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POST QUOTA MOVEMENT CAMPUS

What do the students expect from their university campus?

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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 Ishtat*, a student of Dhaka University.