

# Why was Abu Sayed shot dead in cold blood?



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Why was Abu Sayed of Rangpur’s Begum Rokeya University shot down by police? He was standing alone, totally unarmed with arms stretched out, holding no weapons but a stick. Nor was he engaged in any violent activities. When he was shot, he posed no threat to police and was standing quite a distance away, which an eye-estimate suggests could be about 50-60 feet. Yet police shot him in cold blood. Earlier, we saw the home minister, an otherwise soft-spoken person, explain several times how the police were exercising restraint. He claimed repeatedly that police had been instructed not to indulge in any violence and also not to engage the demonstrators in a way that may lead to violence. Yet police shot an unarmed student who stood all by himself showing that he posed no danger.

Sayed was one of the nine children of very poor parents. He was the youngest and the brightest of nine brothers and sisters. When he got admitted to Begum Rokeya University, the first one ever from his family, his siblings were so elated that they all contributed to his studies, even by saving from their own educational expenses. His very old and ill father said they all hoped that Abu Sayed would change the fate of the family after joining the government service, which was his life’s sole aim. This made him interested in the quota reforms, and hence he joined the protests. His story clearly shows that his desire was only to reform the quota system so that his chances of success would increase. There was no other agenda as is now being alleged. As reported in this paper, at 12:37pm



on Monday, the day before his murder, Sayed shared a photo card of martyred Professor Shamsuzzoha, a young Rajshahi University teacher who was shot dead while trying to protect student protesters in 1969. He wrote, “Sir, we desperately need you right now ... Your legacy is our inspiration. We are enlightened by your ideals”. Prof

Shamsuzzoha became one of the heroes of student movement inspiring us in the lead-up to our Liberation War. As someone dedicated to our freedom and progress, he also served as a source of inspiration in the following five decades of our independence. Sayed was riddled with shotgun pellets causing his death. A post-mortem has been done but result has not yet been made public. Meanwhile, he has been buried. We are heartened by the PM’s promise of a judicial probe. But that will likely take time. We request a separate and immediate enquiry into Sayed’s killing and exemplary actions against the guilty. We are no stranger to killings in demonstrations. But such a singular killing that looked very much like a targeted one is something completely new. That is why it needs immediate investigation. Nothing, absolutely nothing, can justify this action except the arrogance and assured impunity that police have known to be enjoying over the years. Meanwhile, an apology from the police and the home ministry to the family may go a long way to assuage the feeling of outrage that presently exists.

## Universities and the govt have failed the students



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The violence occurring in various campuses in and outside of Dhaka over the last few days is making us anxious and worried about the safety of our students and that of regular citizens. If the universities had fulfilled their responsibility of ensuring safety of their own students, the situation would not have become so concerning. The government’s liability is also not to be ignored. We can guess that it is due to the government’s direction that the UGC shut down the university campuses. The campus shutdown was enacted the day after the student body of the ruling party was removed from the residential halls. At the very least, the university authorities had the responsibility of ensuring passage of students following the shutdown of campuses. Not only did they fail to ensure this, but they also enabled the BGB, police, and different ruling party bodies such as Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and Jubo League to violently attack the students. This has resulted in at least 13 deaths—and we are afraid the count will only go up. The responsibility for this bloodshed cannot be avoided by either the government or the university authorities. On Wednesday, some of us from the University Teachers Network Against Repression tried to rescue the persecuted students. We attempted to organise a rally. There, we witnessed a large deployment of BGB and RAB members on Dhaka University (DU) campus. Instead of ensuring a safe passage for the students to leave Dhaka University, Rokeya University, Jahangirnagar University, Shahjalal Science and Technology University and so on, the students were attacked and forced out of their own campuses. The university authorities and teachers had no consideration of how these students would suddenly return home at the middle of the night or what their mode of transport would be. Today, we have seen students from schools, colleges, and universities come under atrocious attacks by the police and BCL in many places in Dhaka, including Badda, Dhanmondi, and Mirpur. Brac University attempted to protect its students on its campus, but when injured students tried to seek medical help, they were stopped by law enforcement agencies. The government needs to move away from this aggressive approach. They need to understand that fulfilling the students’ demands was not impossible. The students made logical demands that did not deserve this violent retribution. The universities must be reopened so the students can safely return. Those responsible for the killings and attacks need to be tracked down and brought to justice. None of these deaths can go unanswered. University authorities who have failed their students should resign. These are our demands as conscientious teachers.



Students hold a symbolic gayebi janaza on July 17, 2024, in the Dhaka University campus.

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

### WHAT HAPPENED ON WEDNESDAY

## An account from JU

A FEMALE STUDENT OF DU

We started the quota reform protest long before the attacks. On July 15, the students who had gone out at 3pm to attend a rally were attacked with sticks by BCL. It also included attackers from outside, i.e. non-JU students led by the JU Chhatra League. As a result, many students were in the hospital. Another portion who were still protesting remained near the VC’s residence seeking safety. Cocktails were used and the recordings of the attacks are still available on the Facebook feeds of several students. The students had felt the VC’s residence may have been a safe space, yet they were attacked. When the police arrived, there was some relief, but they soon realised that the police had come to protect the VC, not the general students. At that point, the police used tear shells and other weapons in their arsenal. The attack lasted till 4am, all the way till dawn. Many students had to be admitted to Enam Medical College Hospital, with one student in critical condition. On the morning of the 16th, when the news spread, thousands of students arrived at campus during the day, and I was one of them. All day, we kept up a blockade and adjourned it at the end. We held a syndicate meeting and made a decision that we will not vacate the halls upon hearing the statement from UGC. After all, the UGC cannot make a decision about an autonomous institute.

On July 17, our demands were two-fold: quota reform and the refusal to vacate halls. On that day, around 200-300 police officers entered the campus. The teachers told us that we ought to return to the halls for our safety. Still, we did not wish to leave, because it was unacceptable for the police to be present on our campus as the police cannot enter an autonomous institution in the manner that they did. The situation became dire, and it was worsened by us not being able to receive any news. Throughout the country, rumours were spread and there were attempts at fear-mongering. Many students were having lunch at the time when, around 5:15pm, the police attacked us. During the attack, our group had to disperse. We had to flee to whichever road was empty. Many of us were stuck for hours while tear shells were being thrown. It remains a question: for whose protection did the police fire shots? If we assume it was to protect the students, why were the shots fired in their direction? This shooting went on till evening. When our proctor was called by the department teachers, he claimed that he himself was struck. The police can never enter a campus without the permission of the proctor. The proctor’s statement that we should run to whichever place is safe was not sensible because there was no safe passage for us. The police saw us running to the girl’s halls. In the main gate of JU, about a 100 police officers had arrived. Many journalists showed

them their press cards so as not to be shot at by the police. The footage of police coming toward us, however, is yet to be broadcast. After evening, we returned to our halls only for us to hear that we would be forcefully removed from our halls. Around 10pm, we started receiving all kinds of news. I believe it was a BCL tactic to make us leave. Many female students in particular felt unsafe at this time. Yet, many of them were adamant about not leaving the halls. We received frantic calls from our families to leave urgently as they had heard horrifying reports, but we had to assure them those were rumours. Soon, electricity was gone and mobile data ceased to work. I was unable to make a single phone call. We remained awake throughout the night as we had lost faith in the idea that we would not be attacked. I wonder if this is how the nights must have felt during those nine months of the Liberation War. In the morning, the halls had become empty. Under severe stress, we had to leave the campus in the morning, despite our unwillingness. Right after, the police raided each room, with the proctor and hall provost accompanying them. Why did the administration allow the police to inspect halls in this manner? These were clear attempts to break the student’s will, and they succeeded. Though some students are still in campuses, the numbers have reduced to such a great extent that it is not possible to carry out a procession.

## An account from DU

Mustahid Riad  
is student of the University of Dhaka.

MUSTAHAID RIAD

On Wednesday, police were checking everyone’s IDs before letting them inside the campus. They had created a human barricade near the metro station at TSC and were not allowing anyone to pass through. Everyone was asked to take a detour and enter the area through Payra Chatter. I did so and reached Bacchu Bhai’s tea shop, when I saw the car of a police official enter the area. All the journalists rushed to the car that stopped near the Raju Memorial Sculpture. When the police official got out, the journalists harangued him about the presence of police and BGB on campus. He did not answer them; instead, he pushed them and continued walking towards the police barricade near the TSC station. At that moment, a sound grenade went off. There was smoke everywhere. I felt very afraid. Inside the campus, too, police members created human barricades—one right in front of the Raju Sculpture and the other at the three-way intersection in front of the Ruqayyah Hall. At the VC Chatter, we saw many protesters. Some of them had sticks with them and some came from the halls. When the gathering reached around 1,000, we prepared for the symbolic *gayebi janaza* (funeral prayers in absentia). At that time, there were many members

of police standing in front of the vice chancellor’s house, Ruqayyah Hall and Fuller Road, and a police water tank was positioned a few metres away from the Arts Building gate. After the prayer, we decided to bring out a procession from the VC Chatter to Raju Memorial Sculpture with the symbolic coffins, voicing our quota reform demands, questioning the presence of police and BGB on campus and demanding punishment for the students’ killings. We pushed through the police barricade and reached the water tank. Some students shouted at the police angrily and provoked them to shoot, questioning their presence on campus. As we continued the procession, the water tank suddenly moved back and we heard a sound grenade go off. Right then, the clash started.

There was smoke everywhere, and I heard gunshots. The police standing near the VC gate were firing rubber bullets and throwing sound grenades and tear gas shells towards us. The procession got dispersed and there was a lot of chaos. I felt a burning sensation in my eyes from the impact of the tear shells. I could not see properly but managed to climb the wall in Hakim Chatter and enter the Central Mosque; I started running through the mausoleum of Kazi Nazrul Islam to reach the National Museum. I was able to leave the campus with a few others by showing our IDs to the police. But a friend, who called me when I reached the TSC metro station, said he had to take shelter inside a hall. He said the police had launched an attack on students who fled towards the Mall Chatter.



ILLUSTRATION: MORSHED MISHU