

Opinion

Why Buet students are resisting student politics



The murder of Abrar Fahad might be a singular incident, but it was the culture of torture and abuse built by politically active students that led us here. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

In the early morning of October 7, 2019, the dead body of Abrar Fahad, an undergraduate student at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), was found lying on the ground floor of Sher-e-Bangla Residential Hall. The [sight of a student beaten to death in his own university](#) shook the nation. However, the outrage of Buet's general students resulted in something long overdue: the end of student politics.

Since the murderers were members of the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), regular students demanded a permanent ban on student politics on campus. Although the demand came after the death of a student, the constant physical and mental torture by politically active students, conducted in the name of ragging, had gone on at the university for years. For instance, the news of a first-year student suffering injury in his eardrums made headlines the same year Abrar Fahad was murdered. Multiple other incidents of students getting beaten up by seniors were reported over the years, but no visible action was taken to stop this heinous culture of ragging. First-year students would usually be taken to a room in groups and humiliated by the seniors. Some of them would face severe beatings by cricket stumps, sticks, etc. While some of these incidents were reported to the authorities, fear of repercussions and the authorities' inability to respond accordingly resulted in most of them not being reported.



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The residential halls were virtually run by these politically active students. Starting from room allocation to hall dining facilities, the politically active students were the ones making the calls. Staying in the dormitory was a living nightmare for every fresher, having to live in constant fear of punishment.

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OPINION
Shaer Reaz



Hence, the sight of Abrar Fahad lying dead near the staircase of his dormitory sparked flaming rage among common students. The non-political students vastly outnumbered these politically active ragers, and Abrar's murder acted as the seed of coalition among students. They demanded a permanent ban on all sorts of student politics at Buet, and made sure the ban was not only applicable to BCL but to the student wings of other political parties as well, so that student politics could never slither its way in even after a change in power.

Following the ban, multiple attempts were made to reinject student politics into Buet. On August 13, 2022, a mourning seminar was held at the seminar hall of Buet under the banner of BCL by former leaders and activists of the party, which was protested heavily by the common students. Even last year, a first-year student was included in the central committee of BCL, which sparked massive outrage among students. The inclusion of Buet students in these political parties created a fear of the gradual normalisation of student politics in Buet.

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Since the murder of Abrar Fahad, every time student politics has tried to make a comeback in Buet, current students have opposed it vehemently. Despite all of these, a few days ago, when some BCL leaders made their way into the campus at 3am with the help of a few current students, all hell broke loose. This re-entry confirmed the failure of the authority to keep the campus politics-free and eliminate the involvement of politically active students on campus, despite it being prohibited.

While a certain group of people is trying to divert the focus towards current students being affiliated with extremist parties, the root of this vehement opposition to student politics lie in the years of

trauma such political involvement has caused the campus. Abrar's murder might be a singular incident, but it was the culture of torture and abuse built by politically active students that led us here.

However, the presence of a student body is crucial in every university. In a university where the director of the Directorate of Students' Welfare claims that security on campus is not his responsibility and where the authority fails to respond to complaints consistently for years, the presence of a formal student body that will preserve the rights and demands of the common students is important.

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It is equally important that the student body be completely free of outside political affiliations and influences. This body should ensure the inclusion of students from all batches and be democratic in all of its decisions. Whenever a student body holds political power of any sort, especially of the ruling party, it creates an unequal distribution of power among students. This has historically led to the domination of a handful of students over thousands, thus creating a culture of ragging, violence, and abuse in the halls of Buet. The murder of Sabekun Nahar Sony by members of Buet Chhatra Dal in 2002 and the murder of Arif Raihan Dwip by a Hefazat-e-Islam activist in 2013 still remind us that this culture of domination and violence by student organisations isn't particularly limited to BCL, but includes the student wings of all political parties.

The ban on student politics following the murder of Abrar Fahad is one that broke the shackles binding regular students and dismissed the perception that political student wings in public universities are beyond accountability. And the current students at Buet will go to any length to keep those shackles away.

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