DHAKA THURSDAY AUGUST 8, 2024, *SRABAN 24, 1431 BS* | A PUBLICATION OF The Daily Star

CAMPUS

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WE WON

Yet a lot needs to be done

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

BOOKS

Book recommendations on post-independence history of Bangladesh

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

The Quota Reform Movement has brought one very crucial shift amongst other changes. It has made a majority of our generation politically conscious. They have started taking a keen interest in Bangladesh's political history. Here's a list of books that might help you get started on the political climate of Bangladesh after 1971.

COLLAGE: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

***Bela Obela*, Mohiuddin Ahmad**
This book deals with the time of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the Prime Minister and President of Bangladesh from 1972 to 1975. It accounts for the turbulent political climate at that time, the formation of the Rokkhi Bahini and Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSHAL) amongst other events. It also includes interviews of significant characters from that point in history and gives a wide outlook on a newborn Bangladesh.

***Tinti Shena Obhyuthhan O Kichu Na Bola Kotha*, Lt Col (retd) MA Hamid**
Following 1972-75, Bangladeshi political history can be characterised by three consecutive military coups. The first one was on August 15 when Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his entire family were heinously murdered. It was followed by two other coups on November 3 and November 7, which resulted in a dramatic transition of power. The story of all three coups from an insider's point of view is well documented in this book.

***Bangaldesher Chhatro Andoloner Itihash: Ershad Er Shomoykal*, Dr Mohammad Hannan**
Dr Mohammad Hannan has other versions of the history of the students' movement in Bangladesh. But after reading about Bangabandhu and Zia's period, an overall idea of the Ershad regime can be perceived from this book. It accounts for significant events during the Ershad regime and how the students' movement helped remove him from power.

***Jashoder Utthan Poton: Osthir Somoyer Rajniti*, Mohiuddin Ahmad**
Perhaps the most famous of Mohiuddin Ahmed's career, the book deals with the history of Jashod, the main opposition party after independence, their downfall, and their role in shaping the country's future. It is a must-read to understand the history of communism in Bangladesh and how one of the most wildly popular political parties of the country reached its downfall as power changed hands.

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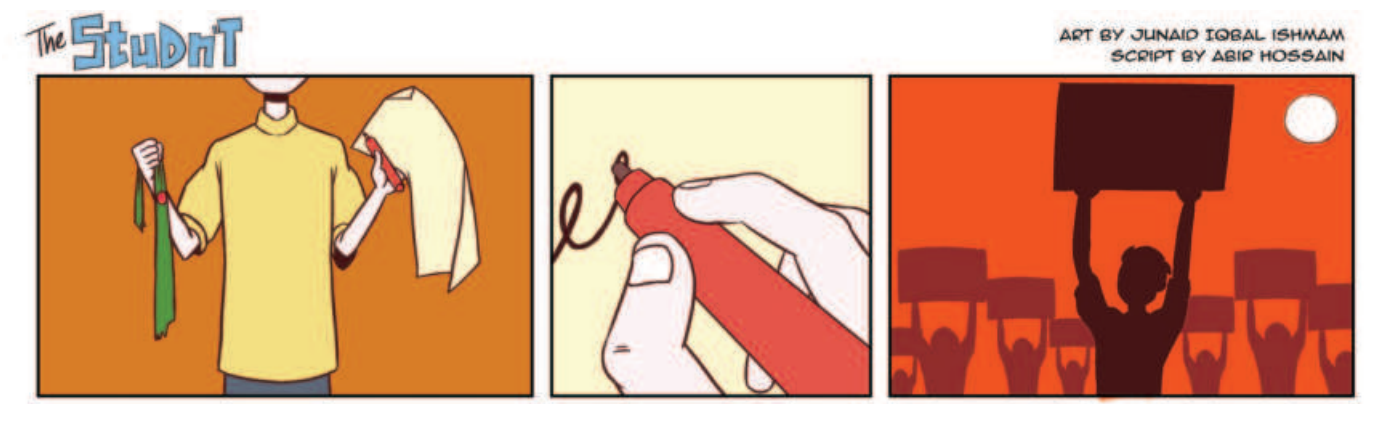

OPPORTUNITIES

CAMPUS STARS

ELIGIBILITY

The student has to be an undergraduate student from a UGC-approved university in Bangladesh. The student can't represent or be associated with any other media organisation. The student must be a member of at least one student club or forum at their respective institution.

Visit campusstars.thedailystar.net to learn more

DEADLINE: AUGUST 31, 2014

Optimizely

Optimizely – Intern (Software Engineering)

ELIGIBILITY

Completion of B.Sc. in Computer Science.

Programming knowledge, core software engineering concepts.

Knowledge of algorithms, data structures, and programming frameworks.

Basic knowledge and understanding of databases - usage and design.

Knowledge of version control like Git/Github.

Visit careers.optimizely.com to learn more

DEADLINE: NOT MENTIONED

BJIT – Software Engineer (.NET)

ELIGIBILITY

One to two years of professional experience in .NET development.

Proficient in OOP, design patterns, and design principles.

Proficiency in C# and the .NET framework.

Visit bjitgroup.com/career-apply/ to learn more

DEADLINE: NOT MENTIONED

OPINION

The lack of freedom for minorities is INDICATIVE OF INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

BIPRA PRASUN DAS

August 5 marked a significant turning point in Bangladesh's history. After years of ruling, Sheikh Hasina resigned from her position as Prime Minister, bowing to relentless pressure from public protests. The streets were flooded with people celebrating the downfall of a government that had overstayed its welcome.

Yet, amidst the chaos and jubilation, a sinister and heartbreaking reality followed with reports of multiple attacks on religious minorities. Temples, churches, and pagodas became targets of senseless vandalism. Many of these sacred spaces, representing the spiritual and cultural diversity of our nation, lie in ruins or are at risk. The very people who should be feeling the winds of change and hope are now gripped with fear. The relative silence from those who so vehemently opposed the dictatorial regime is deafening. Where is the outrage?

At the time of writing this article, there have been multiple attacks on Hindu temples, residences, and businesses across 27 districts. Communal violence has plagued our country for a long time, and perhaps we have become desensitised to it. This may explain why some people resort to social media in an effort to undermine these claims, often demanding that people don't spread rumours under reports that are frequently accompanied by videos. Some, perhaps, even perversely revel in suppression of minorities. Regardless, instead of reducing these incidents of vandalism and violence to mere rumours or conspiracies to divide us, it is high time we asked ourselves who the culprits are and why they haven't been brought to justice.

After all, true freedom is inclusive. It protects the rights and dignity of every individual, regardless of their religious or cultural background. The recent attacks on religious minorities are not isolated incidents. They are a reflection of a deeper, systemic issue – an intolerance that has been allowed to fester for far too long. It is a stark reminder that our fight for democracy and justice is far from over. Should we really settle for a superficial change in leadership while ignoring the underlying issues that plague our society?

Freedom for religious and ethnic minorities in Bangladesh has always been akin to a two-step authentication process – unnecessarily complex, restrictive, and often exclusionary. On the surface, constitutional guarantees and legal frameworks promise equality and protection for all citizens. Yet, the reality is starkly different, requiring minorities themselves to validate their own existence and allegiance in a society that remains deeply intolerant. As a nation, we must confront this ugly reality head-on. We must hold ourselves accountable for the safety and well-being of all our citizens. The struggle for true freedom and democracy must include a commitment to protect and respect our diverse religious and ethnic communities. It is time for the voices of reason and compassion to drown out the silence of indifference.

These communal attacks against minorities undermine the very essence of unity and justice that countless student protesters have sacrificed their lives for. The recent spate of violence is not only an affront to this vision but also an insult to the memory of the martyrs.

These communal attacks against minorities undermine the very essence of unity and justice that countless student protesters have sacrificed their lives for. The recent spate of violence is not only an affront to this vision but also an insult to the memory of the martyrs. The month of July has taught us to stand up for what is right, and fair, and we must use this newfound courage to raise our voices against oppression of all forms.

In the midst of this chaos, however, there is a glimmer of hope. Across the country, ordinary citizens have taken it upon themselves to guard temples, churches, and pagodas, standing as human shields against the tide of violence. These acts of solidarity offer a beacon of hope and a testament to the resilience of our shared humanity. Yet, the very necessity of such measures is deeply troubling. Why must minorities have to be protected by their fellow citizens in a land that is supposed to be their home as well? This stark reality sparks questions as to why minorities are so frequently targeted in our country. The answer lies in centuries-old prejudices and a failure to foster genuine inclusivity and respect for diversity.

Bangladesh stands at a crossroads. The path we choose now will determine the future of our nation. Will we rise above our differences and build a society that truly embodies the principles of justice and equality? Or will we continue to let intolerance and hatred tear us apart?

Reference:
The Daily Star (August 6, 2024). *Hindu houses, businesses attacked in 27 districts.*

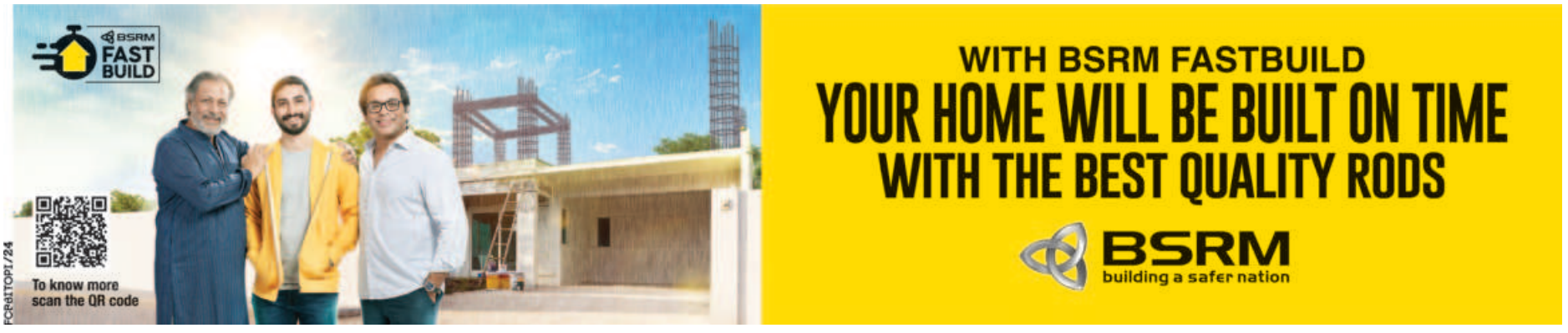

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

POST QUOTA MOVEMENT CAMPUS

What do the students expect from their university campus?

CAMPUS MAGAZINE CORRESPONDENT

A few days into the quota reform movement, a video surfaced on social media which acted as a reality check for me and the violence that was yet to begin. A female protester from Sir Salimullah Medical College (SSMC) was seen getting assaulted by some senior male students of their own institution on July 16. Just when I thought assaulting female students peacefully protesting might be off limits, at least in a reputed medical college like SSMC, I was proven wrong.

It also made me wonder, after the dust settles, how will these students feel safe on campus upon their return? To understand the hesitations about returning to campus under the current circumstances, we must perceive the factors behind such fears.

"The hall allotments are controlled entirely by different factions of the politically active groups," said Nowrin*, a student of Sir Salimullah Medical College. "The hall proctor is only present by name whereas the entire process is controlled by politically active lobbyists. Usually, rooms allotted for 3-4 people are taken up by 1-2 politically powerful students whereas non-political students have to get stuffed into over-crowded rooms. Therefore, most students are somewhat forced to get enlisted in the politically active groups just to manage seats in the halls and avoid discrimination. They're forced to take part in political activities and any refusal is dealt with threats regarding hall allotments since they're controlled by political leaders."

"During the quota movement, the politically active leaders stopped the general students from participating in peaceful movements from the very beginning. Since the male students were actively intimidated into not participating in the movement, female students initiated the peaceful protests," continued Nowrin.

She adds, "When the politically active leaders met the peaceful protests with violence, the male students also joined and the entire student body united. After that, waves of attacks were made on the students and they were forced to evacuate the halls. There were even threats of sexual harassment and so, a lot of the female students didn't return to the halls out of fear. They had to hide in their relatives' or friends' houses and following the curfew the next day, they couldn't return to their hometowns until a week later. Following the eviction, screenshots of the group-chats of politically active groups were leaked, which revealed their plans of taking actions against the protesters once the campus re-opens. Social media posts, containing fabricated claims of some protesting students being involved with banned political groups, also started circulating."

Most students with hall allotments are scared of severe repercussions from politically active groups once they return to the halls, as told by Rafayet*, a student of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST), "The students have this fear that after the movement, the ones participating in the protests will be targeted by these politically active groups. Some passive threats made by them as well as past experiences support this fear. There were also instances of these politically active individuals attacking the protesters. This, along with questionable arrests made by the authority, adds to this fear."

Although general residents of the halls of Dhaka University made the hall authorities ban student politics from the dormitories, there's sustaining fear of what the repercussions might be once student politics creep their way in once again.

"Some of us, who've always been aware of the injustices inflicted by these politically active groups, knew an attack might be eminent. But we didn't expect it to be this brutal," said Ishat*, a student of Dhaka University.

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The lawyers who stood by the students in their time of need

ILLUSTRATION: NATASHA JAHAN

On the other hand, we also observed that even by official reports, hundreds have died in these protests. Among the dead, there have been many innocent children, students, and pedestrians. The police are going to fire on innocent civilians, which may cause even more deaths. We cannot allow that to happen. Our point is that the police have so many ways to disperse a crowd. The procedures are clearly stated in the Police Regulations, Bengal (PRB) and in other laws, but they are not adhering to those.

MD. NAYEEM HAIDER

There can now be little doubt in saying that the past few weeks will go down as an extraordinary moment in the history of our nation – for better or for worse. What started out with peaceful protests surrounding the quota reform have morphed into something that may have very few parallels, be it in the number of people arrested and injured or that of bodies buried.

Students, however, will take heart in knowing that they are not alone. The common people – from rickshaw-pullers and university professors to artists and medical professionals – have come out in support of those who might as well be their own children or younger siblings.

In the midst of this, a particularly inspiring portrait of solidarity has been painted by many lawyers, who, in various capacities, have set the standard in these trying times. Their reasons for coming to the aid of students, the ways in which they have helped them, and their own views and experiences will be examined in this piece.

Barrister Aneek R. Haque of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, who was engaged in the High Court writ petition filed by Advocates Manzur Al Matin and Ainun Nahar Siddiqa against the police opening fire on student protestors and the detention of the six coordinators of the Anti-discrimination Students' Movement, states why he and his colleagues have taken such a significant step.

He says, "We are not helping the students in the hope of getting paid or anything like that. We are doing it because we owe a duty to our own conscience."

He goes further to delineate the legal aspect of the issues and their own position. "We observed that Bangladeshi law does not allow anyone to be detained in custody without lawful authority, and in this case, no legal procedure had been followed. They were simply taken from the hospital and other places. The constitution says that no one can be detained unlawfully. Even if they had been arrested under any provision of the law, the police would have been bound to produce them in court within 24 hours of the arrest. Then, an application could have been made to either take them on remand or keep them in jail. The law is very clear on this. But none of this was done."

Haque goes on to add, "On the other hand, we also observed that even by official reports, hundreds have died in these protests. Among the dead, there have been many innocent children, students, and pedestrians. The police are going to fire on innocent civilians, which may cause even more deaths. We cannot allow that to happen. Our point is that the police have so many ways to disperse a crowd. The procedures are clearly stated in the Police Regulations, Bengal (PRB) and in other laws, but they are not adhering to those."

But even much earlier than this landmark petition to the High Court, as the Quota Reform Movement began to escalate, various lawyers and legal organisations throughout the nation took it upon themselves to support, free of charge, students who were being taken into custody or arrested. Advocate Al Mamun Rasel of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh is one of them. He cites his own participation in the Quota Reform Movement of 2013 as a reason for his support of students today. He states, "As a university student, I supported the movement because I found it to be a just cause. How can a country progress if talented people are not given opportunities? Thus, this time around, I felt that if, as a lawyer, I could offer my services free of charge and give legal support to students who do not have the means, they would be able to carry on their righteous demands for reform. My team and I have only made this facility available for the general students who are being harassed with false cases, and not anyone with political affiliations."

SEE PAGE 7

The importance of INDIGENOUS QUOTA

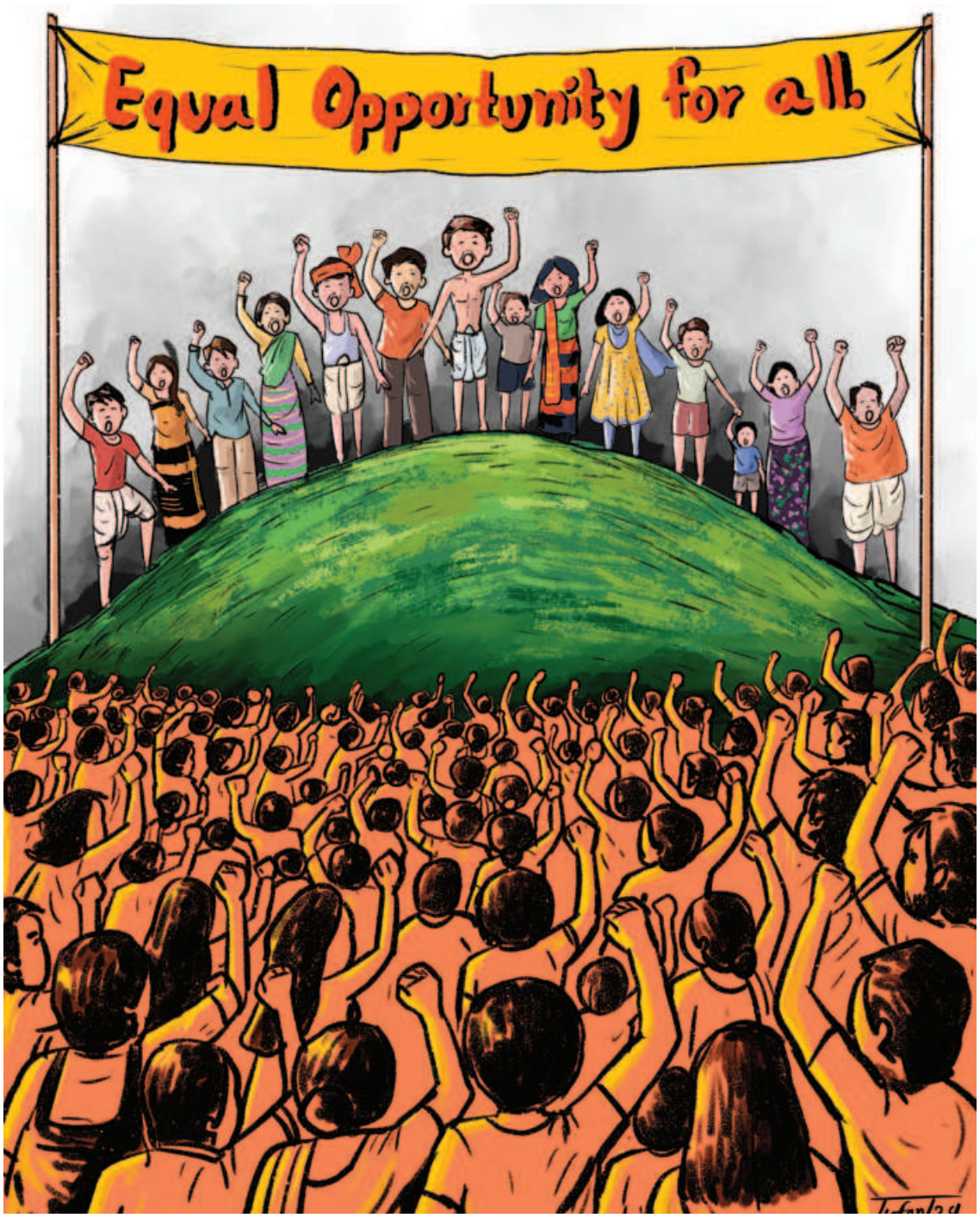

ILLUSTRATION: **TUFAN CHAKMA**

AZRA HUMAYRA

Following the High Court's decision to reinstate the quota system in government jobs, the patterns of public opinion began to take shape once more. Despite the general uproar, the indigenous quota remains especially contentious. Some agree while others don't. But what of the indigenous students themselves for whom this quota is ostensibly designed?

Constitutional provisions are adhered to by the government's quotas for jobs in government that are open to diverse communities. Article 29(1) of Bangladesh's Constitution ensures "equality of opportunity for all citizens in employment or appointment to public service." However, Article 29 (3)(a) empowers the state to establish "special provisions in favour of any backward section of citizens for the purpose of securing their adequate representation in the service of the Republic."

Until 2018, five percent was reserved for ethnic minorities.

> **"Honestly, giving one percent of quota equals to not giving it at all. Only one percent for 50 ethnic groups feels as though it is a form of consolation."**

On October 3, 2018, the government abolished the quota system for government job recruitment in grades nine through thirteen, which also meant the dissolution of the indigenous quota. The High Court's ruling to reinstate the quota system in government posts was overturned on July 21 by the Supreme Court's Appellate Division. 93 percent of civil service recruits should be selected based only on merit – with five percent going to the children of Biranganas and freedom fighters, one percent going to ethnic minorities, and one percent going to individuals with physical disabilities and people of the third gender. This is immediately applicable to all 20 grades of government, semi-government, autonomous, semi-autonomous, statutory entities, and corporations. This means the indigenous quota has been reduced by four percent.

According to Indigenous Navigator, Bangladesh has around 50 indigenous groups spread over the plains and hills. Numerous issues, such as infringement of their land rights, forced displacement, lack of access to essential services, poverty, and political marginalisation, have an impact on their quality of life.

Khingmokay Marma, a fourth-year student majoring in Mass Communication and Journalism at Dhaka University, states, "Honestly, giving one percent of quota equals to not giving it at all. Only one percent for 50 ethnic groups feels as though it is a form of consolation."

According to International Labour Organisation (ILO), research conducted in Bangladesh in 2017, Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ITPs) were allocated five percent of Class one through four government employment. But the research found that about 90 percent of the seats remained empty. Now with the one percent quota, fewer seats are to be held by indigenous people.

The interviewees see the reformation as a quick fix to put an end to the protests, which undoubtedly affects them.

"I have no positive thoughts on this. To me, it appears that an injustice has occurred. There is already a paucity of representation for indigenous people, and quotas provided an opportunity to assure representation, which has now been squandered as well. Whose interests are served here? The interests of the underprivileged are not being served. No changes will occur with the one percent," says Hritu Roy, studying at the Department of International Relations at Dhaka University.

For some, the quota system is a lifeline; they see in the quota system a chance to assert their place in a society that too often overlooks them. To the indigenous people, it is a form of affirmation that the state acknowledges its duty to protect a vulnerable group.

Khingmokay further says, "We need indigenous quotas because we are lagging behind. If someone from an indigenous community gets a government job in a higher position with the help of the quota system, the person may represent their community, encouraging others to come forward for higher education. This also helps guide the future generation. Since the abolishment of quotas in 2018, there has been no indigenous BCS cadre except a few, due to which many are losing interest in higher education."

Another indigenous student studying at Dhaka University who wishes to remain anonymous vocalised her discontentment, "Nobody thinks about the minorities. We are fighting for survival so that we don't have to flee to other places. Some say there's no need for indigenous quotas after university admissions. How many indigenous people get into universities? Those who get into universities want better lives for themselves. Can't they even ask for that?"

A point that arose while speaking to the students was that the lack of media exposure of what happens in the hilly areas is one of the many reasons why the majority do not think about minorities. They also point out the privilege of the people, which enables them to argue against indigenous quotas.

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PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

Post quota movement campus: What do the students expect from their university campus?

FROM PAGE 4

"If these groups somehow made their way back into the campus, it'll be very traumatising for the common students, especially for the dorm students who've witnessed what these groups are capable of firsthand, for years now. After the attacks, even the students who weren't aware of the violent nature of these political groups are conscious now," she added.

But even after the recent violent spree on university campuses all over the country, students still want to go back to their campuses and get back to classes. However, they don't want to return under the previous circumstances, but under a new campus run by and for the general students.

"Firstly, to ensure their safe return to the campus, the illegal arrests by the law enforcement authorities must be stopped and the students' complete safety must be guaranteed," said Imran Hassan Shuvo, a student of Jahangirnagar University (JU).

He furthers said, "In JU, law enforcement agencies, politically active groups, and armed thugs have attacked the students. The campus needs to be made safe from them. A proper environment must be ensured for students to reside in the dormitories. Only when the security of the general students can be ensured, the students will be able to return without fear."

Ishat also adds, "We've worked really hard to ban student politics from our dorms. As we've got signed documents from our provosts banning student politics, we would like to keep it that way. Considering the havoc that was caused by these politically active groups, it would be better if we could abolish student politics altogether. Rather, we need to have non-political student forums in every institution that would help us, the students, connect with the administration."

In regards to the matter, Nowrin adds, "After the recent violence on general students by the politically active students, we've conducted batch-wise surveys on whether they want student politics or not and up until now, more than 95 percent of students are against student politics on campus."

"The general students have presented a 6-point demand, which includes– banning student politics on campus, rusticating those involved in the attacks on the protesters, banning any sort of politics or lobbying regarding hall allotments, evicting all non-student hall residents immediately, formal apology from our principal and a guarantee of taking no academic measures or threats against the protesters. Only then will the general students return to the campus again," Nowrin said.

"As a student, I would like to see the dorms free from any political influence," said Rafayet. "The hall allotments should be as per merit. I would also like to see our teachers held accountable and performing their duties fairly and ensuring the students' safety. All of us want politics banned from the campus at this point."

Although it started as a quota reform movement, due to the unimaginable violence inflicted upon the students and citizens over time, the movement has changed its direction. For university students, it's not just about quota reform anymore. It's a struggle and an opportunity for them to renovate their university, reform student political conditions on campus, and for the general students to take control over what's rightfully theirs.

**Names have been changed upon request.*

The lawyers who stood by the students in their time of need

FROM PAGE 5

Going into greater detail of what he and his law chamber do and have done for the students, he says, "When a student is arrested and their parents or friends contact us, we stand on their behalf in court. We have been trying to get them out on bail and to prove that the cases are false. For example, a few days ago, we handled the case of a BAF Shaheen College student who got arrested. We produced all his documents in court and submitted that he is merely a student who could not be involved in what is a false case."

Nonetheless, Rasel acknowledges that obtaining bail is an arduous task that could take a long time. At the time of conducting his interview, none of the people arrested since July 15 had been granted bail, though, as of now, the courts have granted them to some HSC examinees, and the Prime Minister herself has given an order to release arrested students.

For reason of the apparent difficulty of securing bails for arrested students, Sabbir Hossain Sifat, who is the founder and convenor of Progressive Lawyers - Bangladesh, an organisation that has worked to

PHOTO: **ANISUR RAHMAN**

ensure students get proper legal aid, advises the parents and guardians of students taken into custody to locate and arrive at the police stations where their children are being held before arrest is formally made. In his view, that is ideal because they would be able to have them released before a charge sheet is prepared and the case is brought to court, thus sparing the student and themselves from a world of trouble.

Regarding what he has seen and heard of the students who have been arrested, Sifat says, "While the law clearly states that they must be brought before the court within 24 hours, in many cases the accused are not being brought before the court even when days have passed. And in many cases where the students are duly brought before court, we have heard that they suffered physical or mental abuse."

And just like that, as students see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and feel on their very skin and bones such things that may amount to the violation of sacred constitutional values and human rights, the lawyers mentioned above, in addition to the many whom we see on television and social media, work to keep justice alive.

There have been moments of success, such as the release of the six coordinators following the writ. There are questions, such as on what law were the coordinators taken in the first place or why are the people being shot. There is no shortage of roadblocks and consequently, there is no lack of determination.

As Barrister Aneek R. Haque recounts, "The pro-government lawyers kept on heckling us as we submitted before the court. We couldn't even sit – the whole time we were standing because they had occupied all the space. They even resorted to shouting to drown out our voices. But regardless of any of that, we have carried on."

The importance of indigenous quota

FROM PAGE 6

"The majority often fails to acknowledge the hardships that plague indigenous people simply because the media find no human interest here," the anonymous student adds.

Hritu Roy says her urban upbringing had given her a chance that did not necessitate using the indigenous quota. She says, "I am privileged compared to most people in my community (Chakma). Even though there is a quota facility during university admission, I did not use it, and I think people like me who had a privileged upbringing should not use the quota."

Khingmokay observed, "A person who has been denied benefits can empathise with the difficulties encountered by minorities. We need representation to discuss concerns such as property ownership, evictions, and a lack of qualified instructors and educational institutions. So, I feel that a five percent quota for indigenous people was reasonable."

To ensure representation, the government must take into account their struggles which take many forms. Systemic discrimination includes inadequate access to quality education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, which are frequently compounded by geographical isolation. Culturally, they face marginalisation with their languages, traditions, and identities devalued or actively suppressed. Socially, they are frequently subjected to discrimination and stereotypes that view them as inferior or less capable, which can continue to perpetuate poverty and marginalisation. These kinds of discrimination create an unfavourable environment in which indigenous people must constantly manage barriers that others do not face.

To ensure a nation's growth, the struggles of minorities cannot be overlooked. True progress is inclusive. Concentrated development, while beneficial to some, ultimately falls short of nurturing a thriving, equitable society. By providing opportunities for education and employment, the quota helps to empower indigenous populations.

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

IN FRAME

WE WON

Yet a lot needs to be done

CAMPUS DESK

A mass movement, hundreds dead, thousands injured, and a Prime Minister's resignation. And with that, a country came to life, feeling a sense of freedom. We won then, right?

Perhaps we did. What started out as the Quota Reform Movement turned into a mass movement for something much larger. The students and the country's youth deserve a lot of praise for their efforts and sacrifices, and for showing the general public the need to unite for a greater cause. And right now, more than ever, that unity needs to persist.

Following the August 5 resignation of the PM, emotions were high and the celebrations were everywhere. It was, however, short lived as reports of vandalism and destruction, especially geared towards minority groups, came in from around the country. A country that seemed united over the last few weeks now, all of a sudden, seems divided. However, for a nation undergoing such drastic changes, unity is key.

After all, this was meant to be a movement against discrimination, and a mindset that allows deepset discrimination to persist. Let us not forget how this was earned, and let us all take strides forward, leaving no one behind.

PHOTOS: **ORCHID CHAKMA**