

# Student politics banned at DU halls: proctor

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Legality of the move questioned



All forms of student politics will remain banned in Dhaka University halls, according to the July 17, 2024 framework, Proctor Saifuddin Ahmed said early yesterday.

"The July 17 framework clearly states that all forms of overt and covert politics in the halls will be banned," he told protesters in front of the DU vice-chancellor's residence around 2:50am.

Around midnight on Friday, students broke into demonstrations, demanding a ban on student politics in the dormitories. The agitation followed the unveiling of hall committees by the DU Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) convening body.

Around 2:45am, after an almost half-hour heated debate with students near his residence, VC Prof Niaz Ahmed Khan told the protesters, "The hall administration will be able to make decisions on this. Political activities will be controlled and carried out according to the hall administration's wishes.

"We don't want any repressive politics at the hall level and that is very clear. The decisions made between the hall administration and the students on July 17 [2024] will be considered by them as they see fit; we have no objections to that."

Regarding the Dhaka University Central Students Union (DUCSU), he said hall-based student organisations must work as they wish. "How this will take shape -- whether they can hold processions in the halls or conduct poster campaigns -- must be discussed with the student organisations and agreed upon ... When the panel forms, they will have to work in the halls. Consensus is needed on this matter."

Incensed at the VC's remarks, the protesting students began chanting slogans demanding a complete ban on student politics in the halls.

A few minutes later, Proctor Saifuddin took the mic and announced that all types of hall politics would remain banned.

After that, the students returned to their dormitories.

A Provost Standing Committee meeting was held on the matter yesterday evening. However, the outcome could not be known till the filing of this report around 9:00pm.

Nahiduzzaman Shipon, general secretary of the DU JCD, said the proctor's announcement reflects "clear administrative weakness."

"After failing to control a mob situation, they rushed into making such a decision. If we were to form a similar mob now, would they then make a decision in our favour? The university administration must take a stronger stance on this."

Citing the 1973 ordinance, he said the DU administration has no authority to interfere with anyone's freedom of expression unless it involves anti-independence or anti-state activities.

"The administration may have acted in response to a particular situation, but under no circumstances can it make such a decision. This is our political and social right, guaranteed by the constitution. There is no scope to violate this right."

Jabir Ahmed Jubel, general secretary of Biplabi Chhatra Moitree's central committee, said the proctor's announcement goes beyond his authority.

"There is no legal basis for banning student politics in any part of the university."

"A moral ground was established following the July uprising... After that, there was an opportunity for the university administration and student organisations to jointly decide on politics in educational institutions, but that didn't happen. There is still a chance to reach an agreement on how student organisations will conduct their activities."

Meghmallar Bosu, president of the Chhatra Union DU unit, said the proctor's announcement conflicts with the 1973 ordinance and added that if someone files a writ, the announcement may not hold.

He added that it is concerning if the administration has to make such decisions under pressure.

"We want to discuss a campus charter that outlines how politics will be conducted here, what actions are permissible in the halls, and how monitoring cells will operate within the halls."

Abdul Kader, president of the DU unit Bangladesh Democratic Student Council (BDSC), said a solution cannot come through a statement made in the face of a mob.

He added, "This ban only applies to organisations that are visible. There is no way to identify the covert ones. How will you prohibit them?"

Kader said decisions should be made through discussions with all stakeholders. "BDSC's position will remain the same -- organisational activities will not continue in the halls and other academic spaces."

Saif Md Alauddin, president of the DU's Islami Chhatra Andolon Bangladesh, termed the announcement banning hall politics "short-sighted".

He added, "If we stop politics through such a process, it will inevitably increase conflict rather than promote the political coexistence we speak of."

SM Farhad, president of Islami Chhatra Shibir's DU unit, told reporters that such unfortunate situations arose due to the university administration's failures and a lack of a fixed policy.

"It's the administration's responsibility to engage in discussions with all stakeholders as swiftly as possible to reach a favourable situation ... Legal experts can also be consulted to ensure the rights of any student wishing to engage in politics are not infringed, and the rights of those who don't want to be involved in politics are also protected," he added.

On Friday night, following DU JCD's hall committee announcement, protests broke out at Begum Ruqayyah Hall, demanding a ban on all hall politics. A section of the residents broke the hall gate around 1:00am.

Later, students of Kabi Sufia Kamal Hall and Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Hall joined in.

Last year, the authorities were compelled to ban political activities in halls after Chhatra League activists were driven out a day after they attacked quota reform protesters on July 15, 2024.

The residents of Begum Ruqayyah Hall had taken the first step to drive out the BCL activists and secured an undertaking from the then provost to ban politics in their hall.