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

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"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 further 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, rustivating 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

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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

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"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.

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