

# DU hall students forced to join politics

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In a bid to increase the number of political activists, all student fronts at Dhaka University force students residing in the halls to join their political programmes almost every day intervening their studies.

DU sources said DU hall unit BCL leaders even ousted over 120 students from 13 male residential halls for the last three years on charge of remaining absent from political programmes.

Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) used to force students to attend their political programmes during the tenure of last BNP-Jamaat alliance government. The university unit of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), a student front of ruling Awami League (AL), follows such practice in the halls since AL assumed office in 2009.

Now BCL leaders are compelling first, second and third-year honours students to join its programmes at the hall guest rooms terming it "guest room programme" in the university's 10 halls for three to four days a week.

The leaders are also forcing the students to attend their political programmes held on the campus and outside ignoring their classes, examinations and even sickness in exchange of seats in the halls.

The students who take advantage of getting seats in the halls have to attend the programmes held in the guest rooms for about two hours generally beginning around 10:00pm with the participation of 50 to 80 students and respective hall unit leaders.

If any student is found absent without permission of the senior leaders, he has to suffer punishments. The punishments include verbal and physical abuse, cancellation of hall seats, even ouster from halls with bag and baggage.

In the guest rooms, leaders do nothing but "teach" the new comers about a set of "manners," including dealing with BCL central leaders, delivering political speeches and chanting slogans in rallies and processions.

The leaders also give lessons on how to tackle rivalry clashes using hockey sticks, iron rods and other lethal weapons. Several BCL factional groups hold programmes in the guest rooms separately at night, sources said.

The victim students told The Daily Star that they take it as "a mental harassment"

when the BCL leaders take attendance to find out whether they were present or not.

Returning from the part-time jobs and tuitions in the busy Dhaka city late in the evenings, the students are supposed to sit for study but the political programmes at the guest rooms hamper their normal study, they added.

Sometimes the students cannot attend their classes and do bad in the examinations due to joining such political programmes.

Despite such mental torture, the students do not want to leave the halls as majority of them cannot afford to rent a room in Dhaka city, according to the sources.

"I had lost my interest to study while some BCL leaders compelled me to attend the guest room programmes while I was in first year. I had planned to study regularly to make a bright result like I did in SSC and HSC, but due to such student politics I have almost ruined myself," said a final year student under the social science faculty of the university seeking anonymity.

DU unit BCL President Mehadi Hasan told The Daily Star that BCL does not force students to attend political programmes. "If any hall unit leaders found doing this, we would take strict action against them," he added.

"As the hall committee top leader, I have to look after the overall situation of the halls. I do it with the help of my junior leaders and resident students. I just call them to the guest room programmes to inform them about the latest news and ask them to follow those to run the organisational activities," said a DU hall unit president of BCL, seeking anonymity.

Former JCD president (2003-2005) of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall Akramul Hasan said, "[During my tenure] we never force students to attend the guest room programme regularly."

DU Proctor Prof Dr MA Ali told The Daily Star that it's hard to stop political programmes at the hall guest rooms overnight. "But we must take necessary steps to stop such [political] programmes," he said.

DU Vice-Chancellor Prof Dr AAMS Arefin Siddique said it's "quite unfair" to do harm to the study through holding such political programmes in the halls. "I would ask the hall authorities to tackle such matter," he added.

However, ICS leaders could not be contacted due to their disappearance from the campus area.