

Who's in Charge?

There is no end to surprises as we read about the happenings in Dhaka University from time to time. The latest one is the very interesting and at the same time intriguing story of ownership of at least one hundred and fifty rooms of ten residential hostels of the university. A revealing report in the popular Bangla daily *Prothom Alo* has elaborately narrated the mechanism by which the student leaders control the allocation of seats to and their use by not only party cadres but outsiders also under the nose of hall authorities. Criminals as well as non-student maastans allegedly live in these rooms with the blessings of ruling party student leaders and purported indulgence from hall provosts and house tutors, in some cases. This tendency of 'room capture', according to the report, started in the late eighties and the culture for harbouring cadres and criminals increased in early nineties and the practice escalated in the mid-nineties as police helped a student organisation to capture the residential halls thereby establishing their absolute authority not only on student politics but on the hall and university authorities when it came to allotment of seats.

This is a dangerous trend set by student organisations fuelled by governments of the day bypassing the lawful authority of the university thereby degrading the powers and functions of the provosts and house tutors. The demand and supply ratio of seats for genuine students is highly disproportionate and the situation is further aggravated by the unauthorised intervention of the student leaders. The outcome will be disastrous if the trend is not arrested immediately. The days may not be far off when the leaders of these student organisations end up controlling far greater number of seats in the dormitories than they are doing at present. Dhaka University authority, autonomous by virtue of 1973 Ordinance, must act now.