

He's feigning hurt

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Abrar was Mehedi Hasan Robein, organising secretary of Buet BCL.

"After Robein started it, Anik joined him. At one stage of the relentless beating, Anik went out [of the room] but came back soon afterwards. He again struck Abrar [with a stump] who then lost his consciousness," a police officer told The Daily Star.

The others who led the torture are Mefahul Islam Zion and Ifi Mosharrif Shakal, the officer said wishing anonymity.

The grisly murder at Sher-e-Bangla Hall of Buet sometime between 7:30pm Sunday and 2:30am Monday, sparked widespread protests at different universities.

Investigators think, 23 or 24 Buet students were involved in the killing, police said.

Meanwhile, detectives yesterday picked up Buet student Shakhawat Iqbal Ovi from old Dhaka. An officer said he was inside the room where Abrar was beaten up for hours.

The same BCL group had beaten up Shakhawat around six months ago and fractured his hand, said the source.

RASEL CALLED THE POLICE

Receiving a call from Buet BCL General Secretary Mehedi Hasan Rasel, Chawkbazar Police Station sent a team led by a sub-inspector to Sher-e-Bangla Hall around 2:15am Monday.

Buet campus doctor Masuk Elahi said he went to the hall around 3:00am after receiving phone calls from students and found Abrar dead.

"It seemed to me that Abrar died about an hour or an hour and a half before I had reached the hall around 3:00am," Masuk said.

Sub-inspector Delwar Hossain, who went to the hall with a constable and an Ansar member, said after he reached, Rasel told him that he had informed the hall provost and asked him to wait in the reception room until the provost arrived.

Delwar said after waiting for around 45 minutes, he again called Rasel from a hall security guard's phone.

"When Rasel came, I asked what had happened. He said a Shibir man has been caught and beaten up, I wanted to go upstairs. But Rasel said there was no need [for me] to go inside," Delwar told The Daily Star.

The SI also said he asked Rasel to allow him to take the injured student to a hospital, but Rasel said the

student suffered minor injuries and they would take care of him once the provost arrived.

Prof Zafar Iqbal Khan, who was the hall provost, resigned yesterday. He didn't answer his phone when this correspondent called him.

The SI said he then informed the matter to the inspector and left the hall.

Around 4:00pm, Chawkbazar police received a call and were informed that a Buet student had been killed. The same team from the police station went to the hall and saw that the provost, physician, student adviser and Buet's security personnel were there.

Police sources said Rasel and other students involved with the killing actually tried to buy time to destroy evidence.

Asked why police had not entered the hall despite receiving information that a student was injured, a senior officer of Lalbagh division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police said without the consent of the provost or at least a house tutor, police do not enter a public university hall.

Police officials said even after Abrar's death, Rasel and Shakal seemed quite nonchalant. In the morning, they hung around the hall and smoked cigarettes while senior police officials and hall authorities had gathered.

TALES OF BRUTALITY

"He [Abrar] is pretending. [He] can be beaten up for two more hours," Anik was telling when the second-year student of Buet was left on the staircase between the ground floor and the first floor after being beaten up for hours.

Another attacker, Zion made a similar comment, asking his fellows to keep Abrar on the floor.

"He is pretending. Keep him here," Zion said.

Some students, who witnessed the last moments of Abrar before his agonising death, yesterday narrated the brutality of the attackers to the agitating students in front of the Shaheed Minar of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.

"I could not sleep for the last three nights as I saw him [Abrar] in that condition. I could not save him," Kazi Mohiuddin Alamgir, a student of electrical and electronic engineering, said in a loudspeaker.



Students near the TSC of Dhaka University reenact the violence on campus as part of their protests that have taken the campus by storm since the killing of Buet student Abrar. Buet alumni form a human chain at the Shaheed Minar on their campus demanding justice for Abrar. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN/STAR

Buet VC visits Abrar's grave amid protests

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leaders at the university's Sher-e-Bangla Hall sometime between 7:30pm Sunday and 2:30am Monday.

Around 4:00pm, Prof Saiful reached Kushtia Circuit House along with some teachers and officials of Buet. After having lunch there, they set out for Abrar's village home and reached there around 5:15pm.

Kushtia Deputy Commissioner Aslam Hossain, Superintendent of Police SM Tanvir Arafath, Kushtia Awami League General Secretary Asgor

Ali, Kushtia Zilla Parishad Chairman Robitul Islam and other top officials were with him.

The VC first met Abrar's grandfather Abdul Gafur. Talking to the VC, the grandfather burst into tears. At district administration officials' request, Abrar's father Barkatullah came up to the VC.

Speaking to Prof Saiful, Barkatullah said he had been in Dhaka for 23 hours with the body of his son, but the VC did not meet him. "You only communicated with me over mobile



Remove Buet VC, punish the killers

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India.

'REMOVE VC'

Over a hundred members of Buet Alumni Association yesterday thronged the university campus and expressed solidarity with the agitating students on their demands.

At a rally there, they demanded removal of the VC, recasting of the university administration, expulsion of the accused students and holding the murder case's trial at a speedy trial tribunal.

Buet Alumni Association President Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury placed a seven-point demand, including banning politics and ragging on the campus.

"This brutal murder [of Abrar Fahad] is the outcome of the university authorities' and the vice chancellor's years of reluctance, mismanagement and failure in ensuring security on the campus," he said.

"Qualified, bold and neutral persons should get promotions and the same administration needs to be recast through the removal of the VC. It is necessary to protect the historic image of the institution," he added.

ULTIMATUM

Agitating students continued their demonstration on the campus for the third straight day yesterday to press home their 10-point demand, including ensuring death sentence to Abrar's killers.

Skipping classes, the students joined a sit-in on the university's Shaheed Minar premises around 10:00am. About an hour and half later, the demonstrators put up a barricade at Palashi Intersection and in Baksibazar. They chanted slogans in favour of their demands.

The demands include expulsion of all the accused students, stopping of torture in the name of ragging and a ban on organisation-based politics on the campus.

The protesters gave the university authorities a two-day ultimatum to give compensations to Abrar's family, withdraw the provost of Sher-e-Bangla Hall and identify and expel the students who killed Abrar.

The university authorities were given until October 15 to meet the other demands.

Around 500 students of Dhaka

University brought out a procession on the campus around 1:30pm and extended support to the demands.

Earlier in the morning, a section of Buet teachers and students brought out a silent procession in the morning, demanding justice for Abrar.

Around 7:00pm, Buet students held a candlelight vigil on the campus over the same demand.

BAN 'INDIRECT' POLITICS
Buet Teachers' Association also expressed solidarity with the protesters.

Speaking to reporters, its President AKM Masud said their meeting in the morning decided that they would recommend banning indirect and student and teachers' politics on the campus.

At that time, he also placed their eight-point demand, including resignation of the Buet VC.

"Such a situation has been created as the VC did not give proper assistance in the academic activities. He is responsible for Abrar's killing. We will not let our institution get spoiled because of an "unskilled" vice-chancellor," said Prof Masud.

The demands include evicting outsiders from the university halls.

'ENSURE SECURITY'
Holding black flags, students, teachers and their guardians brought out a procession at Dhaka University, demanding justice for Abrar and safety of students on the campus.

They alleged hall provosts were failing to ensure security at the dormitories and demanded their resignation for that.

At a rally on the foot of Raju Memorial Sculpture, eminent lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua slammed the Buet administration over Abrar's killing and asked, "If you failed to ensure security of students, why did you take the responsibilities as VC, pro-VC and provost?"

"They [Chhatra League activists] killed freedom of opinion through the killing of Abrar," he said.

Jahangirnagar University's Prof Anu Muhammad said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina should shoulder the responsibilities of all activities of Chhatra League as she was the organisational chief of BCL.

DU Economics Prof MM Akash said

phone."

Then the VC went to Abrar's grave to offer prayers.

He also talked to journalists there. Journalists asked him why he came to the village four days after the incident and why he did not even attend the namaz-e-janaza of Abrar.

In reply, he said he had to contact all, including the prime minister and education minister, and he had to make decisions observing the overall situation.

About the expulsion of Abrar

killers, he said he would take all necessary steps in this regard.

Then the VC left for Abrar's home. But he could not pass through the gate due to obstruction by a large number of people, mostly women.

The demonstrators urged him to go back and resign. They also chanted slogans, demanding justice of Abrar killing.

When the VC was about to leave the place, an aunt of Abrar lay down in front of his car. Police then removed her.

Botswana rhinos risk wipeout as poaching rises

AFP, Gaborone

Nine Botswana rhinos have been poached since April, the government said yesterday, an unprecedented rate of one per month that could see rhinos wiped out in the southern African country by 2021.

The thousands of rhinos that once roamed Africa and Asia have been culled by poaching and habitat loss. Very few are found outside national parks and reserves, where they remain threatened.

Botswana is home to just under 400 rhinos, according to Rhino Conservation Botswana, most of which roam the grassy plains of the northern Okavango Delta.

A ministry of environment statement said two rhinos were poached within five days in the Okavango late last month, raising the total number to nine since April.

"We have been losing about a rhino a month to poaching," said Mmadi Reuben, rhino coordinator for Botswana's wildlife department in the statement.

"If the poaching continues at this rate there will be no rhinos in Botswana in a year or two, especially the black rhino."

While southern white rhinos have been rescued from extinction, black rhinos are still considered critically endangered, with only around 4,200 living in the wild.

Less than 20 are found in Botswana, which is also home to the continent's largest elephant population.

Botswana has a zero-tolerance approach to poaching and previously operated a "shoot-to-kill" policy against perpetrators.

"The anti-poaching forces have now placed the protection of rhinos and location of these poaching gangs as their highest priority," said the statement, adding that two perpetrators were killed in recent operations.

But poaching is escalating in the region, driven by demand for rhino horn in Asian countries, and authorities are overwhelmed.

Buet admin did nothing

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by some Chhatra League men at a university dormitory on Monday, sparking countrywide outrage.

"This has been going on for a long time and it did not happen overnight. Undoubtedly, it is the failure of the university authority and also the teachers," AKM Masud, president of Buet Teachers' Association, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the teachers' association had a meeting yesterday where representatives of dormitory authorities said they were aware of the abuses but could not act properly as they did not get the necessary support from their higher authorities.

Masud said, "Why do meritorious students become unruly after getting admission here? It is an issue for concern. Another matter of concern is that the authorities go into denial mode because of political pressure."

Citing meeting discussions, he said the dorm authorities had reported the matter to higher authorities but was asked to "manage the situation".

Masud mentioned the director of students' welfare (DSW) as one of the higher authorities tasked with looking after the students.

Most of the teachers said students were scared of making formal complaints because of backlash. Even after formal complaints, perpetrators have hardly ever been punished or the punishments meted out.

Around 1:00am on July 25, some Chhatra League leaders called Abhijeet Kar to the common room of Ahsanullah Hall. When Abhijeet went there, he saw 14 other students in the room. All of them were asked to stand in a line and then Chhatra League leaders beat them up.

Sowmitro Lahiri of mechanical engineering department had slapped Abhijeet.

Abhijeet started bleeding from the ear.

Seeing his condition, Sowmitro sent Abhijeet to his room. Abhijeet went to the doctor's the next day. The doctor said that his ear drum was perforated and blood had clotted inside the ear.

Abhijeet then lodged a complaint with the DSW which formed a probe body. The Daily Star obtained a copy of the probe report.

It recommended suspension of Sowmitro Lahiri, Plaban Chowdhury, Nahid Ahmed, Farhad Hossain Mithu, Anab Chowdhury and Sabbyasachi Das from Ahsanullah Hall for a year each and prevent them from entering the dorm.

The committee also recommended harsher punishment of Sowmitro and

Plaban through Board of Residence and Discipline for the greater interest of the university.

The university authorities last month expelled only Sowmitro and Plaban from the dorm for a year and the rest were sort of let off with suspended sentences.

But in reality, the duo did not leave the dormitory right away, said students and an assistant provost.

Two more students of Suhrawardy Hall faced similar beatings but the university did not take any action.

A final-year student of computer science and engineering, said six people attacked him on November 23 last year at MA Rashid Hall.

They beat him with cricket stumps causing a tear in his left leg ligament.

The beating was for refusing to pay the "charge" for a "hall feast" some students organised. The CSE student had refused as he would not be in the dormitory during the feast.

The student could not walk for one month but did not lodge any complaint fearing retribution.

He said even though he did not lodge any complaint, the hall provost and assistant provost knew about the matter.

An assistant provost said these were not isolated incidents and that these had been going on for the last five to six years.

"It is a cumulative failure of the university administration. We failed to protect the students," the assistant provost said wishing not to be named.

Another assistant provost said the situation would have been different had the administration taken proper action for each of the incidents.

"It is our failure. It was our duty to protect the students but we could not because of politicisation of the administration. Whenever we filed complaints with the DSW, the director always says 'adjust with the situation'," the assistant provost said.

A Buet student said, "If the administration had taken proper action and were proactive, Abrar would not have died and Chhatra League men could not have gotten the audacity to repeat such incidents."

Prof Md Mizanur Rahman, director at the office of the DSW, said, "It is not my failure. It may be an institutional failure.

"I took the charge three months ago. If anyone can say in front of me that I asked them 'to manage the situation', I will resign right away."

The Daily Star tried to contact the vice-chancellor and the registrar of the university for comments but they could not be reached.

Search all university dorms

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student politics.

"I myself emerged [as a leader] through student politics, why should I talk about banning student politics?"

The PM, however, said if the Buet authorities want to do so, they can. "They have a Syndicate and a committee. They can do it. We won't interfere in it."

She also said this is an autocratic attitude that student politics should be completely banned.

The PM also questioned the justification of the student movement when the government is taking action against the offenders.

"Why is this movement? The trial [of the offenders] must be held. It's necessary to feel the pain of a mother or a father who lost their children. I understand it ... I lost my father, mother and brothers," Hasina said.

The PM mentioned that after learning about the incident, she asked police to immediately collect CCTV footage and evidence from the spot.

It is regrettable that policemen were obstructed by students when they were returning with the hard disk containing the CCTV footage, she said.

"The IGP informed me that police members were not being allowed to come out with the evidence and footage."

Hasina said students obstructed police not because they were taking the CCTV footage but in fear that they would destroy the evidence. But police took steps for proper autopsy of the body, collected evidence and arrested those involved in the incident from different rooms of the Buet hall.

"My question is why police were obstructed from collecting the evidence? they [police] later collected the footage and gave a copy of it to the authorities. Now police are identifying the offenders by examining the footage."

The PM said it is necessary to find out the reason for obstructing police as three hours were lost because of it. Mentioning that Abrar suffered internal injuries, not many external ones, she recalled that many Awami League leaders were killed in similar manner after 2001.

Hasina said she immediately instructed Chhatra League leaders to expel all those involved in the murder. "I also instructed police to arrest them. We had taken steps before students took to the streets."

Referring to her India visit, the PM said the AL government always protects the country's interest, reports BSS.

She pointed out that the volume of water India would get from the Feni

river is insignificant and meant only for drinking.

"We always protect our interest in all fields... the stretch of the river [Feni] from where India will take water is a catchment area and it belongs to Bangladesh. That is why we signed an MoU with India," she said.

She said her government has already discussed with India the water-sharing of the Monu, Mohuri, Khowai, Gumti, Dharla and Dudhkumar rivers, and steps are being taken in this regard.

"Besides, discussion is going on over the water-sharing of the Teesta river."

She also mentioned that the source of the Feni river is in Khagrachari and about 94km-stretch of the river is along the Indian border.

Hasina said the scarcity of drinking water is acute in Tripura's Sabroom town, and the MoU was signed with India to give it 1.82 cusec water.

"The volume of water we will give to India is very insignificant and we will use most of the water of this big river."

"If anyone wants water for drinking purposes, and if we don't give that, it doesn't look good," said Hasina.

Taking a swipe at BNP leaders for criticising the Feni river deal, she said Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia during their visits to India could not strike

any deal on the water-sharing of the Ganges river.

"When the media asked Khaleda Zia about the issue of Ganges water-sharing upon her return [from India], Khaleda Zia said she forgot to raise the issue during her visit to India," said Hasina.

"How could the party [BNP] talk about the issue of Feni river when it forgot to protect the country's interest and realise the rightful demand for water of a big river like the Ganges?"

Turning to the recent deal for exporting LPG to India, the PM said she can never ever compromise the country's interest and everyone should know that.

"We always put our country's interest first and there is nothing to raise question about this. We import LPG in bulk, then we bottle it and supply throughout the country as per our demand. We will export part of the excess LPG to Tripura of India."

She mentioned that a new LPG item would be added to the country's export basket as there would be a value addition after importing the LPG item in bulk.

Hasina also recalled the role of the people and the government of Tripura during Bangladesh's Liberation War in 1971.