

Wednesday Nightmare

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give us various 'tasks,' said a second-year student of Sher-e-Bangla Hall.

Asked about the tasks, he said, "Sometimes they force us to dance or sing. In some cases, they order us to recite vulgar poems."

Another resident of the hall said one day, he and some other first-year students were asked to appear at the Gono Room around 2:00am.

"I had a class test the next morning. But I had to go there because I had no other option. Otherwise, they would not let me stay [at the dormitory]," he said, adding that many like him could not study properly due to such gatherings.

A student of the naval architecture and marine engineering department, also a resident of Titumir Hall, said students were assaulted if they missed any political programme, including processions brought out by the BCL.

"On March 26, Chhatra League leaders came to every room and asked the students to attend a rally. I could not go as I was suffering from fever," he said.

That evening, the student was asked to go to the rooftop. "I shuddered and sensed something bad. As I went there, I saw some 30 students standing in a queue," he said.

"There were seven to eight Chhatra League leaders of my hall. Two of them suddenly started beating us with cricket stumps. We screamed for help but no one dared to help us," he said, adding they were forced to stay there till the next morning without any food and water.

Several students said ragging was nothing new at Buet dormitories, but the practice had turned violent in the last four to five years after the pro-Awami League student organisation gained an absolute grip on the halls.

In the absence of any political opponent, the BCL men often indulge in acts of torture like slapping, kicking, and beating common students.

Also, the students are verbally abused over petty issues, they said, adding that each hall has a gang of six to seven leaders who are mainly behind such torture.

Some students, however, said situations at Dr MA Rashid Hall and Nazrul Islam Hall were better.

A third-year student of chemical engineering, also a resident of Sher-e-Bangla Hall, said, "When I got enrolled in the university, my parents came to drop me off here. They were very happy with the environment here. But I had had bitter experiences within a few days."

He said he once found himself in

a dreadful situation for protesting his harassment.

"I was called to the Gono Room [of my hall]. There, they beat me with stumps. I was threatened that I would suffer even more if I told anyone about it," he said.

His roommates also advised him not to share the incident with anyone. "Since then, I have been attending all the political programmes. I am doing that despite not being a political activist or a supporter."

A physics student shared a similar experience.

He said he needed to take permission from his Boro Bhai to go to meet his parents living in the capital's Uttara.

"But on many occasions, I did not get the permission," said the student of Suhrawardy Hall.

And when there was a political programme, be it a meeting or rally, they were asked not to go outside the hall.

One student said, "Throughout the week, the students remain under pressure of studies and exams. And this sort of harassment makes the situation worse."

A student of Ahsan Ullah Hall said he was kept locked on the roof throughout a night last winter.

"I was only wearing a T-shirt and pyjamas. I was also beaten," he said. "My only fault was that I skipped a Chhatra League procession because I had to attend classes."

Contacted, Khondoker Jamius Sani, president of Buet BCL, said the allegations were not true and no one was politically harassed on campus.

"If there is any harassment, please ask the student to lodge a complaint," he said.

Asked about ragging, Sani said Chhatra League should not be blamed for it because it has been in practice for long. "Even I faced it when I was a freshman."

Prof Md Mizanur Rahman, director of students' welfare office, which is responsible for organising and coordinating various student-related activities, said he took charge around three months ago and was yet to receive any complaints.

"How can we act if we don't get any complaints?" he asked while talking to The Daily Star.

Many students told these correspondents that they were afraid of making complaints as they believed the administration would not take any action against BCL activists.

"Chhatra League is quite powerful. Despite many complaints, no visible action was taken against it in the past," one of the students said.

Abrar threatened

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Earlier on August 7 last year, some Buet BCL activists, led by Rasel, beat up Daiyan Nafis, from batch-15 of the mechanical engineering department, for taking part in the road safety movement, said Daiyan's classmates under the condition of anonymity.

Later, the recently removed BCL general secretary Golam Rabbani handed Daiyan over to the Chawk Bazar police station.

Rabbani also called Daiyan's mechanical circuit box a 'sim box' on a Facebook video. He alleged that Daiyan was involved with Chhatra Shibir and used different phone numbers to contact them.

Buet BCL men also beat up Ehtesham UI Azim, from the electrical and electronic engineering department of batch-15, that same night as he protested the move of handing over Daiyan to police.

Rasel called Ehtesham to room 202 of the hall on October 2, slapped and punched him, and forced him out of the hall, fellow students said.

Both Daiyan and Ehtesham refused to comment on the issue.

Motiu Rahman, another student, alleged that two BCL men Mubashshir Shanto and Mahadi Hasan called him and other residents of room 511 of the Suhrawardy Hall to room 1010 on September 4 because none of them greeted the seniors with a "salam".

"They asked why [we did not greet them] and later slapped me and another classmate twice as we were whispering while answering their questions. I consulted a doctor later, who told me that my ear had internal bleeding," Motiu said.

Shanto and Mahadi then called 20 students from batch-18 to the Suhrawardy Hall's terrace the next day.

One of the 20 students, under the condition of anonymity, said, "They asked me to identify and introduce the seniors who were there. I could identify all but one. Mahadi then asked me to slap the senior I could not identify. As I did not comply, Mahadi slapped me."

Contacted, Shanto and Mahadi refused to talk about the issue.

TOO AFRAID TO COMPLAIN
In most of the cases, students tortured in the name of "ragging" or beaten up by political leaders fear to speak up or file written complaints with the university administration.

A number of students, wishing anonymity, told The Daily Star that the victims could not muster up the courage to file complaints fearing further harassment. The authorities' disinterest in punishing the attackers or stopping the ragging culture also plays a role in ensuring everyone's

silence.

"Many students cannot afford to rent a house and are compelled to live in the university dormitories. They do not speak about the ragging culture or the torture incidents fearing eviction by seniors or political leaders," said a student of batch-17.

He alleged that the authorities only allot seats in the dormitories, but hardly look after the students after that.

The authorities have also done nothing over the years even though the incidents of torture in the name of ragging have increased to an alarming level, he further alleged.

"The authorities only suspended a student of the Ahsan Ullah hall for slapping a fresher. That student still lives in the hall and the student at the receiving end of it [the slap] lives in fear."

"Will anyone now dare to lodge a complaint after seeing such light punishment?" the student asked.

Samrat

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Samrat, who according to different media reports was involved in various misdeeds and corruption, came under the spotlight after Rab busted his illegal casino business in different sporting clubs in the capital.

Rab filed two cases with Ramna Police Station against him under the arms and narcotics control acts on Monday.

He amassed a huge amount of money through the illegal casino business, tender grabbing and extortion, say statements of the cases.

UN peacekeeper dies after C Africa chopper crash

AFP, Bangui

A fourth Senegalese UN peacekeeper has died after he was injured in a combat helicopter crash in the Central African Republic two weeks ago, the UN said on Monday.

Three other Senegalese crew died when the Russian-made helicopter went down on September 27 in Bouar, in the western CAR, during a UN operation.

The Senegalese captain, badly wounded in the accident, died of his injuries on October 6, Mankeur Ndiaye, chief of the UN mission known as MINUSCA, said on Twitter.

The helicopter crew were part of a military operation against the 3R militia, one of several Central African armed groups, UN officials said.



A man checking hilsa at a wholesale hilsa market in Chandpur town yesterday, which was the last day before a 22-day ban on netting, selling, and transporting the fish. Traders at the market said the number of buyers shot up ahead of the ban.

PHOTO: ALAM PALASH

No punishment in most cases

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But if history is anything to go by, then not much can be expected of it.

Usually activists of ruling-party backed student organisations took part in the killings.

The Daily Star found the highest of at least 74 people killed at Dhaka University, followed by 29 at Rajshahi University and 19 at Chittagong University.

Besides, 16 others were killed at Bangladesh Agricultural University in Mymensingh, seven at Jahangirnagar University, two each at Islamic University in Kushtia and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), one each at Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University in Tangail and Shahjalal University of Science and Technology in Sylhet.

At Chittagong and Rajshahi universities, which were Shibir strongholds, the student front was at fault for more killings than any other party.

On Buet campus, Sabequn Nahar Sony, a second-year student of chemical engineering, was killed when two factions of the BNP-backed Chhatra Dal exchanged fire in June 2002.

The execution of the verdict in the

Sony killing case is yet to take place as police had failed to arrest the main accused Mukti and Tagor even after 13 years, said Sony's father Habibur Rahman.

The High Court in a verdict in March 2006 awarded life imprisonment for three absentee killers.

In another incident, the body of Diaz Irfan Chowdhury, a Chittagong University student and BCL assistant secretary, was found hanging in his flat near the university campus in November 2016.

Diaz's mother Jaheda Amin Chowdhury claimed Diaz was murdered and then she went on several hunger strikes demanding justice.

The victim's family members later met the Assistant Superintendent of Police Jasim Uddin Khan of Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Chattogram, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case, to let him know that the accused were roaming free on campus.

Advocate Jubaida Sarwar Nipa, elder sister of Diaz, told The Daily Star, "We asked the IO why they are not arresting the accused. He sought evidence from us," she said, asking whether it was the family's responsibility to collect evidence.

Asked why justice was delayed, she said it was due to the negligence and unwillingness of the administrations concerned, coupled with interference from influential political leaders.

Even the investigators are still in the dark as the IOs have been changed at least thrice in the last three years.

Contacted, ASP Jasim Uddin Khan of CID, Chattogram, and also the IO of the case, refused to make any comment on the matter.

"Parent organisations misuse student organisations politically. They also save student leaders from punishment, taking advantage of different loopholes," lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua told this newspaper.

In another incident, Zubair Ahmed, an honours final-year student of Jahangirnagar University, was tortured and stabbed to death by some BCL men in January, 2012.

Six years later, the HC sentenced five BCL men to death over the killing. But, the decision is yet to be executed.

"No one was punished as they [perpetrators] escaped the country. We are helpless... It's the state's duty to bring the culprits back," the victim's elder brother Abdullah Al Mamun told this newspaper.

At Dhaka University, Islamic history student Abu Bakar was killed

in February 2010, in a clash between factions of BCL at AF Rahman Hall. A committee formed by the hall authorities is yet to submit its report nine years after the incident.

Police arrested eight BCL men in the case filed by a student, but they were all released later.

Frustrated with the negative changes, Dhaka University history department supernumerary professor Syed Anwar Husain said, "Student politics has now become dirty politics."

"Ruling parties should take the responsibility to create a healthy environment on campuses. But most of the times, the perpetrators do not even face trial. On the contrary, they are sheltered by ruling parties," he said.

Communist Party of Bangladesh President and former student leader Mujahidul Islam Selim also blamed political links of the perpetrators for the impunity they enjoy. "Chhatra League and Chhatra Dal do politics of looting when their parent parties - Awami League and BNP - are in power. That is why such killings take place," he said.

"Ensuring exemplary punishment to the killers and exercising idealistic politics could establish peace on the campuses," he observed.

Outrage all around

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to hold an urgent meeting with the hall provosts around 4:30pm yesterday, around 38 hours after the killing.

Learning about the VC's arrival, several hundred students besieged his office around 5:00pm. He came out of the office an hour later, and assured the agitating students that their demands would be met.

"I, in principle, support your [students] demands and assure you that I will meet those," said Prof Saiful.

The students then hurled a volley of questions at the VC but he didn't respond to any of those.

Saiful said he would have to talk to government high-ups to find a solution to the crisis.

"I can't do anything alone... I need to discuss the issue with government high-ups. We have formed a probe committee, which is now working."

"It is a murder case and we all have to be patient. I will try to meet your demands," the VC told the agitating students.

The students, however, were not satisfied with his assurance and refused to let him leave the office. The VC then went inside. He was allowed to leave his office around 9:30pm.

Before his departure, the VC told reporters that they agreed to meet the eight-point demand put forward by the students. But it would be implemented in phases.

The administration is also

considering a ban on organisation-based politics on BUET campus, he added.

The agitating students, however, said they would continue their protest and brief the media today about their next course of action.

Their demands include expulsion of all the identified killers from Buet for life within 72 hours, trial of the Abrar murder case at a speedy tribunal, and expulsion of those involved in ragging students at Buet dormitories.

The other demands are withdrawal of Sher-e-Bangla Hall Provost Muhammad Zafar Iqbal Khan for his failure to protect students, compensation to Abrar's family and bearing their expenses for running legal battle in the murder case.

The students also threatened to foil the Buet admission test scheduled for October 14 if their demands were not met.

Earlier in the day, several thousand students from Dhaka University brought out a procession from the TSC, demanding justice for Abrar. It marched through the Buet campus.

Besides, students staged demonstrations at Jahangirnagar University and Rajshahi University.

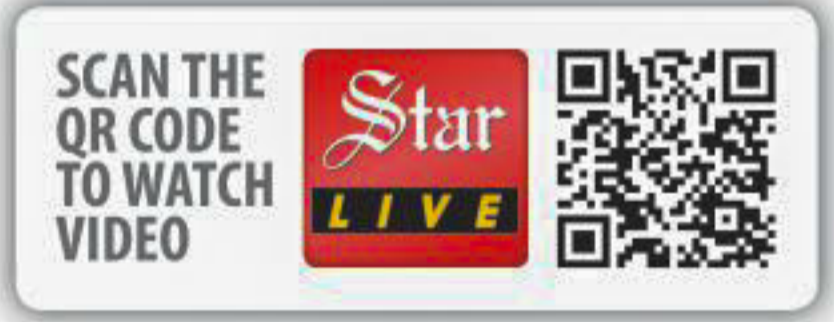
Meanwhile, three more Buet students were arrested from different parts of the capital in the Abrar murder case. Two of them are accused in the murder case while the other is a suspect.

They are Moniruzzaman Monir, student of water resources engineering;

Md Akash, student of computer science and engineering; and Shamsul Arefin Rafat, student of mechanical engineering.

Monir is library affairs secretary of the BCL Buet unit. It could not be confirmed whether the other two have any political affiliation.

So far, police have arrested 12 out of the 19 accused in the case. A Dhaka



court yesterday granted a five-day remand for each of the 10 accused who were arrested on Monday.

The murder case was transferred to the Detective Branch of the police yesterday.

'BUET AUTHORITIES FAILED'
Buet Teachers' Association President Dr AKM Masud said Abrar died because of the university authorities' failure to protect students.

Masud went to the Buet campus around 12:30pm and expressed solidarity with the agitating students.

"It is the duty of the university authorities to ensure safety and security of every resident student on the campus, but they have failed to do so," he said.

"Their inactiveness in stopping

torture and ragging at the dormitories in the past led to Abrar's murder. The security system of Buet has collapsed. The university authorities must take the responsibility for the murder," he added.

Earlier around 11:00am, Mizanur Rahman, head of the Directorate of Buet Students' Welfare, went to the campus to talk to the agitating students.

In the face of repeated questions about the role of the authorities in ensuring security of students, he said, "In principle, I agree to all your demands but I don't have the capacity to fulfil those..."

NUMEROUS INJURY MARKS

There were numerous injury marks on Abrar's hands, legs and back, according to the physician who conducted autopsy on his body.

"The tissues in many parts of his body were severely damaged. He died due to internal haemorrhage, blood clotting and obstruction to blood circulation," Sohel Mahmud, head of the forensic medicine department at Dhaka Medical College, told The Daily Star yesterday.

ABRAR BURIED

Abrar was buried at his family graveyard at Raidanga village in Kushtia's Kumarkhali upazila around 10:00am after his third namaz-e-janaza.

After the burial, locals staged protests with placards, demanding exemplary punishment to the killers.

He was loved by many

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Hossain, a government employee who knows Abrar's family, also said he still could not believe that Abrar died due to such a heinous act.

Abrar was a second-year student of the Department of Electrical and Electronics Engineering (EEE) at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet). He was beaten to death by Bangladesh Chhatra League men at his university dorm on Sunday night.

Habibul's sentiment was echoed in that somber gathering. Most of them became emotional while responding to queries.

Those who were closely associated with the family or had seen Abrar growing up said Abrar was polite,

meritorious and religious.

Another villager, Altaf Hossain, said although Abrar visited his ancestral home occasionally, he had always been respectful and loved to play with the other children.

"He loved to play football or cricket with the little kids. He was also the go-to-person for students who wanted to solve a math problem or enrich their English grammar skill. He sat with those kids in front of his home to impart lessons," Altaf said.

He demanded exemplary punishment for the killers.

Mir Zahid, a teacher of Kushtia Zilla School from where Abrar completed his secondary schooling, said there are two types of students -- one chaotic and the other polite and meritorious.

"Abrar belonged to the latter group. He hardly talked in the class, but was first to answer a question," the teacher said, adding everybody loved him.

Nader Hossain, a relative of the slain Buet student, said Abrar always dreamed of doing big things.

"He was eager to learn and whenever a relative went to Dhaka he requested them to bring books," Nader said.

Abrar's grandfather, who is now 86 and lives in Roydanga village, looked very annoyed over whispers of his grandson's affiliation with Jamaat-Shibir.

"I have learnt politics from Bangabandhu. I was loyal to his Awami League. How are people saying that I was not involved with the Awami

League? I want to talk to Prime Minister Hasina," the octogenarian said.

Abrar's younger brother Abrar Fiyaz said that his parents were totally devastated. His father Barkatullah said: "They have shattered my dream. They have ruined us."

The family was going through economic hardship after Barkatullah's retirement. They had hoped Abrar would be the one to make things better.

But Abrar took a final journey back home, leaving the nation in mourning. The second Namaz-e-janaza of Abrar was held at Al-Hera Jame mosque, near Abrar's residence at PTTI road in Kushtia town and the first Janaza was held in his university (Buet) in Dhaka on Monday night.