

Dhaka University Platinum Jubilee Special

A Glorious Past, Turbulent Present and a Future Full of Promise

Interview with the Vice Chancellor

VC Prof Emajuddin Ahmed: When I was a student of this University in the early fifties, the student bodies also played a significant role in the politics of the country. But the difference between today's student politics and that of those days, is that the political parties then were dictated by the students on how to set their activities. Nowadays, it is the political parties who dictate the students.

The number of students and teachers were so small and therefore everybody knew everybody in the campus. There was always an environment of academic attainment for students as well as the teachers. These days you can find those students everywhere extremely well-placed in the society.

Things were different because in those days almost all students were promised employment as soon as they passed out from the institution. Everyone felt happy because a degree from the DU assured him employment. In consequence, the discontentment was absent. In the late sixties when more students began to come, size of the student bodies and the teachers began to expand. Many consequential problems began to emerge.

Although during those days the teachers did not have the opportunities of training as today, they were very dedicated and thus the standard of education was quite good.

Since its inception, the Dhaka University was called the "Oxford of the East". It was not only because of its academic excellence but also because in terms of structure, it was designed on the basis of Oxford University — having schools and colleges under the University admin-

istration. Besides, the science, Islamic and law studies enjoyed a standard which was then unparalleled in the region.

Until the late forties, Dhaka University owned an area of 900 acres, but the size has now come down to 252 acres of land. The University's initial stand as a residential teaching institution was shaken first during the gradual boom of students and teachers in the years 1956-58. We never had to worry about accommodation, but today the University can only provide one fourth of the total students with accommodation.

At present Dhaka University boasts of teachers who have been trained in the best universities and institutions in the world. But prior to our independence, the training of teachers abroad was almost non-existent. Only three scholarships for the teachers were awarded yearly by the central government. Now the University has enough well-trained teachers to carry out a wide range of educational activities. I can tell you, the teaching staff is one of the best in the region. We are fully capable of not only teaching but also carrying out various research work within the institution.

Prior to our independence, "session jam" was unthinkable in the campus. But after independence politicalisation at a very high level entered the University thus changing its image. I remember the date as it was the birthday of one of my family members. On July 28, 1972, the students of the University laid siege to the VC's office. They were demanding to delay the exams on grounds of disruption of studies during the war of liberation. At one point the students cut off the

The University of Dhaka, established in the year 1921, celebrated its 75th birthday on 30th June 1996. To mark this occasion the University has taken up series of programmes over the coming months. The Vice Chancellor Professor Emajuddin Ahmed talked to The Daily Star recently on issues concerning the past, present and the future of the seventh oldest University of the sub-continent. The interview was taken by **Morshed Ali Khan and Masud Arif.**

telephone lines of the building and nobody was allowed to come out of the offices. At the end of the day when all negotiations failed, the then VC and others confined there decided to inform Sheikh

Mujibur Rahman of the siege. At 7pm Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was informed and he personally came to the University. On arriving there he, with his towering personality, shouted at the stu-

dents to leave the place. Everyone obeyed him and left the place. But the exams had to be delayed that term.

With the events that followed over the years violence and politics have crept into

the University. As a matter of fact, it has become a social phenomenon. The political parties, of course, can ride the University of violence only if they agree not to use the students for the interest of the



VC Prof Emajuddin

parties. Moreover we have to create enough employment opportunities for the students who come out of the university.

Actually we are not sitting idle. Through the expansion of academic and cultural activities in the university we are trying to contain violence. An academic calendar has been introduced so that the students are aware of their exam dates before the admission. This calendar has been designed in such a way that it may withstand any disruptions in holding the academic activities which last up to five weeks. Rescheduling of exams is not occurring as frequently as before.

In the academic year 1992-93, due to postponement of exams, the total number of students rose to about 30,000, but at present the number has come down to 23,000. This number will further decline in the future as session jam disappears totally.

By June 1996 we are going to add a lot more cultural activities to the students' daily life in the campus. Then an integrated four-year Honours course will replace the age old three-year course.

With this, the University intends to join the international standard of a total of 17-year teaching. At present the student in our country has to undergo 16 years of teaching before he/she graduates.

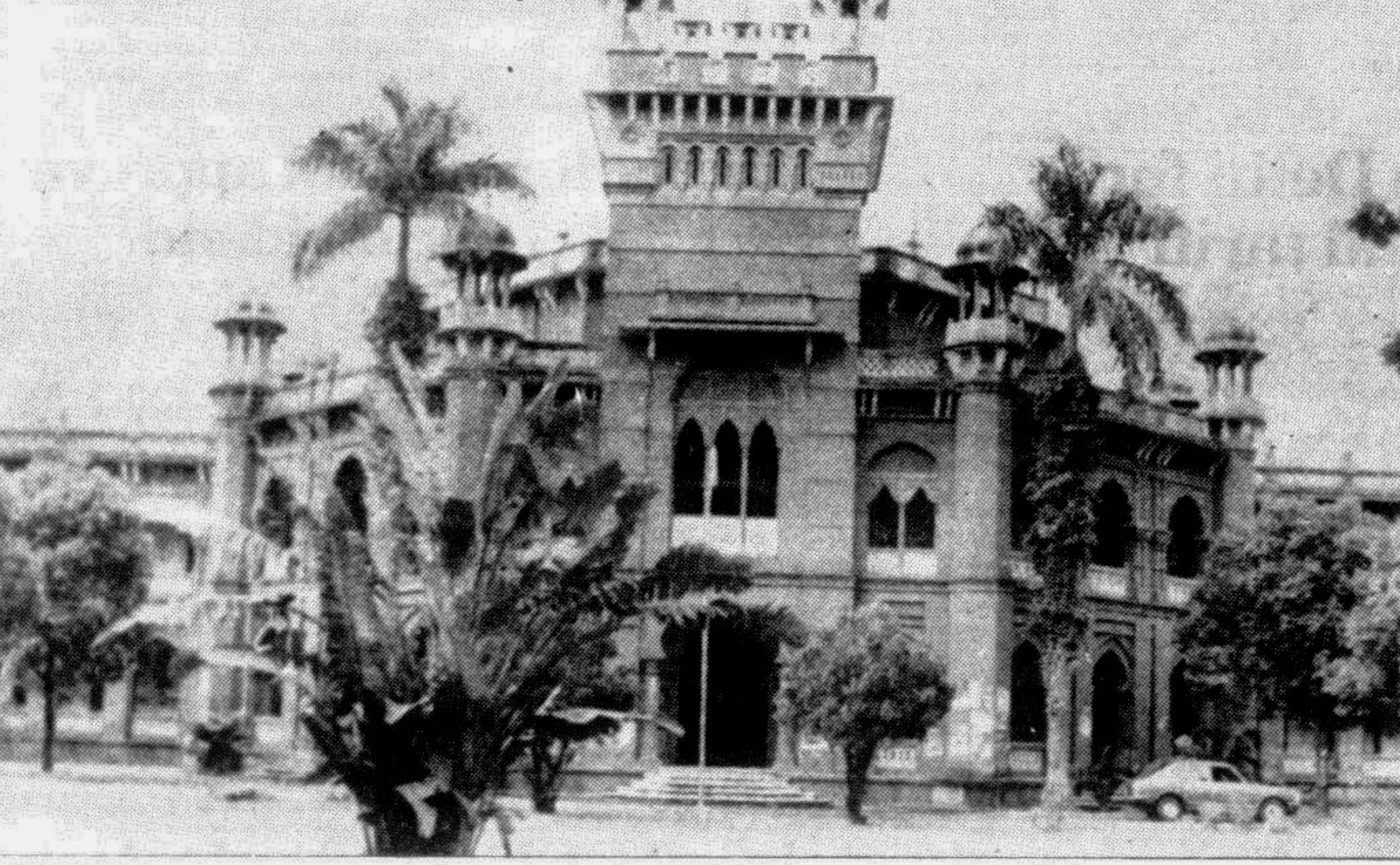
It is a matter of pride that a lot of our higher educational institutions including the Dhaka University are recognised internationally. Whereas in India out of around 200 universities and colleges, only twelve are internationally recognised.

The Dhaka University has a glorious history. All the movements were born here. Now at the 75th year of its life I want the nation to take it up. We are open for any suggestions, criticisms and deliberations. We are eager to hear every idea which may come from the people. We have planned a series of programmes till March, 1996 to commemorate the 75th anniversary of this great institution.

In the near future all wings of the University will be computerised. In its initial stage the computerisation process in the central library of the University is under way. Besides, the library will be connected to the Internet system so that academic information from all major universities of the world may remain on the finger tips of the students and teachers. Two more new departments — Cinematography and Music — will be opened. This will enable the students to pursue their higher studies in these subjects at home.

The University is well on its way to a glorious future. This 75th anniversary will once again remind the nation of its brilliant past. This is more than a national event and the people are urged to rejoice on this occasion.

Curzon Hall — majestic and beautiful it echoes with voices of a glorious past. — Star photo



Alma Mater

by Razia Khan

THE year was 1951 — I was to matriculate next year from Mama Parsi School, Karachi, where Bapsy Bhandara now the famous Bapsy Sidhwa was my class-fellow. Much against my father's wishes I came to Dhaka for a holiday and stayed with my brother-in-law Dr M N Huda who was then the Provost of F H Hall. His official house was in Abdul Ghani Rd, a red-brick one-storied structure with wide grounds. His wife, my sister Kulsum was studying in the Economics Department. I was enthralled by the lively, stimulating atmosphere of the University life which I watched from a distance with envy.

Seeing my passion for poetry Dr Huda put my name in the list of competitors in English poetry reciting. The poem was 'Strange Meeting' by Wilfred Owen. I was the only school-girl reciting that poem and fortunate enough to steal the first prize. I longed to join the university there and then but four years had to pass before I could enroll myself as a student here. The Arts Faculty was then situated in what is now the Medical College. I got transferred to the second year Honours course in English from St Joseph's College, Karachi. Apart from English literature which was my first love — I was thrilled by my subsidiary subjects also. Reading Machiavelli and Malthus for the first time. I discovered new dimensions of thought and theory. Apart from regular lectures and tutorials, the extra curricular activities were exciting and rewarding.

I was attached to the most beautiful hall of the University — Sir Salimullah Muslim Hall. Participating in debates and hall-drama kept me busy. Invitations came to take part in the plays produced by other halls. The Law Faculty students asked me to act in their play 'The Law is an Ass' by Mr Nurul Momen. Malcolm Muggeridge who was on a visit had watched the play and praised it. I also acted in 'Underneath the Law.' In these English plays I was given the roles of young lawyeresses. But in the Bengali Hall plays I was inevitably the mother of a widow. I was getting tired of powdering my hair and appearing on the stage in white cotton sarees. When the law-students offered me the role of a young heroine in a Bengali play 'Ognigiri' by Askar Ibne Shaikh I grabbed

it greedily. On the radio in the University Magazine plays I played Giovanni in Webster's The White Devil, Oliver in Oliver Twist, Antigone and Cleopatra. The last three plays were produced by the late Professor Matin and Claude Colvin of the USIS.

My first Bengali short story 'Probaho' appeared in the S M Hall Magazine. It was this that led publishers to bring out my first two Bengali novels. So the university was opening up for me all the avenues where I could leave some mark.

Drama circle was formed around the mid fifties. Although my Honours examinations were near I could not resist travelling to West Pakistan and Calcutta as a member of the group to act in Bernard Shaw's 'You Never Can Tell' translated by the late Muneer Choudhury. Even here I played the role of an elderly mother. I came back from the trip and turned out the best possible results winning the Pope gold medal for literature. I had been fortunate in my tutors who groomed me for this. Under their guidance I embarked upon a study of the Italian Renaissance and was overjoyed on discovering the exquisite sonnets by Michael Angelo whom the world knows only as a brilliant painter. Tucked away in a sleepy delta, the University of Dhaka then was indeed the window to the universe. Dr Jenkins was then the Vice-Chancellor and Professor J S Turner the Head of the English Department, which had been once chaired by the renowned Old English scholar Professor when Anglo-Saxon English was then regularly taught here.

During my student days Mr Cawson the Head of the British Council took a keen interest in our activities. Dr Fiske of the USIS was equally supportive. The University along with the British Council and the USIS provided for us a unique cultural experience. The lack-lustre mediocrity which galls the spirit was then absent. Of all the lectures, I enjoyed most those given by Muneer Choudhury before he shifted to the Bengali Department. He made Dryden, considered dry and off putting, so interesting that I realized what a brilliant person can do to enliven a subject. Brilliance, idealism, confirmed with simplicity, then ruled a violence-free campus — making the efflorescence of all inner qualities, possible.

Rabindranath

— Rameshchandra Majumdar

I got the opportunity of a close encounter with the poet. I was studying MA at an institute in Calcutta. It was probably 1909-1910 when a famous singer and musician from Hyderabad had come to Calcutta. He was welcomed at the Institute with Rabindranath as chairman. After the singing and musical recitals and Rabindranath's own speech a respected Justice of High Court Srigrudras Bondhopadhyaya stood up and said, "Rabibabu, the boys would really like you to sing for them." Rabindranath replied, "At 50, do I have the voice to sing?" Gurudas Babu said, "what can I do, the boys have requested it and insist upon it?" Rabindranath said he would sing the song he had composed that very day. He then sang his famous song — 'Tumi kamon kore gan koro he guni?' I still remember that song. Even at fifty the melody that came from his throat enveloped the entire hall with awe. Every word could be heard clearly, something that is quite rare in the Rabindrasangeet of today.

I was then a Professor at DU and provost of a hostel called Jagannath Hall. At that time there were three halls in the University and every student had to be attached to a hall. Dhaka University invited Rabindranath to give two lectures, and I invited him to be a guest at my home. At that time one of his granddaughters was living in Dhaka. When he got my invitation he wrote back, 'I will stay at your house. If I go to visit my granddaughter, hopefully there won't be any problem.' No problem arose an account of the granddaughter. But a few people in Dhaka created unnecessary

complications. They informed him that the people of Dhaka did not want him to stay at my place. This caused a lot of untoward incidents and a lot of correspondence between Rabindranath and myself. As a result Rabindranath sent his Professor Sri Nepalchandra Ray to Dhaka to investigate this. Ray went back and informed him that apart from a few people, everyone approved of his staying at my home. It was then decided that Rabindranath would stay at my house.

Once at a gathering a student was reading out a poetry from Rabindranath book. After a minute or so Rabindranath exclaimed irritably, "It's not working," and taking the book from the student's hand, began to read it himself. At the end of the recital many people berated the poor student. I stopped them and said, "Don't scold him, it is because of him that we had the privilege of listening to such a beautiful recital of Rabindranath's poem from his own lips."

Rokeya Hall

— Akhtar Imam

I had joined a short-while ago. Meanwhile the personal files of many female students from other halls were coming in. The list carrying the number of students had come in. There were 23 resident students, and 143 non residents thus a total of 166 in the year 1956-57.

I had been extremely busy with the hall's work when one day I received the news that the female students were participating in a 'sit down' protest. Leaving every-

Memoirs of DU

Excerpts from Smriti Kothai Dhaka Biswavidyalay by Md Johangir Translated by Aasha Mehreen Amin

Salimullah Hall in the early 40's

— Azizul Huq

At that time the scenic beauty of Ramna was indeed spectacular. The huge grounds surrounded by green grass, shadowy trees, green leaves and colourful flowers — the brick red Curzon Hall, the then Dhaka Intermediate College and other beautiful structures created a wonderful atmosphere. What is now called Sarwardi Uddyan used to be the site of Sunday horse races. The present Medical College Hospital's main building was then used as the Dhaka University's Arts Faculty.

The life at Salimullah Hall was very attractive — especially for students like me who had come from the mufassil towns.

Surrounded by majestic trees the Salimullah Muslim Hall existed in the most tranquil environment. With the changing seasons the

trees blossomed with flowers one after the other. Closest to the hall was a red bricked two-storeyed building. Built at around 1905, the house is now dilapidated and ready to be torn down. On the north-east side of the hall was a beautiful bungalow, which is now the residence of some university professors. At that time this was the provost's residence. The area where Iqbal Hall and the four storied faculty buildings stand used to be a field full of trees which was used mainly as grazing grounds for cattle. The pond near Iqbal Hall served at that time as a swimming pool for the Salimullah Hall students.

Compared to the other rooms, the dining hall was the liveliest — and smelliest. A strange mixture of Bangla, Urdu, Hindi and English conversation filled the air at the

dining hall. It was in moments of anger that this mixed language was used. The food was bland and the same all the time but of good quality and enough. To make up for the lack of curry there was daal (lentils) and unlimited rice. For a monthly fee of six taka, you could get rice, daal, vegetable curry and a piece of fish or meat.

Next to the indoor games room was another room where a shopkeeper used to sell breakfast but this was not very popular. Later a student of the hall opened a regular restaurant at one of the new houses near the hall. Some students, however, prepared breakfast in their own rooms. The regular breakfast at that time included Polson's or Stafford butter with toast.

In 1941 communal violence and the war's continuous deterioration made the atmosphere at the university very unstable. One of the victims of communal violence was a student of Salimullah Hall — Mutahar Hussain. It was the road between Jagannath Hall and what is now the Engineering University, that Mr Hussain was stabbed in the back.

But even after the University opened there continued to be a lot of fear

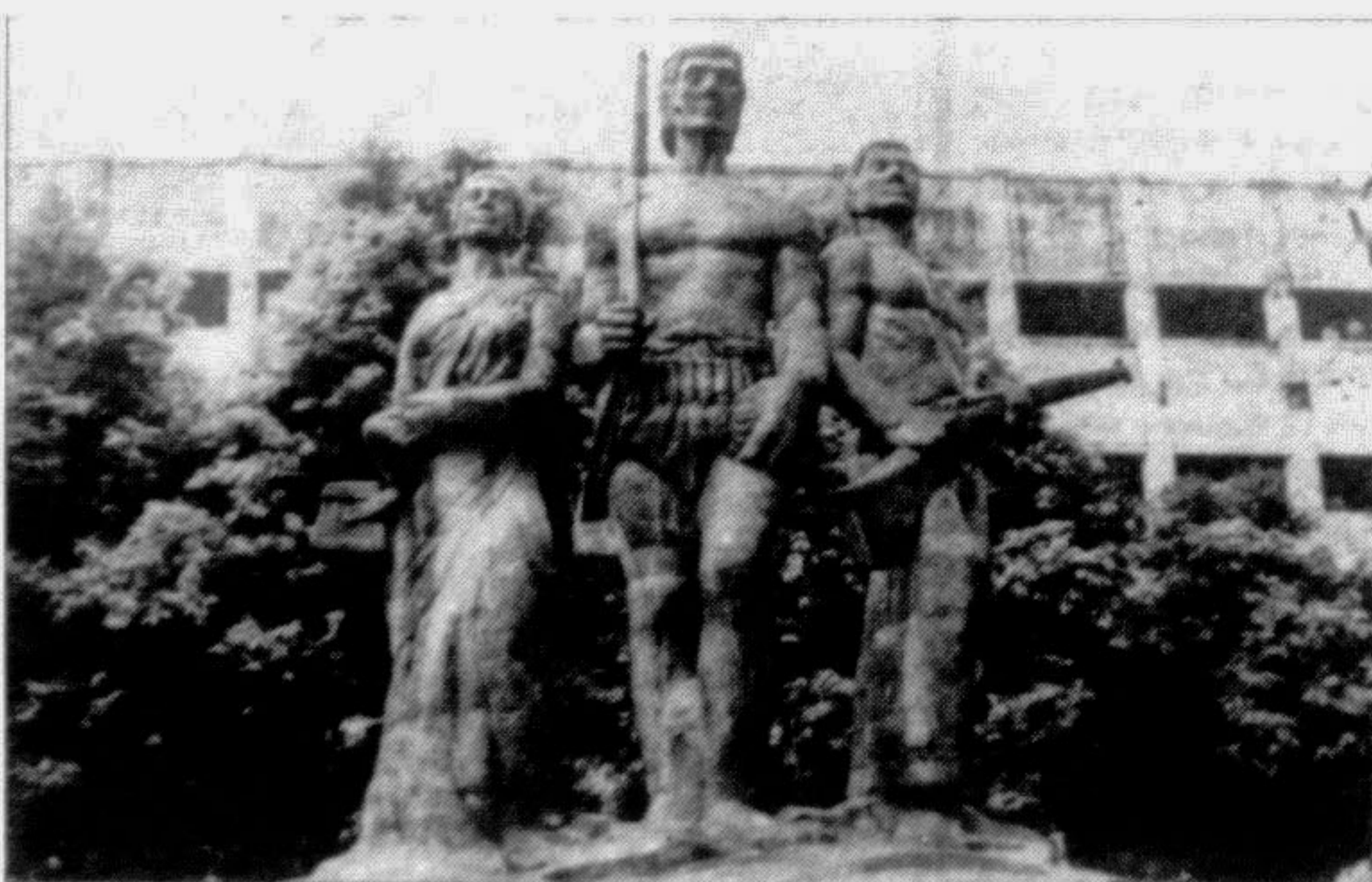
and anxiety in the campus. At the beginning of 1943 during a function at the Curzon Hall held by female students the situation reached an extreme point. A few people from the audience raised an objection regarding the way a side of the stage had been arranged. As a result there was a lot of chaos and the participating students became dispersed in all directions. Right after this incident and outside Curzon Hall and Dhaka Hall (now Shahidullah Hall) and inside the gymnasium and outside it, the students present began to hurl stones at each other. Before the University reopened, with the leaders of the student union, the provosts of various halls got together to discuss the situation.

But when the University did reopen on February 2nd, 1943 on that terrible day, a student of Salimullah Hall Mr Nazir Ahmed was fatally injured by the knife of his murderer. He was immediately rushed to Mitford Hospital. But his condition began to deteriorate very fast and he needed blood. A few students had gone to the hospital to give blood. But the news had already arrived — Nazir had breathed his last.

male students and the other halls. The Women's Hall was DU's first hall for female students. The students demanded the establishment of a hall union. This was perfectly justified. In this regard I sent a letter to the University authorities. The proposal was quickly approved. Like other hall unions the constitution for the Women's Hall Union was also formed. Through the University Executive Council the constitution was passed after which a voter's list was made and the election date was set for 27th November 1956.

issue and definitely come up with a solution. At this the situation became normal.

After the women's hall had been established it was necessary to draft appropriate rules and regulations for the resident students. This was because girls from other halls were living in the same hostel. Yet it was the provosts of the halls they were attached to, who were responsible for them. With a separate hall for women, the provost of the women's hall was now responsible for all female students. Thus, there was no longer any administrative link between the fe-



Aporajay Bangla — symbolizing freedom and courage. — Star photo



Madhu's Carteen — very much the heart of DU's political scene. — Star photo