

INTERVIEW

Md Shahnawaz Khan Chandan of Star Weekend talks to Nurul Haque Nur, the vice-president elect of Dhaka University Central Students' Union (DUCSU) about his stance on the controversial elections, the challenges he has been facing, and future plans.

Akhter Hossain (secretary-elect for social service), victorious. We were not the exception. In several female students' hostels where our nominated candidates and candidates from other panels got an overwhelming majority, they were ultimately declared elected despite lots of misconduct. Had there been a fair election, our entire panel would have been elected through a landslide victory. At present, we are demanding re-election for all the posts (including vice president) of the central union and the hall unions. This is why I have decided not to take charge as vice-president yet. Instead, I have been protesting with all the students for re-election.

Have you, as the vice-president elect, officially rejected the overall election results?

DUCSU election is not like the general

and generous host. I had never met her before so I was obviously a bit nervous. At the same time, I was also a bit disappointed. I was told that the honourable Prime Minister wanted to meet the elected members of DUCSU and the hall unions. However, when I went there, I saw numerous members and leaders of BCL who have no connection with DUCSU. Many of them were not even from the Dhaka University wing of BCL. I felt like I was at a programme of BCL. Such an environment affected my concentration and confidence. Moreover, I had prepared a written statement where demands of all the students were mentioned and I took that paper with me to Gono Bhaban so that I could read out all the demands clearly. During screening procedures, the security officials took that paper from me. This is also one of the reasons I could not

est. I was personally attacked by BCL activists. Many of our activists were assaulted and severely injured by BCL. So, if anyone still identifies me as a BCL leader, it is extremely unfortunate and not factual at all. At present, my only political conviction is that I should protect the students' interest in all possible ways. And, remembering DUCSU's past years of glory, I will try my best to ensure that DU's students will remain firmly against all forms of corruption and injustice.

Corruption is everywhere in Bangladesh—in our politics, in our democratic institutions, in the judicial system, everywhere. We, all the activists of the parishad, came to a consensus that student-wings of the political parties have turned into auxiliary forces of their parent political parties. In this structure, they will never be able to fight against corruption and protect the interests of the people. So, our parishad will always remain non-partisan and, in this way, I believe we shall be able to fight against all forms of corruption and injustice. This is our political ideology.

You are known for your role during the quota reform movement. Did the movement achieve its goal? If not, what will be your next step?

I think the government has played a game with us. The government has abolished quotas for first-and second-class government jobs and retained quotas as before for the third- and fourth-class government jobs. In this way, the government tried to appease all. However, our demand was rational reformation of the quota system. We never wanted to abolish quotas. I shall sit with the activists of the parishad and decide our future steps. But currently, most of our activists are extremely busy with the protests for DUCSU re-election.

You have been showered with congratulations from all sides and greeted by many as the leader of more than 43,000 students of DU. How do you feel about being elected?

It is a lot easier to lose trust than earn it. I have earned the support and trust of thousands of students. Still, I am trying my best to understand their needs so that I can honour their trust in me. I am under tremendous pressure from all sides. Last year, many of our activists and I were picked up and taken away blindfolded by the police. Our activists were detained and tortured by the BCL cadres and by the police. Many of our activists and even common students have recently received death threats and eviction threats. Many of us are so threatened and vulnerable that I cannot assure you that our decision today will not be changed after five or seven days. We are frequently sitting with the students to decide about the next course of action considering all these realities.

Again, due to these threats, my family members are quite apprehensive about my future. My family members and I used to hope that after graduating from Dhaka University I would get a government job. Now it is pretty certain that I shall never get a government job. If you ask me, I am not actually basking in the glory. Rather, I am seeing quite a challenging future. But what I can tell you is I will never stop my activism in the face of threats.

Md Shahnawaz Khan Chandan can be contacted at shahnawaz.khan@thedailystar.net

IN CONVERSATION WITH THE MAN OF THE MOMENT



PHOTO: KAZI TAHSEN AGAZ APURBO

After 28 years, DUCSU got its vice-president. But many students, even many of your supporters, think that the election was not fair and you have been selected in order to pacify the agitation.

The DUCSU election held on March 11 shattered our expectations. We are extremely disappointed. There were lots of credible evidence of electoral malpractices and most unfortunate of all was that our respected teachers were found involved with those using unfair means. Except the panel backed by Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), all the panels boycotted the election and demanded re-election. We have also expressed our solidarity with this demand.

However, I don't think I was selected. Instead, I would like to say that the students of Dhaka University voted for us so overwhelmingly that the administration had to declare myself and my friend,

elections. There is no constitutional provision for taking oath as the vice-president of DUCSU. Once you are declared elected as vice-president by the president of DUCSU, the vice-chancellor of the university, your tenure as vice-president starts; no matter if you reject the results or boycott the election. However, you can clearly understand my position by observing my current activities. I am still demanding re-election and I am protesting against the administration for this cause. Had I accepted the results, I would not have committed myself and my fellow activists for organising a free and fair re-election. *You accepted the Prime Minister's invitation on March 16 and paid a visit to her with your fellow activists. Tell us about your experience there.*

I felt really excited and also nervous when I received the invitation. The honourable Prime Minister was an extremely cordial

state all of our demands specifically. *You are one of the founders of Shadharon Chhatra Odhikar Shongrokkhon Parishad, a platform known for its non-partisan nature, which nominated you for the vice-president post. At the same time, you are often identified as a former BCL activist and leader. What is your and your parishad's current political position?*

It is true that previously I was involved with BCL's politics. But, currently, I am the representative of all students of Dhaka University. When we formed the parishad, we took to the streets for all students of Bangladesh. During the quota reform movement, students of the private and public universities protested with us. We again demonstrated during the road safety movement and expressed solidarity with the protesting school students. During all these movements, BCL played a role that was explicitly against the students' inter-