq Hall," said Provost Dr M Hossain Monsur.

Talking to The Daily Star, university VC, general students and student leaders have expressed satisfaction over the present atmosphere on the campus.

"Normaley returned to the campus as there is no gunfight and outsiders and terrorists who usually create unrest on the campus are nabbed," said DU vice-chancellor Prof. AK Azad Chowdhury.

The VC said that the government's facilities encourage us to nab the trouble makers and bring back peace and a congenial academic atmosphere on the campus. "Co-operation from teachers, students and student organisations also help us."

No terrorists would be spared, the VC said adding even if he turns out to be of the government-backed BCL, he would have to face action. He said DU authorities would go for stern action against the terrorists, trying to stay on the campus.

"I do not want to hear any

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more the names of outsiders and terrorists in future," Prof Chowdhury said adding they will be crushed.

The VC also told, the university authorities were determined to maintain the prevailing peaceful atmosphere and sought cooperation from all quarters to further improve the situation.

Prof Azad said violent incidents in the DU have come down to nil at present. Giving a break-up of violence in the country's largest university he said there were 57 violent incidents, including 27 gunfights, which left one person dead during the period 1993-94.

In 1994-95, there were 72 violent incidents, including 32 gunbattles with four deaths in the university. In 1995-96, there were 50 incidents of gunfight leaving one student dead.

In 1996-97, the number of violent incidents came down to 28, but rose again to 47, including 27 gunfights, which left one killed during the beginning of Awami League rule. But after this the situation began to improve and there were only few untoward incidents of stabbing and beating during the current 1998-99 session.

Proctor of the university Dr AKM Noor-un-Nabi termed the present situation as the best ever in recent times. "The campus is almost violence-free as the frequency of terrorist activities on the campus has reduced."

When asked, an MA (final) year student of Mass Communication and Journalism termed the prevailing campus situation as "comparatively better" than previous years.

Expressing satisfaction over the present campus situation, a woman student of Philosophy Department Suraiya Khatun hoped that the peaceful atmosphere will continue.

While giving his impression, BCL's DU unit leader Sajjad Hossain gave all credit to the government and DU authorities in restoring peace and academic atmosphere in the university.

Though he was not very happy, Sharifuzzaman Sharif

the organising secretary of Bangladesh Chhatra Union termed the overall campus situation as "comparatively better."

Only JCD leaders came up with a different picture of the prevailing situation. "I don't think that the situation is any better now, rather it is deteriorating day by day," said JCD's DU unit president Manir Hossain and added its a cosmetic peace resulting from a one man show, as activists of JCD were driven out from their respective halls by the armed activists of BCL.

He alleged that the DU authorities did not take initiative to rehabilitate the ousted JCD activists in their respective halls, now guarded by various armed factions of the BCL.

Questioning the "honesty" of police, the JCD leader alleged that police themselves informed selected terrorists over telephone, before raiding the dormitories.