

Politics at Dhaka University—as I experienced it



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I remember nothing from my very first visit to Dhaka as a child. My next visit to the capital was as a twelfth-grader, and by then I'd heard a lot of things about the University of Dhaka (DU) from my relatives, teachers, and others, so I was eager to see the university. However, I left Dhaka without being able to see it. After doing pretty well for my SSC and then obtaining second position on the merit list for my HSC from Jashore board, I enrolled in the Department of Finance and Banking at University of Dhaka in 1995.

After admission, I took it for granted that I would get a seat in the dormitory (or, hall). My academic results gave me further confidence to this end as well. But I was shocked to know that first-year students were not allowed to stay in the hall legally.

I was assigned to Surja Sen Hall but wasn't acquainted with anybody from there. Therefore, I began to stay with my cousin, who was placed in Jatir Janak Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall. There were four beds in the room for eight students, including myself. Initially, I was quite satisfied with the new accommodation. The only problem (and a lesson, too) was that we (two overweight cousins) had to fit into one small bed. After some months, political unrest erupted in the country—and so did my suffering.

Because of the political turmoil, the hall administration became very strict. House tutors started checking the identity cards of students at the entry point to the hall. As an outsider in the hall, I could not show them my card and had to make up excuses along the lines of "I forgot to bring my card" or "I'm visiting a friend here to study with him." At times, I was entirely unable to enter the hall and would stay the night with my friends

in other halls of DU.

I had to live in constant fear and panic, while also having to attend political rallies and programmes frequently. When I could not attend them due to academic pressures, I was scolded brutally. (Now I only feel relieved that I was not assaulted for violating their instructions!)

There were frequent raids in the hall, too. The police would arrest students on various grounds. As an outsider in the Jatir Janak Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall, I was always anxious that I might be arrested. Being on the top floor, I could always sense an incoming raid before most others. I would wake up and try to go into hiding, usually in the bathrooms where the police didn't usually check. Another method of avoiding harassment was to go to the reading room, even in the dead of night.

I eventually applied for a seat in Surja Sen Hall and finally acquired one. There were two beds in the room, and a student had already been occupying the bed assigned to me. When I requested him to vacate my seat, he informed me that he would continue to stay there. He was a part-time journalist, now living abroad. On the other bed was a senior student leader who often hosted late-night gossip and political discussion sessions. Needless to say, my studies were seriously hampered. I stayed in that room for one year.

I eventually got a ground floor room with a single bed in the beginning of my third year. But I was the only general student in the hall with this facility at that time; of the other two occupants of single rooms, one was involved in politics and another was a part-time journalist. But my privilege was short-lived because, soon enough, I was forced to

accommodate a politically connected student in my room. After one year of living with this person who lacked any etiquette, I applied for a better room and got one on the fourth floor. Before I had to encounter any political issues, I voluntarily allowed a first-year student to stay in my new room with me.

The cadres in our hall would lock the gate to force students to attend

become a hooligan to get revenge on the cadres. I could have gone to any of these extremes, but I restrained myself keeping in mind my family's and society's expectations from me.

But every student was not and is not as sensible as I was. There is every possibility that they may fall into a political trap.

Over time, the situation at the DU dorms worsened because of the

Hence, they must be prioritised when assigning seats at the residential halls. These are common practices at any good university globally. To ease up this process, the number of students being admitted to DU must be rationalised, as there are already enough public universities in the country.

As for politics, like in other sectors of the country, it has a role to play at

abroad; incurring a great loss for the country.

No government so far has shown adequate effort to solve the fundamental problems at the University of Dhaka. The issue of getting seats at residential halls, for instance, is left unresolved intentionally in order to make students subservient to political cadres. But once this problem is fixed,



VISUAL: REHNUMA PROSHON

processions. During exams, we had to show our admit cards to the cadres at the hall gate. In order to dodge political participation, I would leave the hall in the very early morning, have breakfast somewhere, and go to the library first and then to class.

I stood second and first, respectively, in my BBA and MBA exams. But I did not have an environment in the hall that was conducive to studying well. I had to struggle constantly. I had to play hide and seek with the cadres. And the problems I faced could have ruined me. I could have become one of the spoiled political cadres. I could have turned into the mastermind of a torture cell. I could even have

mismatch between the number of students and the available residential facilities. Many first-year students live in mass (gono) rooms, and some even reside on the balcony floors. It may be possible to live there, but it is difficult to study properly in these circumstances. After facing such problems in their first year, lots of students fail to perform well in exams. Some even fail and many drop out. The dreams of numerous students and their families fall flat on their faces.

The prevailing management system at the University of Dhaka's dormitories needs an overhaul. The first-year students come from different parts of the country and are not familiar with the capital

of the university, too. Politics shelters political cadres. It makes some student leaders rich, and helps some less qualified candidates to become teachers. Being politically involved also increases the probability of one becoming a vice chancellor, provost, proctor, house tutor, and more. It also assists many to get important positions outside the university. In a resource-constrained institution, politics works as a means for one to get a piece of the pie. However, such distribution of benefits is disincentive for scores of teachers who silently leave this university. Many do not come back after finishing their higher studies

students can be less dependent on politics and have more room to be open-minded free thinkers. These students will be driven by reasoning and always challenge authority.

As is clear, a university with a lack of resources poses fewer threats to the position of authority. But it is not a scarcity of resources that keeps the problems unresolved; it is simply due to a lack of intention to solve these issues at all. We must realise that the image of students huddled together in gono rooms, on balconies, and sometimes even in mosques is a disgraceful one for a centennial university to display. It is also not commensurate with Bangladesh's pace of development.

A sweet and sour Thanksgiving



AN OPEN DIALOGUE

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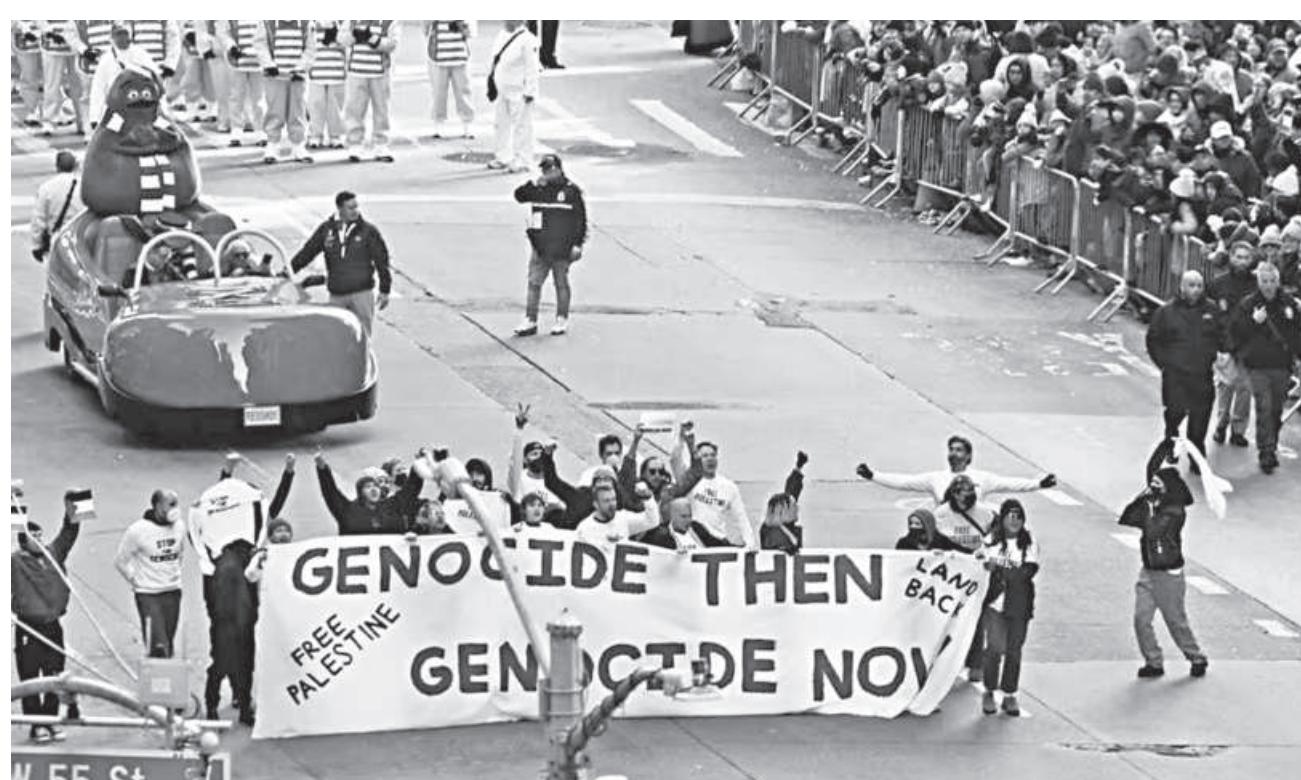
ABDULLAH SHIBLI

This Thanksgiving was a sad one for me. I realised that I was only going through the motions. I joined my family for the usual sumptuous dinner: roasted turkey, baked pie, and mashed potatoes, among others. But my heart was not really in it, as if I was acting only out of respect for the children and for tradition's sake. My mind was elsewhere as I went through the rounds of feasts, parades, and football games that are part of the Thanksgiving ritual I have gotten used to over the last four decades.

Thanksgiving Day is celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November. You gather with family and loved ones around tables overflowing with food and drink to offer thanks to your family, your community, your homeland, and others who have played a role in your life—often in a dining room lit with candles and decorated in the season's colours of red, gold, orange, and brown.

The reason behind my sadness this year was that, at every step I took and with every breath I inhaled, I could not help but be aware of the hellish conditions in another part of the world: Gaza. I remembered my fellow human beings who are living in Gaza and have been bearing the brunt of the Israeli war machine, the IDF, supported by the brutal might of Western powers. I have seen horrific photographs, heard heart-rending accounts of IDF's brutality, and read stories from the war zone that have moved me immensely. The death and destruction, the casualties from the indiscriminate bombardment of civilian targets, including hospitals, and the indescribable sufferings of innocent and helpless women and children are constantly on my mind.

I only watch a little TV, but regularly read the newspapers and check the messages on my phone. The images from Gaza City and the Rafah Border Crossing are mind-boggling. The satellite images depict the scale of the devastation in Gaza following the month-and-a-half of non-stop aerial and ground attacks unleashed by the Israeli forces. Gaza City is the largest city in the State of Palestine, with more than half a million residents, and Israel has methodically pounded



People demonstrate during the 97th Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, in Manhattan, New York City on November 23.

every single structure in order to wipe out the existence of the Palestinian people. And it is not only Israeli politicians who have vowed to push the Palestinians out of Gaza; even some US and European politicians have approved the goal to have this nation be "wiped off the face of the Earth."

The relentless Israeli airstrikes appear to have but one mission: to bring Palestinians down to their knees. Kill them, starve them, and force them to beg for surrender. The Gaza health ministry said they stopped keeping a count of the people who died after November 10, once the fighting and the destruction of the communications network made tallying from the hospitals nonviable.

The entire region of Gaza is severely short on food, water, medicine, and fuel. Fortunately, Jordan has offered to lend a helping hand and fly out a field hospital in

anymore. A World Health Organization team that visited al-Shifa Hospital said that while most of the patients have left, there are a few remaining patients with amputations, burns, or other trauma, with plans being made to evacuate them in the coming days.

On Thanksgiving Eve, the National Public Radio (NPR) news programme announced that 31 premature babies in "extremely critical condition" were transferred from al-Shifa Hospital to Egypt. Earlier, these newborns had been receiving urgent care in Rafah, a city in the south. There was a shortage of incubators, and the babies had dehydration, hypothermia, and sepsis in some cases, said Mohamed Zagout, director general of Gaza's hospitals. Four other babies died in the two days before the evacuation, he said.

The fate of the newborns at al-Shifa

hypocrisy of the Western world, which is pouring in money and armaments to perpetuate the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East. Just before I was sitting down with my family for Thanksgiving dinner, I could see the sun setting down on the western sky, and I couldn't help thinking of the millions of others who were rushing down Salaluddin Road—the main thoroughfare through Gaza—heading south in panic; uncertain as to where they would be able to find shelter or take cover if the Israeli jets targeted them.

My wife led the prayer: "Thank you, Allah, for the food we are about to eat, for those who are here to share these blessings, for the generosity of all who make this possible. Bless those who are here and those who are in our hearts, and all those who are not as fortunate on this day. Ameen."

CROSSWORD

BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS	30 Tennis category	8 Cleanser bottle
1 Not napping	34 Good times	9 1986 World Series
6 Sells for	35 Pen fill	champs
11 1992 U.S. Open	36 Ripen	10 Overlooked, as
champ	37 Patron of England	faults
12 Dominant	40 Bert's buddy	14 Utah ski resort
13 Patron of Scotland	41 Was a nomad	19 Land unit
15 Genesis woman	42 Dance makeup	22 Breathing organ
16 Bullring cry	43 Disreputable	23 Points a finger at
17 Band blaster	24 Graphics for layouts	25 Chef's specialty
18 Lease signers	26 Absurd	28 Join the chorus
20 Backer's vote	29 Useful skill	30 Places
21 "Spy Game" org.	2 Make baskets	31 Tadpole, e.g.
22 "Why don't we?"	3 Space visitor	32 Spurred (on)
23 Capital of Ghana	4 Boxer Norton	33 Rundown
26 Pop	27 Detective's find	38 Tiny taste
28 Junior, to senior	5 Latvia neighbor	39 Sound of delight
29 102, in old Rome	6 Walking aids	
34 35	7 Un-original	

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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