

Editorial
of

Outburst at Dhaka University

Move to remove army camp is welcome

WE welcome the steps taken by the government to defuse the tension at Dhaka University. The decision to remove the army camp on the campus together with the initiation of a judicial inquiry, in addition to the army's investigation, into the worrying incidents of Monday and Tuesday will go a long way toward restoring normalcy in the university. It is also a sign that the military has opted for reconciliation rather than confrontation with the students. Through this mature decision it has upheld the greater interest of the country and has demonstrated its respect for broad public opinion.

There are some important lessons to be learnt from the disturbances at Dhaka University. It is clear that the army must go for a serious rethinking on how it should relate to the broad civilian population. Such rethinking must include the camps that have been set up in civilian population centres all over the country. Owing to the state of emergency and the resultant involvement of the army in a variety of activities --- administration, law and order, et al --- its leadership must devise a mode of engagement with the public that will have no room for any misunderstanding. After the ugly incident at DU, provoked by the behaviour of a few soldiers, it is necessary that the army go for not just damage control but also ensuring that such incidents do not happen again. There is always a distinction between the army as an institution and soldiers as individuals. Sometimes the questionable individual attitudes of ordinary soldiers undermine the reputation of the army as an institution. That being the reality, we would urge the army high command to revisit the entire issue of civil-military relations. It is particularly important because army camps are located outside the cantonments. Under no circumstances should the ties between the army and the civilian population be allowed to deteriorate.

While we are on the subject, we cannot but condemn the police action on the campus. The frenzy with which they went into action, through firing rubber bullets and truncheons, was totally uncalled for. It now makes sense to raise the question of who ordered the police into taking such action. Given the nature of the gymnasium incident, it was expected that the students would agitate. But that was hardly a reason for the police to confront them in battle mode. As for the students, much as we sympathise with their grievances, we cannot but register our grave displeasure with their behaviour, as demonstrated through such acts as a torching of vehicles on the roads. It certainly did not enhance their image and reputation. We hope they will desist from such violent behaviour in future. Finally, let us hope that calm returns to the campus.