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Hyderabad

EFLU Women's Collective says inappropriate behaviour by professors is allowed by admin

EFLU's Women's Collective, in a statement, alleged that previous complaints of inappropriate behaviour towards students by some professors had been treated with "utter disregard by the administration".



EFLU university

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A week after a female student was allegedly sexually assaulted in Hyderabad's English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU) on October

18, the Women's Collective of the campus said that no one from the administration has directly addressed students regarding the investigation. The collective also condemned the EFLU Vice-Chancellor's statement in *The Hindu*, in which he called the campus 'peaceful'. The Women's Collective alleged that previous complaints of inappropriate behaviour towards students by some professors had been treated with "utter disregard by the administration".

"We believe that the professors on this campus could behave in such an inappropriate fashion with the students only because the administration has allowed for such a campus environment where people in positions of power cannot be held accountable for misconduct," said the statement from the EFLU Women's Collective. It added that neither the Vice-Chancellor nor anyone from the proctorial board has addressed the students directly regarding the investigation of the case so far.

"In the recent past, certain professors have been calling up students at inappropriate hours, trying to intimidate and threaten those who are standing in solidarity with the survivor. More so, the professors and students who checked the CCTV footage on the day following the assault have not been contacted in the course of the investigation process that the Vice Chancellor claims to have been going on. The EFLU administration's lack of maintaining transparency in this case is, therefore, a matter of serious concern for all the students," the statement further said.

Along with the statement, the students have also attached screenshots of chats and messages from professors. One student said, "We had a WhatsApp group with two other professors who were teaching the course, despite which one professor would personally text me with class updates on the pretext that he didn't want to communicate in the same group with another professor in it. We created another WhatsApp group with just him and our classmates, but this did not stop him from personally texting me despite my telling him several times to text in the common group. He would ask inappropriate questions when I asked him to text in the common group, like 'What are you busy with?' These questions made me feel cornered and intimidated."

Another student wrote about a professor, "The professor's behaviour with his female students is completely unprofessional, including him asking

only his female students to call him for no reason. During such calls, the subject changes from academics to "Do you have a boyfriend?" and "What do you think of me as a professor?" just to state a few. He also calls some of his students at odd hours (after 10 pm) and gets irritated if one doesn't answer those calls. He also sends them weird texts and emojis, which he deletes after some time, probably out of fear of facing consequences. All of this made a few of the female students feel very uncomfortable attending his classes due to the fear of facing harassment and inappropriate behaviour".

The statement by the Women's Collective also alleged that if students gather at one place for some time in groups of more than three, security guards on the campus "start surrounding and questioning them". The Collective further said that no attempts have been made to install lights or CCTV cameras at the site of the October 18 sexual assault. "Most of the public spaces inside the campus have been rendered inaccessible to students through vague circulars and "verbal orders". This hinders every kind of student-led activities or event within campus premises and, in turn, affects the holistic campus life of the students," the Collective added.

The statement from the Collective comes a week after the EFLU administration announced the formation of its Internal Committee (IC). Beginning from the night of October 16, about 300 students held a protest for over 24 hours, demanding the reconstitution of the university's Sensitisation, Prevention and Redressal of Sexual Harassment (SPARSH) committee. Students have said that the previous SPARSH committee, which was constituted under an EFLU ordinance based on the Sexual Harassment of Women At Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act of 2013, has been defunct since June 2023.

After the protest ended on October 17, the incident of sexual assault took place on the night of October 18 at around 10 pm, which led to further protests against the administration by students on the night of October 19. In response, EFLU Proctor Samson filed a complaint against students with the Osmania University Police, and 11 students were subsequently booked.

The women from EFLU further said that the IC's constitution goes against the University Grants Commission (UGC) guidelines and therefore can not function sufficiently. They pointed out that the panel of the IC is not

completely in place as the student representatives are not elected yet, adding that several other guidelines of the UGC have not been followed.

According to the Collective, the IC in EFLU goes directly against UGC Guidelines which state that "persons in senior administrative positions in the HEI such as Vice Chancellor, Pro Vice Chancellors, Rectors, Registrar, Deans, Heads of Departments, etc. shall not be members of ICCs in order to ensure autonomy of their functioning."

"Prof. Anjali Bagde is the Presiding Officer of the IC and also Dean of the School of European Languages which is a violation and once again raises questions about the transparency of the investigation and the power dynamics involved," said the Collective's statement.

After the sexual assault case and following protests, the EFLU administration also declared holidays till October 29, which students say was done to prevent them from protesting.

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