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## UGC must consider anti-ragging policies

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IN RECENT times, violent ragging in public universities have shocked the nation. A number of students of Jahangirnagar University, as New Age supplement Youth reported on Sunday, were physically and mentally tortured in the name of ragging in February. Similar stories are reported from Shahjalal University Science and Technology and Chittagong University. The responses of the university administration so far have been punitive rather than preventive. They act after the event when a student is severely injured and the case makes the headlines. Even though the practice of ragging is pervasive, the university still treats it as a 'behavioural problem' of a few individual students. Therefore, the extent of their action is limited to punishing a few students, instead of looking at the root cause of the persisting problem. Since the problem exists in all public universities on some scale or the other, the University Grants Commission, which supervises higher educational institutions, also has a role to play. However, the commission seems to avoid their responsibility stating the institutional autonomy of public universities. In the prevailing context, there is no scope of passing responsibility. All authorities concerned must develop an institutional mechanism to end this practice and secure an enabling academic environment for students.

The supplement includes an exhaustive list of the ways new students are harassed and humiliated on campus. New students are treated as inferior being who would have to unquestionably follow the order of the seniors and the order or rules laid out for new students are often sexually suggestive and absolutely demoralising to the extent that victims are at times left on the verge psychological breakdown. In search of an easy way out, university administrations tend to link the ragging with seat crisis on campus. However, the nature of abuse says otherwise. New students, at least in Jahangirnagar University, have to follow a dress code, they are asked to walk looking down to their feet. Referring to the nature of abuse today, progressive teachers of different universities have blamed the political culture on campus. They suggested that from residential halls to classrooms, students are expected to follow the yes-man culture. In residential halls, to secure a room allotment, new students are compelled to follow what the ruling party student wing leaders ask them to do. They are not expected to ask questions in classrooms either. Therefore, to uproot the practice of ragging embedded in the political culture of university, what is needed is more than just disciplinary actions against a few students.

It is high time that the government considered a law to criminalise the practice of ragging. In order to ensure that anti-ragging policies are enacted and implemented on campus, the University Grants Commission must also consider imposing regulations on universities to eliminate ragging. The university administration must seriously look into the systemic cause of ragging and take actions to bring in fundamental change in the academic culture.



Editor: **Nurul Kabir**, Published by the Chairman, Editorial Board ASM Shahidullah Khan on behalf of Media New Age Ltd. 30 Tejgaon Industrial Area, Dhaka-1208  
Phone: 880-2-8170450-56 (PABX), Fax: 880-2-8170457

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