



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

YOUTH AGAINST fear and injustice

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When fear becomes a constant part of life, when university and colleges turn into a free playing field—moneymaking-torture space of ruling party men, when state surveillance has reached new heights, when greed and opportunism keep a large section of the intelligentsia silent, it is the rise of young students protesting against injustice, from university to schools, which provides us with a breath of fresh air.

The public universities, old and new, are in quite a sorry state. It seems that these institutions exist only to offer support for the government's misrule. The relevant authorities are least bothered about the educational environment, research and academic leadership in their respective institutions. Rather, they are more concerned with keeping control over dormitories and university teachers.

The teachers in the administration, in most cases, depend highly on ruling party student leaders. The student residing in the residential halls are completely held hostage by these *boro bhais*. A rule of fear is established and the students are forced to take part in processions, *zindabads*, attacks and so on. They are treated like a reserve army by the leaders. The 'gono rooms' or mass rooms, a place for general students who did not get seats,

are in fact torture cells, used to break the individuality of the students and render them into virtual slaves, forced into total subservience of the ruling groups.

Abrar being murdered in BUET dormitory shows the extent of the violence and domination. Abrar did not hurt anybody, he did not even make any abusive comments towards any powerful person. In his FB status, he only expressed his concern about the agreements made by the respective Prime Ministers of India and Bangladesh on water, port and others, which to me sound very logical. But the musclemen could not tolerate facts and arguments—they called him to their torture cell and beat him to death.

FROM PAKISTAN TO BANGLADESH: RPSO PHENOMENON

A careful reading of history indicates that the use of violence in student institutions, or of state-backed violence over general students, began during military rule in Pakistan. During the 1960s, a student organisation known as the National Student Federation (NSF) was formed, backed by the military regime of General Ayub Khan, to suppress the increasing mass resistance in public universities. This organisation terrorised opposition activists and did not even spare university teachers. Unfortunately, this trend did not stop even after independence; rather it

intensified with every change of regime. During every regime, we find the ruling party's student wing, armed and violent, terrorising the general student population to ensure its authority. I therefore term this as the ruling party student organisation (RPSO) phenomenon.

During the Ershad regime, strong unity among student organisations played an effective role in fighting autocratic rule in the 1980s. The phase of unity among student organisations ended with the fall of the Ershad regime in 1990. Since 1991, Bangladesh has been ruled by elected governments led by either the Awami League (and alliance) or the BNP (and alliance). The ruling party's student organisation dominates educational institutions, using violent means to capture each institution. The university administration and especially the student hall administration are being controlled by the ruling party student organisation, irrespective of the ruling party.

Thus, from 1991 to 1996, Bangladesh's educational institutions were under the control of the *Bangladesh Chhatra Dal*, and in some places, *Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir*. From 1997 to 2001, they were replaced by *Bangladesh Chhatra League*. *Chhatra Dal* and *Shibir* again came into a controlling position from 2001 until 2006.



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