

■ **CAMPUS LIFE** ■

# Making our CAMPUSES SAFE

**AZRA HUMAYRA**

University is known to be institutions ripe with knowledge, brimming with the intellectual glow of educators who educate the brightest of the nation and students whose academic stamina knows no bounds. It is disheartening to acknowledge the unfortunate reality that within such a fortress of knowledge, where enlightenment is the cornerstone, safety is still not guaranteed for most of the students.

Perusing the pages of newspapers over the past few months substantiates this reality. Recently, there have been reports of an incident of sexual assault at Jahangirnagar University (JU) where a group of men, which included students, after detaining a couple, raped the wife on campus. There have also been reports of sexual harassment and molestation at Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) where the victim was going to take a practical class while passing through an autorickshaw driver, who touched her inappropriately from behind and tried to lift her into the vehicle. All of these happening within a few weeks presents a harrowing picture of how unsafe campuses have become for women.

The issue extends beyond women, as evident by the recent exclusion of Hochemin Islam from an event at North South University (NSU) on the grounds of purportedly promoting homosexuality and inciting religious outrage. Additionally, the demand from a faction of students to eliminate the transgender quota in the undergraduate programme admission test of Dhaka University (DU) underscores the inadequate safety measures for gender-diverse individuals.

**“Currently, the system predominantly emphasises merit without actively promoting extracurricular activities, student exchange initiatives, volunteerism, or participation in multiple debates that contribute to the holistic development of students’ minds.”**

We reached out to the NSU Public Relations team for comment, Director (Acting) Asif Bin Ali, who states, “NSU prioritises the safety and well-being of every student on campus, maintaining effective safety measures. If any student feels concerned about their safety, they have the option to approach the Proctor’s office either in person or through email to report the situation. The university is dedicated to ensuring a secure environment for all students and staffs, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, or religious identity. NSU upholds these principles without compromise.”

To add insult to injury, DU’s campus-based gangs getting involved in various crimes including physical assaults on students, and Chittagong University (CU)’s constant clashes among factions of student wings of major political parties are other reasons why students are having safety concerns. “On our campus, there are eleven political groups for eleven bogies. With so many groups, there is never a chance for peace; as a result, there is constant fighting among them,” CU hall resident Tahera Alam\* stated.

She further added, “After an incident, students occasionally cut the shuttle train’s pipes, severing the campus’s connection to the city. We are unable to travel to the city and they are unable to visit us. The students who are not part of these groups shouldn’t have to suffer for the actions of these political groups.”

Upon asking what can be done to combat the issues stemming from the lack of sympathy of university students, one of the members of The Sexual Harassment Cell of DU and professor at the Department of Women and Gender Studies, Dr Tania Haque, states, “Students gaining admission to universities are adults; however, the cultivation of empathy and broader perspectives should commence at an earlier stage. Currently, the system predominantly emphasises merit without actively promoting extracurricular activities, student exchange initiatives, volunteerism, or participation in multiple debates that contribute to the holistic development of students’ minds. Conflict is not the solution, with non-violent means we can bring transformation.”

Certain universities grapple with the challenge of large crowds congregating on their campuses, creating an environment that is less conducive to education. This issue is particularly pronounced in campuses such as CU, DU, and JU, where students frequently voice concerns about the compromised safety resulting from the increasing influx of people. Addressing this matter is essential to fostering a more secure and education-friendly atmosphere for the

student body.

Nawshin Flora, a fourth-year student of the Department of Women and Gender Studies at the DU, states, “I do not think the DU campus is entirely safe for women and people of non-cisgender identities. Political reasons aside, the influx of people every day on campus who are not students makes it a very unsafe place. I have been harassed by outsiders on campus after evening. The university authorities could surely do more to ensure the safety of students.”

In the pursuit of enhancing campus safety, Dr Tania Haque has advocated for widespread awareness and adherence to relevant laws. The proposed approach

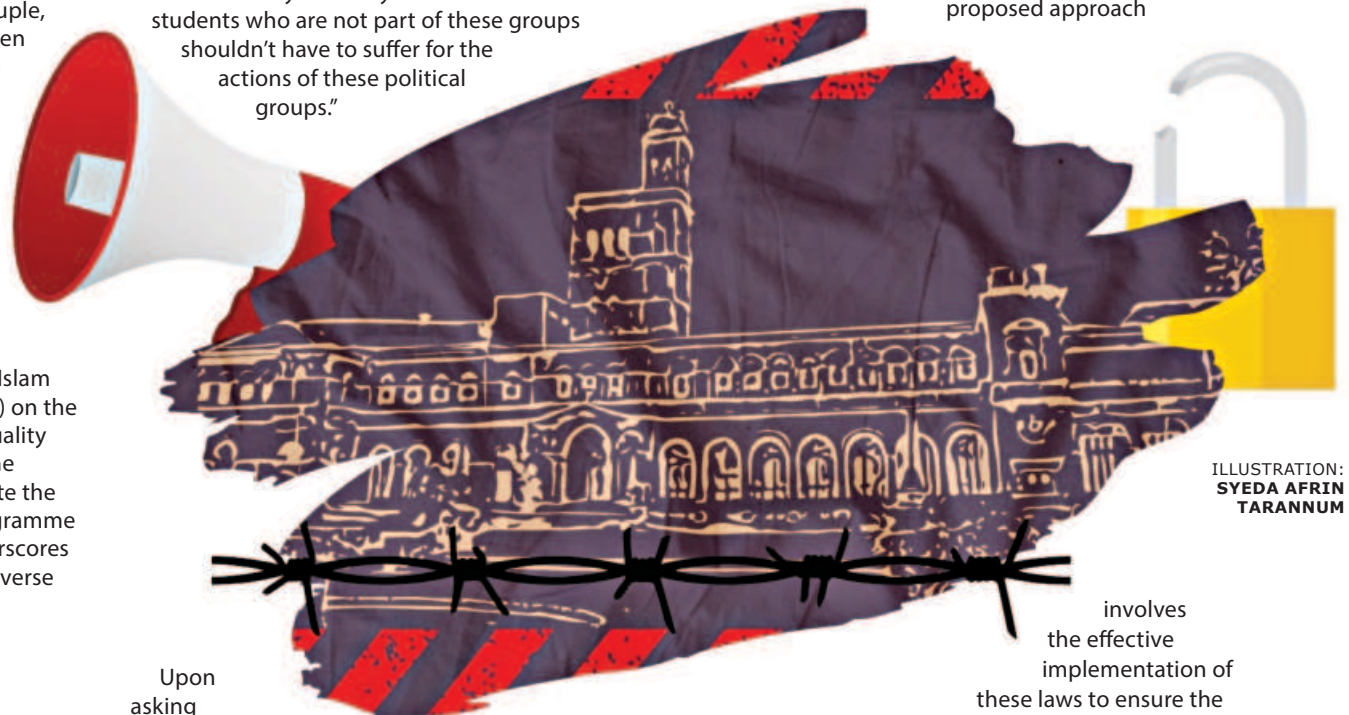


ILLUSTRATION:  
SYEDA AFRIN  
TARANNUM

involves the effective implementation of these laws to ensure the efficient functioning of universities. In instances where gaps exist, comprehensive training and awareness campaigns should be implemented across all levels of academic institutions. This initiative is deemed essential for the proactive prevention of criminal activities, fostering a secure environment on university campuses throughout Bangladesh.

Universities bear a significant duty to ensure campus safety, with a particular focus on the well-being of women and gender minorities. The current wave of sexual assaults and protests underlines the need for institutions to reassess and strengthen their commitment to creating a safe and supportive environment. Implementing strong preventive measures, raising awareness through programmes, establishing effective reporting mechanisms, and providing comprehensive support to victims are all critical steps toward cultivating a safe and sympathetic campus culture.

*\* Names have been changed upon request.*

*Azra Humayra is majoring in Mass Communication and Journalism at Dhaka University.*