

# The Daily Star

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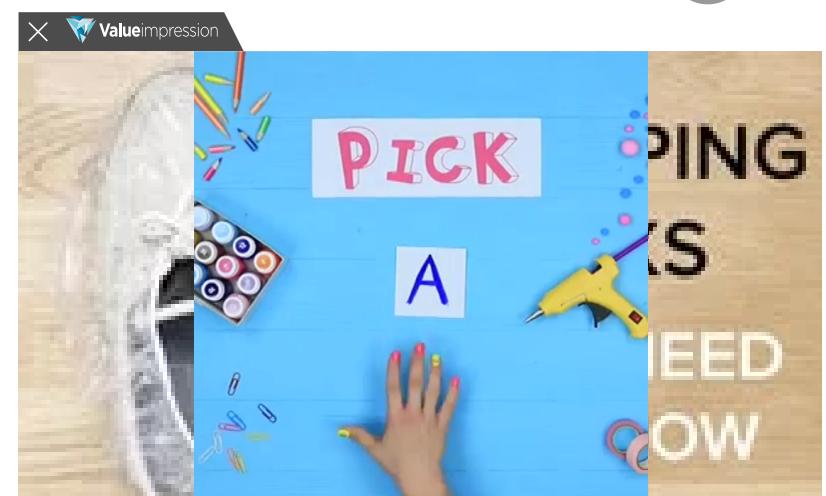
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## Where is my failure?

*Buet VC in interview with Star*

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**Mohammad Al-Masum Molla and Wasim Bin Habib**

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In the aftermath of the gruesome murder of Abrar Fahad last week, Buet thinks he had no failure in handling the situation.



“Where is my failure? I, from my position, have done everything possible to tackle the situation,” he said in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star at his office on Sunday night.

Abrar Fahad, a second-year student of Buet’s electrical and electronic engineering department, was beaten to death by some Chhatra League men at the university’s Sher-e-Bangla Hall sometime between 8:30pm on October 6 and 1:30am on October 7.

The murder touched off widespread outrage across the country. Fumed, Buet students began a demonstration on the campus, demanding the highest punishment for the killers. They also called for the VC’s resignation over his “silence”.

Buet Alumni Association and Teachers’ Association also demanded the VC step down for his “failure to ensure security” on the campus.

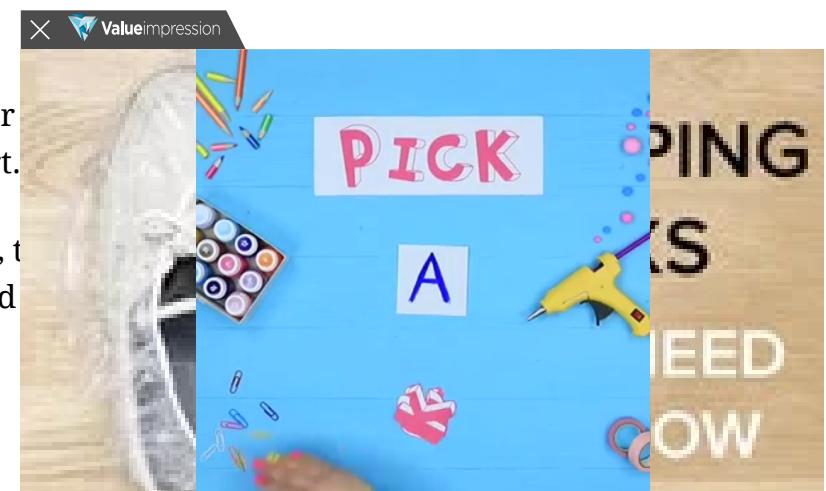
After the grisly murder, Prof Saiful neither met the agitating students, nor did he attend Abrar’s namaz-e-janaza. He showed up around 38 hours after the killing to hold a meeting with the hall provosts, the students alleged.

During the two-and-a-half-hour interview, Prof Saiful, who was appointed the VC on June 23, 2016, defended his position and the actions he took after learning about Abrar’s death around 3:00am on October 7.

He said on top of overseeing administrative work, he monitored the situation and maintained constant communication with the police and the higher authorities. He also formed an enquiry committee in consultation with senior teachers that very day.

“I was in my office, doing everything possible to keep the situation under control,” said Prof Saiful, an educationist, researcher and electrical and electronic engineering expert.

Asked why he did not meet the agitating students soon after the murder, the VC said he was in a difficult abnormal situation. The students were furious. Had I gone there, I would have been miscommunication.



“Then I would not have been able to maintain communications with the government and the communications were very crucial at that time.”

Prof Saiful said the director of the university’s Directorate of Students’ Welfare (DSW) is supposed to handle the situation if anything bad happens to students.

“It is the director’s prime duty. He maintains communications with the vice chancellor and takes necessary support from the university authorities. He is supposed to be constantly in touch with the VC until the matter is resolved.”

Narrating the events that unfolded after Abrar murder, Prof Saiful said he got a call from the director around 3:00am on October 7. He then woke up his personal secretary and programme officer and requested them to rush to the scene.

From then onward, Prof Saiful said, he was continuously in touch with the officials. He also ordered calling police to the campus and lodging a general diary over the incident.

The VC said the matter was then handled by the higher authorities of police, including the inspector general of police.

The prime minister was also monitoring the situation.

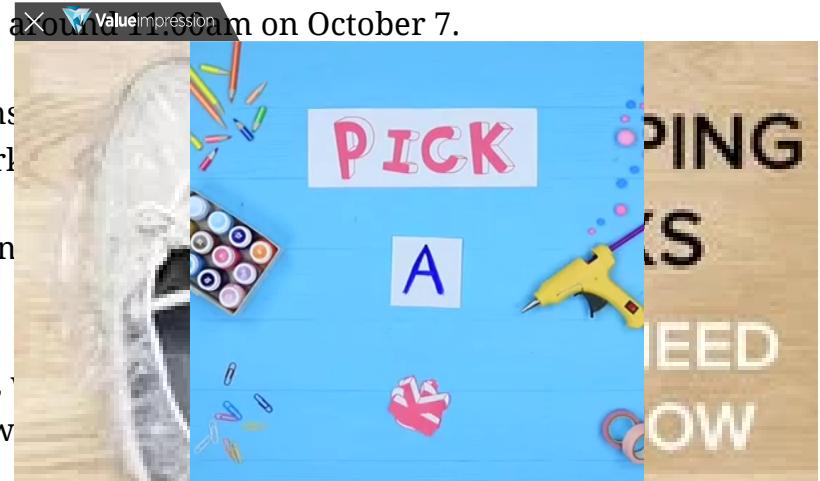
He said he made arrangements for making copies of the CCTV footage from the Sher-e-Bangla Hall, and it took almost the entire day.

Relying to a query, he said he called an emergency meeting at his office around 11:30am on October 7.

The meeting, which was attended by faculty deans, department heads, ins

The deputy education minister was also informed about the situation. Sin

Around 3:30pm, Abrar’s uncle along with one of his relatives met the VC, who then arranged an ambulance to take Abrar’s body to his home in Kushtia for burial. They w



Asked why he did not attend the namaz-e-janaza on the campus, he said no one had informed him about it.

“No one even told me that Abrar’s father came to the campus. I would have certainly met him and attended the janaza if I had been informed,” he said.

Talking about ragging at the university dormitories, Prof Saiful blamed the DSW for the situation.

“This [ragging] has a long history. It dates back even before my joining [as Buet VC],” he said.

He said DSW director Prof Delwar Hossain tried his best to keep things under control, but he left due to “health reasons” citing huge work pressure.

Later, Prof Satya Prasad Majumder was given the charge, but he also could not stop ragging at the halls. The VC said Prof Satya failed to check the practices “probably because he was too soft”.

Prof Saiful said he learnt about student torture in the name of ragging in June this year during a session review committee meeting with the deans, department heads and institution directors. Some guardians also lodged complaints about ragging.

“The then DSW director Prof Satya Prasad Majumder was not present at the meeting and I immediately asked him about it over the phone. I asked him politely, but he loudly replied that there was no proof to this end. I felt really bad,” he said.

At another meeting, Prof Satya Prasad told the VC that he could no longer  the position.

Later, Prof Saiful appointed Prof Abul Kashem Miah as the new DSW director. But he could not take up the post right away due to strong opposition from BCL leaders, he said.

Prof Mizanur Rahman replaced Prof Kashem. Initially, he took some good steps to control ragging among some students.

“But a few weeks later, I found that Prof Mizan was also unable to control it,” he said, adding, “I cannot intervene here directly. It’s the DSW that is authorised to do so.”



Replying to another query, he rejected the allegation that the DSW director did not get cooperation from him.

“It is absolutely false. If he does not get me all the time, how could he reach me over phone at 3:00 in the morning the day Abrar was killed?” he asked.

“My door is always open for him,” he said, adding that the DSW director would get his full support in future.

Prof Saiful said a senior teacher with a strong personality should be holding the DSW director’s post so that students, provosts and assistant provosts obey his orders.

“That has been our practice,” he said.

Asked about his high number of overseas trips, he said he went abroad in the interests of the university. He mentioned he presented his own research paper on two occasions.

“I never took a single penny from the university or the government. I was invited and those who invited me bore all the expenses,” he said.

He said he signed 66 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with different universities, institutions and organisations, including Oxford University, for research collaboration, exchange of faculty members and post graduate students. “These faculty members have started bringing in positive results for us.”

Speaking about the allegation that it was difficult to reach him, the VC said it was not true. “My door is always open for the students and the teachers. I am always available for them.”

He said, “After nine years, I arranged a convocation attended by nearly 7,000 people. It would have been a disaster if it happened had there been any communication gap.”

He said he sought government permission for holding another convocation.

Asked why he lives outside the university campus, Prof Saiful said he does not live there because he is unfortunate that I got life threats through anonymous letters and text messages.



office.

“I stay on the campus from morning to midnight. I also need to attend various meetings, which are compulsory for me.”

The VC also refuted the allegation that he was responsible for delay in dispatching official files.

“When I took charge, there was a backlog of around 4,500 files. It is because my post had been vacant for a couple of months and the immediate past VC was ill for quite some time. It took me around a year and a half to clear those files. That’s why there was some delay in file processing. It was quite painful.”

“Another point is that I do not sign any file blindly without going through the contents. Currently there is no file pending with me.”

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