

DELHI UNIVERSITY

From Words To Blows

VIOLENCE is an unfortunate fact of life in Delhi University. That was bloodily emphasised on February 16 when Dilip Simeon, 32, history lecturer at Ramjas College, was savagely beaten up by six men on his way to work. The lecturer's multiple fractures came as the flash-point of an acrimonious feud between college Principal Dr Kartar Singh, 52, and teachers, students and karamcharis.

Things had been festering at Ramjas (total enrolment: 2,100) for a long time and observers had no difficulty in connecting the murderous attack to Simeon's campaign to oust Singh. One of its features was a week-long hunger-strike in support of head gardener Sita Ram, who had not been paid his wages for some months and was being victimised by the college authorities, reportedly for having deposed against the

principal-staff/student quarrels. Ten years ago, Justice S.S. Dulat conducted an enquiry into its affairs after such a quarrel forced a shut-down. In April last year, a DUTA meeting was disrupted by Ramjas karamcharis and the consequent report by Justice G.D. Khosla dismissed the allegation that hoodlums hired by Singh had disturbed the meeting, describing two karamcharis who had testified to incitement by the principal as "obviously procured witnesses".

Khosla came down hard on Sita Ram—pouring scorn on the gardener's testimony that Singh had handed him a lathi, Khosla called him an "old, weedy-looking weakling". The report did not stem the tide of protest: a demonstration on December 8 followed the strike and according to staffers, Singh was again seen passing out lathis to men who intimidated

parallel staff association president R.S. Mittal and caretaker H.K. Kalra.

Unexpected Twist: Even as the vice-chancellor and Delhi Lt Governor S.L. Khurana promised redress and justice, the attack had an unexpected spin-off: Mittal quit as president of the parallel association and the two teachers' camps merged under lecturer R.R. Suresh's leadership to fight their "common enemy". DUTA president Arun Bose, who had initially opposed the demand for Singh's suspension, admitted he was mistaken, said Ramjas was "seething with a chronic crisis" and pointed out that Singh has had to retract every step he contemplated against staff and students—Simeon's dismissal, Sita Ram's wage cuts, rustication of a few students, and threatened action against some hostellers.

The target of the furore, however, was holding out spiritedly. He did not visit Simeon in hospital fearing assault but challenged his detractors to prove their allegations in court; said he: "If I am found guilty, I should be hanged from the first pole available." Calling Simeon a "maniac", he added: "Bose was elected with the support of an extreme left and anarchist group. He has



Singh (far left) and Simeon (inset) in hospital: festering wounds



principal in an earlier enquiry.

The strike was followed by an 18-day closure of the college, and an intensification of the 'Singh-must-go' campaign. And although last fortnight's attack was first registered as an accident by the police, a statement by Simeon from his hospital bed at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences turned it into an indictment of Singh, and charges were registered of attempted murder, conspiracy and culpable homicide not amounting to murder. Simeon had not recognised his attackers, but alleged that they had been hired by Singh.

Quarrels: The attack provoked the inevitable reactions. The Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA) gave the vice-chancellor five days to suspend Singh and institute an independent inquiry. On February 19, a protest bandh was called throughout the university, and Ramjas teachers suspended work for three days.

The college, one of the oldest in the university, has always been racked by

the demonstrators. And only five days before the February 16 attack, a Ramjas College Teachers' Association (RCTA) meeting broke up after a scuffle between pro- and anti-Singh lecturers.

The angry reactions provoked by the assault spurred the police to greater efforts. Within a week, they had identified all the assailants, helped by Virender Jain, an external student enrolled with the college. On February 21, J.P. Jain, director of physical instruction at Ramjas, was arrested and charged with "conspiracy to plan an assault". Simeon's colleagues had named him as one of Singh's supporters on the staff, the others being chemistry lecturer K.S. Verma,

sold his brains. How can he demand my immediate suspension?"

Ironically, Singh was himself a member of the Communist Party of India until some time after he came to Ramjas in July 1976. He has allegedly maintained a dictatorial grip over Ramjas by dividing to rule—30 of the college's 110 lecturers are on temporary employment and thus at Singh's mercy. That Simeon's accusation had a point was proved by Jain's arrest—and the denouement came on February 22, when the college's governing board met in a tense atmosphere and, under pressure from the faculty and students, decided to send Singh on indefinite leave.

—CHAITANYA KALBAG

