

In the early morning of October 7, 2019, Bangladesh University of Engineering Technology (BUET) changed forever.

I was an admission exam candidate then, pursuing my dream of getting into BUET. I woke up to the news of the death of Abrar Fahad, an undergraduate student at the university. At midnight, his dead body was left in the corridors of Sher-E-Bangla Hall, by his classmates, hallmates, people who went to the same university as him.



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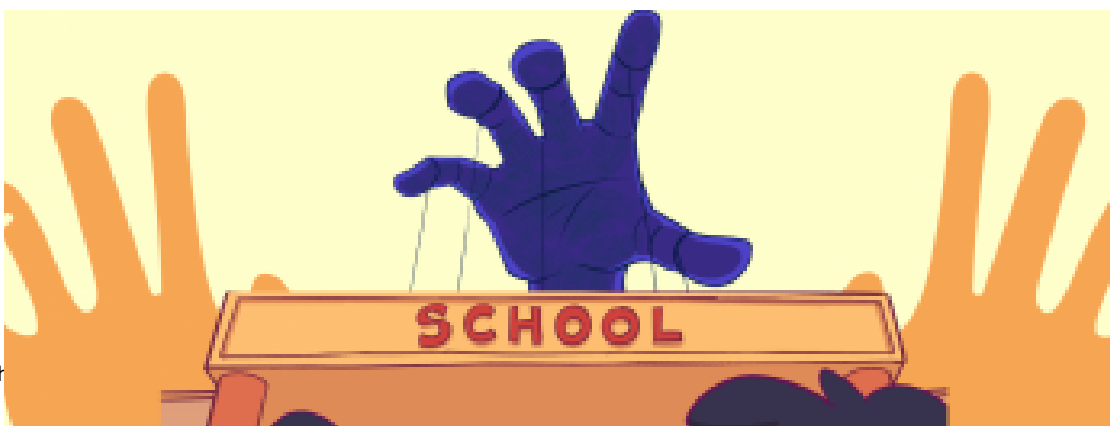
The initial reaction was fear and confusion. Ragging had been a dominant culture in public universities for long enough. Before the incident, the campus was a nightmare for first-year students, especially for those who live in the halls. The canteen, the half-wall in front of the cafeteria – these were often off limits for freshers. After the incident, many victims of ragging made their stories public. Bleeding from the ear over a slap, getting beaten up by stumps and sticks, constant physical and mental abuse – harrowing details started coming forward.

Following the killing, some thought nothing would change as the accused were politically backed by the BUET Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL). But the students reacted with outrage and fury. The haunting CCTV footage was retrieved which showed the murderers carrying out the body of Abrar Fahad.

As I saw his body being carried away, I couldn't believe that this place was supposedly the dream of thousands of aspirants all over the country like myself.

It wasn't the first casualty of student politics in BUET. In 2002, Sabekun Nahar Sony, a student of Chemical Engineering fell prey to the gunfire between two groups of BUET Chhatra Dal. In 2013, Arif Raihan Dwip, an undergraduate student of Mechanical Engineering was brutally hacked by a religious extremist which later caused his unfortunate death. The students finally did the impossible which would redefine campus life on BUET forever – they forced the authority to ban student politics.

The Prime Minister of Bangladesh was in complete support of the prosecution of the killers. First thing after the incident, she ordered the police to arrest the killers and assured that they would receive the highest punishment.





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In a press conference on October 9, 2019, the Prime Minister said, "If BUET wants to ban student politics, they have syndicate and committee. They can do so; we will not interfere in this regard."

After the dust settled, a new BUET rose from the ashes. One where the halls are safe, where freshers feel like they belong. A safe haven for students where they aren't called to the common room in the middle of the night by their seniors and abused. A place where they can concentrate on their studies and their aspirations without having to fear for their life – what a university should be like. A fundamental right that wasn't delivered by the authority, but rather ensured by its students.

Yet, a few days back, on August 13, a program remembering the death of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was held in the BUET seminar hall by some alumni.

The banner of the program claimed that it was organised by the past leaders of BCL, BUET, despite the permission letter not having any mention of this being a seminar of the political group. When the authority banned student politics a few years back, it also banned all sorts of political seminars along with it. This incident was therefore a clear violation of the established rules. Naturally, the students protested and asked the authority for an explanation.

However, the reaction from political groups outside the campus has been extreme. There is a narrative prevalent that with student politics banned, other extremist groups will find their way into the campus. Some even went as far as labelling BUET as a breeding ground for extremists. Just yesterday, I saw a person label some students who were talking to the press as extremist shibir activists. Ironically enough, some of those students were followers of the Hindu faith. And so are hundreds of others in support of the protest against student politics.

It is crucial to realise that the students have no problem with the National Mourning Day program. The only issue here is that the program was held under the banner of BCL, even after the ban of student politics in BUET. The current students aren't particularly against BCL, but against all forms of student politics on campus. Their only true agenda is to make sure it doesn't slither its way back into the campus.

Safe campus – a right that should've been inherent to every student has cost this campus a lot more than it should have. The campus doesn't want another Abrar Fahad, Sabekun Nahar Sony or Arif Raihan Dwip.

References

Prothom Alo (October 10, 2019). *PM Hasina says BUET can ban student politics if it wants.*

Hasib Ur Rashid Ifti is a student at BUET.