

Sexual harassment at JnU: For 2yrs, suspect protected, victim tormented



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For two years the Department of Film and Television of Jagannath University protected a teacher accused of sexual harassment and went after the complainant.

It was not until the death by suicide of another unrelated sexual harassment victim in the university that the authorities take action against the suspect and his abettor.



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Fairuz Sadaf Abontika died by suicide on March 15 after failing to get a remedy for harassment by a classmate.

Six days later, lecturer Abu Shahed Emon was suspended and his abettor and chairman of the department Prof Junaid Halim was relieved from his post on March 21 in connection with a sexual harassment complaint filed two years ago.

The victim, then a second-year student, verbally complained to the department that Emon sexually harassed her in 2019.

Angered by her move, Emon mounted pressure on her via another teacher and did not let her sit for a mid-term exam in 2021.

“I have been deprived of justice. Suspension is hardly a punishment. I want the expulsion of the accused teachers.”

— Says the victim

The student in December 2021 wrote to the university authorities for redress but it yielded no results.

It was not until the death of law student Abontika, who also did not get any remedy after filing a harassment complaint against one of her classmates, that the accused teacher was suspended.

"I have been deprived of justice. Suspension is hardly a punishment. I want the expulsion of the accused teachers," the victim told The Daily Star recently.

She said she started getting calls from various quarters to withdraw the complaint after she filed it with then vice-chancellor Prof Imdadul Hoque on December 26, 2021.

Eight days later, Prof Junaid called in the student and tried to coax her into withdrawing the complaint in the presence of Emon.

On January 6, 2022, the victim and her mother complained to then VC detailing how she was being persuaded to withdraw her complaint.

Prof Junaid and Emon visited the student's home in Rajbari and met her father twice on January 8 and 9, 2022, to make her withdraw the complaint, she said.

Prof Junaid again called her to his office at the faculty on January 9 and tried to force her to withdraw the complaint.

A day later, the victim filed another complaint with then VC seeking remedy.

Prof Junaid then kept calling her father and putting pressure on her, she alleged.

As the victim and other students started protesting, the university launched an investigation via the Anti-Sexual Harassment Cell on March 22, 2022, almost three months after her first written complaint.

The probe committee during its investigation received calls from unknown dialers. "The callers hurled abuse. They asked us why we are investigating the matter, what is the purpose etc ..." said Prof Hosne Ara Begum, a member of the cell.

The probe body submitted its report on November 24, 2022. Eight months later on August 1, 2023, the university for the first time acted, sending a letter to Emon accusing him of sexual harassment.

A syndicate meeting then recommended that the film and television department take action against Emon, but Prof Junaid, being the chair of the department, did not take any such steps.

JnU VC Prof Sadeka Halim, who was then a member of the cell, said, "Even the dean of the faculty concerned asked Prof Junaid several times [to take action against Emon] but that too fell on deaf ears."

The victim, meanwhile, continued to face the wrath of Prof Junaid. She claimed that her assignments were not received deliberately, which caused her to fail semester finals.

In November last year, the victim wrote to the UGC seeking redress.

Emon refuted the allegations after The Daily Star approached him.

Prof Junaid also rejected the allegations against him. "The university authorities asked me to resolve the matter since it happened at my department," he said.

He admitted that he went to Rajbari along with Emon to request her father to withdraw the complaint.

About not receiving assignments, Prof Junaid said the student tried to submit assignments after the deadline. "Why would I accept it?"

JnU VC Prof Sadeka Halim said another committee is probing the allegations against Emon and the final decision would be made after