

## Make room for JU freshers in the halls

### Why are non-student cadres of BCL still occupying halls?

It is unfortunate that students of the 2022-23 academic year in Jahangirnagar University could not start their classes on time or in person because the university administration could not provide them with accommodation facilities in the residential halls. The students had to start their classes online, on November 30, having waited for five months since their admission test. While the administration previously said they would start classes after opening the newly-built residential halls for freshers, they apparently failed to do it. Meanwhile, more than 500 seats in various halls remain occupied by non-students tied with Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), according to a report by *Prothom Alo*. The question is: why didn't the university evict outsiders to make room for freshers?

At present, JU has 17 old residential halls as well as four new ones that have been inaugurated recently. Why couldn't the administration make accommodation facilities for the newcomers in these halls? Moreover, why can't they evict the non-student cadres of BCL? Reportedly, earlier this year, the administration ordered them to vacate the seats they were occupying "within seven days." Seven months have passed since then, but no one did so or was expelled from the halls. Why? According to a teacher of JU, the administration does not want to drive them out because it uses them to run the university and to suppress dissent, which is not surprising at all.

Over the past 15 years, we have seen how unruly members of the ruling party's student wing have ruined the educational environment in most of our public universities. The BCL leaders—many of whom are non-students—not only keep the residential halls under control by forcing general students to abide by their rules, but also engage in seat trades and have cultivated the *gono* (mass) room culture for their own interests. The situation is so dire that sometimes it seems as if it is the BCL members—and not university authorities—that run public residential halls and campuses.

Recently, we have seen how BCL goons have attacked a journalist at Chittagong University, and held the JU vice-chancellor hostage at his office for about two hours for not appointing a certain BCL leader as teacher. They are also engaged in all types of criminal activities, including mugging and extortion. But strangely, nothing is being done to prevent them by the university administrations or the higher authorities. And it is the general students who are suffering as a result. The BCL, therefore, must be reined in to improve the overall educational environment of our public universities. And at JU, we urge the authorities to take stern action against the outsiders and solve its accommodation crisis.

## Overhaul the Cyber Security Agency

### Citizens' data must be protected

We are alarmed to learn that even five years after the Digital Security Act (DSA) was enacted, the Digital Security Agency—renamed National Cyber Security Agency following the passage of the Cyber Security Act (CSA)—still remains non-functional. According to a report by this daily, the agency was not provided with necessary equipment or manpower to perform its critical role. The DSA made way for robust provisions for its operation to "ensure the emergency security of critical information infrastructure." Yet, reportedly, it still lacks operational capabilities, including a national computer emergency response team and digital forensic labs, that were promised in the law. The lacklustre state of such a vital institution reveals the sheer apathy of the government to protect citizens' data.

Developing the manpower and capacity of the agency should have been a priority for those in charge. When asked for comments, the agency's director-general, Abu Sayed Md Kamruzzaman, said the delay in developing the institution mainly arises from "misconstruction as many government agencies do not understand the importance of cybersecurity." If that is the case, then what explains the government's heavy investment in cybersecurity surveillance software, including the expensive Spearhead system from Israel, with whom Bangladesh has no diplomatic ties? This situation is completely unacceptable.

It is no secret that government sites are being increasingly targeted because of their weaknesses, leaving citizens' personal information up for grabs. In October, following a massive data breach, officials acknowledged that the personal information of 5.5 crore holders of smart NID cards were available on a Telegram channel. Recently, the tech magazine *Wired* found that the National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre (NTMC), an intelligence agency, left its database, containing personal metadata, exposed to a spy agency. The fact that government servers such as the Office of the Registrar General, Birth and Death Registration—one of the 29 government-declared critical information infrastructures that the agency is supposed to protect—have been breached shows the vulnerability of our IT system as well as the skewed priorities of the government.

The DSA, bereft of an agency overlooking its mandate and protecting citizens' data, has instead served as a draconian tool to suppress people's freedom of speech. As experts have pointed out, the CSA, which has replaced the DSA, still contains the same weaknesses that were abused over the years to crack down on dissent. Needless to say, genuine cybersecurity laws protect, rather than abuse, the people. We, therefore, urge the government and the ICT Division to overhaul the National Cyber Security Agency so that it can serve its role and ensure the security of the nation's cyber infrastructure.

# Is Awami League heading towards a Pyrrhic victory?

## What image of our legal system are we presenting to the world?



### THE THIRD VIEW

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MAHFUZ ANAM

As an ageing freedom fighter, I often reminisce about those glorious days of 1971 and how fortunate we had been to participate in our freedom struggle. We try to relive that time of glory, sacrifice and bravery, and dream of reigniting the inner glow, the indomitable aspirations, and the spirit of freedom that swept our inner beings, making each of us—the brave and the not-so-brave—into courageous and death-defying beings, ready to face a genocidal army.

Our constant companion and sources of inspiration and energy were our comrades-in-arms, so to speak. But we also took great inspiration from poems, patriotic songs, histories of struggles, and of course Bangabandhu's speech of March 7, 1971. There is one particular song from those days that is indelibly etched in my memory:

"Mora ekti phool ke bachabo boley  
juddho kori // Mora ekti mukher  
hashir jonno ostro dhoi"

("We wage war to save one flower //  
we pick up arms to preserve one smile")

**Aren't these kids the "flowers," to save whom we claimed to have fought the war? Were the smiles and laughter on these young faces not what we had taken up arms for? Can we blame the present generation if they conclude that all our pledges to our martyrs were just words without meaning? Through our present actions, haven't we made a mockery of the values of our struggle for independence? Did we lie to our future generations?**

I was thinking of this song as I read the story of six-year-old Siyam, who was pictured holding up a photo of his detained father, Abul Kalam—a 35-year-old BNP activist—at a rally in front of the Jatiya Press Club on Wednesday. There was Nurjahan, aged 4, and her older sister Aklima, aged 7, whose father has been in hiding to avoid arrest. The police picked up their mother, Hafsa Akhtar, and charged her with violence. The court granted Hafsa a three-day remand even though she, according to her family, never had anything to do with politics. These children had come to the rally with their grandparents. Four-year-old Nurjahan appeared totally lost in the absence of her mother, without whom she had never even stepped out of the house. At this rally, not understanding anything that's going on, she was crying out at the top of her lungs on hearing the mention of her parents' names on the microphone. There were many others like them, from toddlers to boys and girls of primary and secondary schools, who were demanding to know the whereabouts of their parents—mostly fathers—currently under detention.

Wasn't it the future generation of



Siyam, Nurjahan, Aklima, and all others like them deserve our apologies for those unfulfilled promises we made in our patriotic songs.

PHOTOS: AMRAN HOSSAIN

independent Bangladesh that we used to sing the above song for? Aren't these kids the "flowers," to save whom we claimed to have fought the war? Were the smiles and laughter on these young faces not what we had taken up arms for? Can we blame the present generation if they conclude that all our pledges to our martyrs were just words without meaning? Through our present actions, haven't we made a mockery of the values of our struggle for independence? Did we lie to our future generations?

The families of the victims of arbitrary arrest, torture, indiscriminate beating, and direct and indirect intimidation asked on Tuesday, "Is it a crime to be a BNP activist?" According to a body of pro-BNP lawyers, 20,326 opposition leaders and activists—mostly belonging to BNP—were arrested in 837 "fabricated and ghost cases" in which 73,123 were implicated across the country since October 28. Additionally, 8,249 were injured and 17 killed, including a journalist, in clashes with police and others.

So, are we to understand that opposition activists, especially those belonging to the BNP, have all suddenly become criminals? The official reply will be that only arsonists and not BNP activists are being hauled up. If that is so, why didn't we see more violence and arson when BNP held large rallies numbering thousands (or, in a few cases, hundreds of thousands)? Why, in spite of severe impediments like transport strikes and police excesses, did BNP activists not resort to violence? And why are cases, some of which are 5 to 10 years old, suddenly gathering pace at an unusual rate now, just before the election? Is not the message clear that the legal system is being routinely used for a political end—namely to obliterate the opposition?

Several things are happening now that worry us immensely.

First, the police have been let loose on the BNP to harass, intimidate, arrest, forcibly enter homes, detain family members if the targeted person is unavailable, implicate in cases at will, and more, which has created such an atmosphere of fear that many party activists have now abandoned their homes and have gone into hiding in adjacent villages and districts. This, in

ways: 1) anyone can be accused, and the cases—regardless of their merit—will most likely be accepted; and 2) bail is mostly arbitrary and no more a right, and may be denied without adequate reasoning. This means that getting accused leads to imprisonment and may even lead to remand. What comes to mind is the recent case against Khadijatul Kubra, wherein it took 14 months and eight petitions—including at the highest judicial level—for her to get bail.

Law is no longer a source of protection for the citizens, but a source of fear and oppression. Today, anybody can be implicated in any sort of case at any time and under any pretext—the police being the arbiter. And if one happens to be a known BNP activist, then our legal system is unlikely to be a guarantor of relief for him or her. Our law allows filing cases against "unknown" perpetrators, which may number from a few to several dozens to even hundreds. This gives an opening to the police to implicate literally anybody, especially those with a political tinge and those from the lower middle class (or small-time entrepreneurs and SME operators) who are helpless in facing the police and whose only way out is by dishing out cash. Authorities don't mind either, as it keeps the police happy.

What image of our legal system are we presenting to the world?

While writing this column, I couldn't help but think of the recent presidential election in the Maldives, where the opposition candidate—Mohamed Muizzu—won with 54 percent of votes while his opponent—the incumbent, I repeat, the incumbent—got 46 percent. The two parties have opposing ideologies. Yet, the election was without violence and the transfer of power peaceful. Despite being a role model for development, we can't do what the Maldives can.

In Thailand, Gen Prayut Chan-ocha, an usurper of power through a coup in 2014, who engineered his stay in power for the last nine years—met with complete defeat and had to step aside even with the army on his side. Again, even in a highly charged climate, both the election and transfer of power were peaceful.

The third election, that of Tayyip Erdogan of Türkiye held in May,

also deserves our attention. He is an ambitious, highly intolerant, and powerful leader who even changed the constitution to continue his stay in power, and got re-elected to extend his tenure into the third decade. Erdogan received 27.73 million votes—52 percent—in the run-off against his opponent, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, who got 25.43 million votes. The turnout



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Glitch in online GD filing

In the journey of digital transformation, the Bangladesh Police introduced its "online GD" project last year. The goal was to simplify the laborious procedure of filing a general diary (GD). At first, this service offered convenience and accessibility, enabling people to report lost property or threats without having to physically going to police stations. But in

recent weeks, the online GD filing platform has been inaccessible due to server issues, causing inconvenience to the citizens. I hope the police authorities will take steps to promptly resolve the server issues.

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REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE: COLLECTED