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NEWAGE

DHAKA UNIVERSITY CENTRAL STUDENT UNION

Where has the democracy gone?

by Samanta Shermeen

DHAKA University was supposed to be the vanguard of socio-cultural movements of Bangladesh. It was supposed to be a democratic model for the country. It should have opened new windows of thoughts, therefore knowledge. But, in reality, we have a totally undemocratic situation. Student's participation is ignored in every policy making decisions. For the last 27 years, Dhaka University Central Student Union election is withheld solely by the university administration. I want to ask, what the teachers, senators and vice chancellor would have done if the elections of teachers' association, senate and vice chancellor were postponed for just seven years? Each time, we try to express our need for DUCSU election, university administration finds new ways to repress us. DUCSU was the space where students could participate in taking decisions about their academic proceedings.

From the platform 'Shikharthi Odhkar Moncho' (platform for student's right) in 2012, students were demanding DUCSU in 2012. Recently, the students of Dhaka University are taking measures to initiate DUCSU movement again. On

May 22, another senate election took place without students' representatives. According to university's 1973 ordinance, the election panel should include five representatives from students. Therefore, students gathered at the entrance of the Senate Hall with placards and chanted slogans to reclaim their rights. Two months of the protest at Senate Hall, VC election took place on July 29. We gathered there again to demand our rights in a peaceful protest. In both days, we were shocked to see the way a faction of teachers attacked us.

The teachers of a university known as 'the oxford of the east' attacked their students like everyday thugs, physically assaulted their students and tried to shun them away. Students were addressed as 'lunatics' for raising voice for their minimum rights. They did not hesitate for a second to harm and assault female students. The teachers, who weren't even included in the election, assaulted us. The assistant professor Robul Islam was seen speaking to a national television and proudly announcing that along with teachers, he was ready to 'tackle' students. There were two teachers of Jagannath University appeared very active in the attack, to confirm their place in Dhaka

University as a teacher! All of these shocking incidents happened, just because we wanted to put an end to the 27 years of undemocratic rule in our campus.

In most of the cases, faculties in powerful administrative roles don't have enough interest and time for research and educational activities. However, they remain very active and involve in flexing muscle power to repress students' rightful demand. For 'tackling' protesting students, they have ample time and interest. It was the goon-like teachers who attacked us and we were asked, 'who attacked us?' Who are behind the DUCSU movement?

I was shocked to my core. Isn't 27 years of undemocratic rule reason enough for us to organize and demand for DUCSU? Will it be inappropriate, if I ask what provoked the proctors to involve the teachers of another university in that brazen attack on students? Even the probe committee formed to investigate the incident of July 29 is constituted in an undemocratic way. The teachers, who were actually involved to foil and attack us, are included there as the investigators. The university administration didn't even think to include there any student representative. The

administration wants us to keep trust on the investigators, as they are 'teachers' and therefore our 'guardians'. We want to ask the university administration that why they breach the trust and then hide behind the rhetoric of 'trust' when it comes to investigations? Why in their 'trust-based' investigation they fail to make it transparent and fair by ensuring minimum standard?

The attack on student on July 27 shows how undemocratic and tyrannical the administration is in its governing practices. Democracy is disappeared from the activities of Dhaka University. In many cases teachers enjoy autocratic power in the classroom. There is no way of evaluating teachers by the students. The everyday life of general students in halls is severely undignified; the goons of the student wing of the ruling party made student halls their kingdom of feudal anarchy. Apparently, they hold the real administrative power in the halls.

In this fascist environment on campus, the general teachers are also becoming the victim of undemocratic practice. Sometimes, the cadre of the ruling party's student wing take advantage of administrator's silence on their unruly activities and assault on general teachers. Recently, teachers had to face

legal action under section 57 and harassment for criticising the university authority. Such is the environment of campus.

Faculties in power and their supporters even claimed that the protesters are trying to unstable the University by raising demand for DUCSU election at this moment. Really? If the university becomes unstable because of demanding DUCSU election, shouldn't the university administration be responsible for that? Because, it is the administration, not the agitating student, who had failed to administer a successful election in 27 years. How much arrogant and ill-motivated one can be before posing such 'theory' of 'instability'?

Any university, with its teachers, administrators and staff, would be pointless without students. The 1973 ordinance ensured some minimum rights of the students to practice democracy. However, rights and entitlement allowed in this ordinance is falling far behind from taking a modern approach to make university a better place, to ensure academic freedom. Therefore, in reality, we need an updated, functioning and more democratic ordinance. But, we are living in a time when the minimum demand is not met without taking it to the streets, without

movements! The government and university administration is blinded by their power hungry attitude that they don't even see the need for DUCSU, we still have to convince (!) them for our minimum rights. The administration does not feel obligated to students to share their plans. Students' needs and realities are overlooked when increasing fees, necessary hall requirements. Students are denied standard research facilities, they aren't even allowed to have a say on annual budget. Yet, the administration of Dhaka University has taken about tk 12 crore in total from the students in 27 years for DUCSU election. Would it be wrong to ask, where has the money gone?

Students are the heart of any university, but we can take neither responsibility nor pride of our university's attainment or disrepute, if our participation is ignored. Dhaka University administration should declare DUCSU election immediately. Even the president of the country echoed students demand: 'DUCSU is a must'. The sooner the new VC and Dhaka University administration initiate DUCSU election is the better.

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