

Why are public universities still rationing women’s freedom?



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I was a student at Dhaka University (DU) in the 2016-17 session. Although I was a non-resident student, like everyone else, I was attached to a residential hall. I remember seeing how the lives of my female friends and peers who were resident students were scheduled around the hall curfew, and how they would leave programmes early or avoid them altogether so they would not be caught breaking it.

That memory returned to me while reading recent reports about public university halls. One account was as ordinary as it was cruel. A DU student’s mother had travelled more than 300 kilometres from Dinajpur to surprise her daughter with a home-cooked meal, reached Rukayyah Hall at 10:58 pm, and was denied entry. The daughter was not allowed outside to meet her mother either. Around the same time, a male student in a nearby hall could step out for a walk. That contrast says more about our universities than any prospectus.

This is not discipline but discrimination. Across public universities, female students continue to live under rules from which their male peers are exempt. At DU, female residents are expected to be back by 10:00 pm, with some informal flexibility until around 11:00 pm. On other campuses, the deadline can be earlier: 8:00 pm or 9:00 pm. Interviews with more than 20 female

students from DU, Khulna University, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST), and Mawlana Bhasani Science and Technology University suggest that these rules are widely enforced, though not consistently. At the same time, men move in and out with far fewer restrictions.

The damage is not limited to inconvenience. For many students, private tutoring and part-time work are what make university life financially possible. Classes often end in the late afternoon. Tutoring happens in the evening. Traffic does not respect the closing times of hall gates. Students quoted in news reports described friends having to quit tutoring because they could not get back on time. One DU student said she had to turn down a job at a fashion house because the workday ended at 9:30 pm. It is hard to speak grandly about women’s empowerment while accepting rules that make women’s income more inaccessible by design.

Then there is the cost that is harder to quantify but no less real. University life is an entire experience in itself that does not necessarily end with lectures. It continues with club meetings, rehearsals, debates, seminars, conversations, organising events, and the friendships that make a campus feel inhabited. Female students said curfews and restrictions to access cut them off from these spaces as well. At DU, women have

also objected to being unable to enter other women’s halls, while men generally move across male dormitories with a much greater ease. An education that trains women to watch the clock more than the world around them is not equal.

Hall authorities defend these restrictions in the name of safety. That concern cannot be brushed

mechanisms, security response, and hall access procedures?

What many students describe is not just security management but behavioural policing.

I remember an incident involving one of my seniors who was shamed for staying out past 8:00 pm and was granted access only after signing a *muchleka* (bond). A former SUST

into obedience. A curfew justified as care can still operate as control.

The reported DU incidents make the problem even harder to dismiss as a matter of official hall timings alone. In September 2025, two female students were reportedly stopped from entering the Mall Chattar area at 10:38 pm, despite having presented their IDs. The staff allegedly told them

students alleged that they were being barred from entering Central Field after evening hours based on verbal instructions, even though the university authorities and Dhaka University Central Students’ Union (Ducusu) representatives denied any formal policy. This is how arbitrary control survives. No one owns the rule, yet someone enforces it. No one signs the order, yet women are expected to obey it.

That is why token gestures ring hollow. Reports on DU’s “Women Student Day” described how female students were allowed to remain outside dormitories after 10:00 pm for one night in July 2025, only for many to protest what they saw as symbolism without structural change. They were right to object. Freedom granted for an evening is not freedom but permission that can always be withdrawn.

The female students’ demands recorded in the reports are practical: keep late gates functional, allow ID-based entry, make room for work commitments, medical needs, late returns from home, and emergencies, and stop turning every delayed return into a lecture on character. None of this is radical. What is radical is the idea that adult women at a public university should have to negotiate their dignity at a gate.

A university is supposed to widen the scope of one’s life. It should not teach women that access to education comes with a smaller map of movement than the one offered to their male counterparts. If public universities cannot imagine women as adults who study, work, return late, help friends, attend events, and move through campus without suspicion, then the problem is not women’s safety. It is the institution’s understanding of freedom. A university cannot educate women while locking them in.



VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

aside. Bangladesh is not a safe country for women after dark, or even in broad daylight. But if the campus and cities are unsafe, why is the solution restricting women’s movement instead of increasing institutional responsibility? Why does danger become a reason to contain women rather than a reason to fix transport, lighting, complaint

student quoted in a news report recalled hall authorities telling students that “good girls don’t stay out late.” Others described remarks that carried the same policing in different tones. Once a university starts judging female students by the hour at which they return to their dormitories, it moves from protecting students to training them

there were “orders from above.” The proctor later said no such directive had been issued and expressed regret. That exposed something more troubling: women on campus can be restricted by instructions that seem to exist only at the gate, not even on paper.

The same pattern resurfaced in January 2026, when female

Starmer’s resignation signals constraint, not virtue



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Keir Starmer’s resignation is being presented as a dignified submission to democratic accountability. That interpretation is partly correct but dangerously flattering. Starmer did not leave because one revelation suddenly awakened his conscience. He left because his authority had been emptied out by voters, rivals, and frightened Labour Party MPs. In his Downing Street statement, he acknowledged that his parliamentary party no longer believed he was the person to lead it into the next election. He will remain prime minister until a successor is chosen. This was an orderly surrender, not a voluntary sacrifice.

The roots of the collapse were visible in Labour’s celebrated victory of July 2024. Labour won 411 seats but secured only 33.7 percent of the vote. Britain’s first-past-the-post system converted a shallow plurality into overwhelming parliamentary command. The result looked like a national embrace but was substantially a rejection of a discredited Conservative government. Starmer mistook seat arithmetic for political attachment. In reality, a vast majority gave him legislative power, not durable public consent.

His political offer was competence without conviction, which helps after a period

of chaos. But it cannot govern through scarcity. Britain faced weak growth, strained public services, heavy borrowing, regional inequality, and little fiscal room. Starmer responded with caution, repeated resets and reversals. Policies were announced, defended as necessary, but then diluted when resistance became costly. Pragmatism lost its meaning and became merely the avoidance of commitment. The left saw managerial austerity, the centre saw drift, and the right saw weakness. A government that promised stability began to look directionless.

The Peter Mandelson affair was especially corrosive as it destroyed Starmer’s strongest remaining claim: sound judgement. Mandelson was appointed ambassador to Washington despite his known association with Jeffrey Epstein, and later reporting showed that he had failed security checks. Starmer said he had not known about that failed vetting, but the defence was politically devastating. Either he knew and exercised appalling judgement, or he did not know and presided over a grave failure of control. For a former chief prosecutor who marketed seriousness, process, and institutional discipline, this was a dire contradiction of

identity.

Then, in the May election, Labour lost more than a thousand council seats, while Reform UK made sweeping gains. Labour also ceased to be the largest party in Wales for the first time since devolution, while losing ground in Scotland. The results exposed a fractured political map. Reform UK was advancing from the populist right, the Greens from the left, and nationalist parties in Scotland and Wales

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from the territorial margins of the union.

Andy Burnham’s victory in the Makerfield by-election with 54.8 percent of the votes and a majority of 9,231, showed Labour MPs that another leader could defeat Reform UK in a constituency it had aggressively targeted. Until that moment, discontent with Starmer had lacked an organising centre. Burnham

became an alternative to anxiety. Starmer’s resignation followed not because the constitutional system automatically expelled him, but because his party concluded that retaining him endangered its seats and its hold on government.

Britain has demonstrated something valuable: a premier can lose party confidence and leave without calling the army, intimidating judges, shutting down broadcasters, or manufacturing a state emergency. The civil service continues, the governing party chooses a successor, the monarch appoints the person most likely to command the confidence of the Commons, and power changes hands without institutional rupture. This normality is a democratic achievement.

But it is not proof that accountability naturally outranks power. Starmer resisted departure until his political survival became implausible. Labour MPs moved decisively only after electoral losses began to threaten their careers. This was accountability produced by incentives, not virtue. Nor will voters necessarily choose the next prime minister. Under Britain’s parliamentary system, a new Labour leader can enter Downing Street without an immediate general election, provided the government retains the confidence of the Commons. While this is constitutionally legitimate, it reveals the difference between parliamentary continuity and renewed popular consent.

Starmer’s successor will become the country’s seventh prime minister in a decade. Such churn can indicate that leaders are removable, but it also indicates strategic incoherence, factional panic, and a political class addicted to replacing personalities

instead of repairing institutions.

The larger crisis is the exhaustion of a political model that cannot reconcile low growth, fiscal restraint, public expectations, migration pressures, Brexit’s continuing economic and political burdens, and widening distrust. Reform UK’s rise is not merely a punishment for Starmer, and Green gains are not merely youthful protest. Together, they show that voters no longer accept the old parties’ claim to be the only plausible vehicles of government. Changing the driver will not repair an engine whose warning lights have been ignored for years.

For Bangladesh and other democracies, the lesson is not that British leaders possess a superior moral gene. This kind of accountability works only if institutions and political incentives make clinging to office more costly than leaving it. Competitive elections must transmit public anger. Legislators must be able to withdraw support. Political parties must have internal autonomy. The media must investigate appointments and contradictions. The state must remain neutral during succession. None of these safeguards depends on a leader’s benevolence.

Starmer does not deserve canonisation for leaving after the system and his party made continued rule untenable. The real democratic test is not whether one weakened prime minister departs gracefully. It is whether the next leader confronts the failures that brought their predecessor down, submits power to scrutiny, and ultimately returns the question of national direction to the electorate. Accountability came first only when power could no longer be sustained. That is better than authoritarian defiance. But it is a warning, not a triumph.

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BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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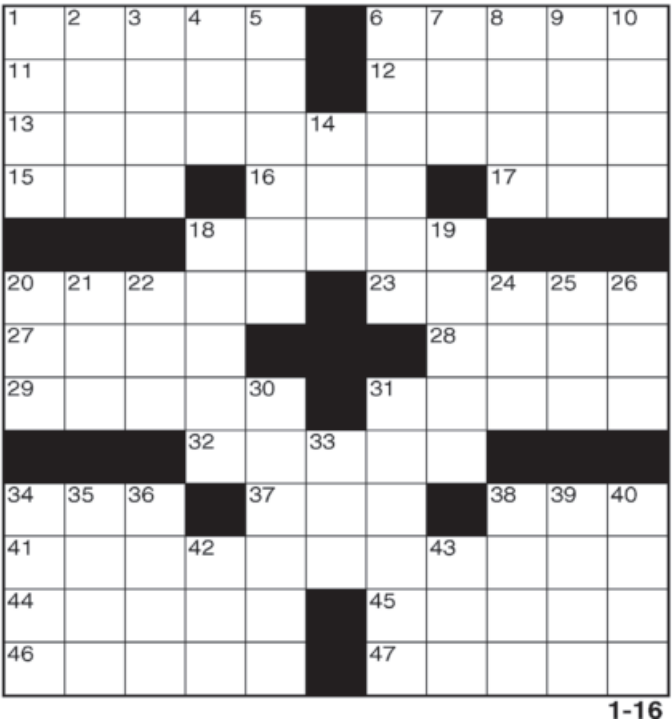
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