

Criminalization of Educational Institutions in Bangladesh: BCL Rampage in Universities Continues

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BCL Rampage in Universities Continues

Abstract

At least 50 students were injured as Bangladesh Chhatra League attacked on Islami Chhatra Shibir in Rajshahi University on 2 October 2012. Seven Shibir activists were injured with bullets as Chhatra League men fired gunshots. RU Proctor Chowdhury Mohammad Zakaria was also assaulted by the BCL men when he tried to quell the unrest. The police and the administration have played a very unfortunate role by failing to take any measure against the perpetrators. The demands from various quarters addressed to the government for taking measures in order to bring BCL back to the appropriate track seemed to have been ignored.

Background

Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) is the student wing of the present ruling party Bangladesh Awami League and it was formed on 4 January 1948. After formation of present AL Government on 6 January 2009, BCL members started to engage with terrorism, violence, minority torture, tender business, vandalism, admission business and other illegal activities in the whole country.¹

Unruly activities by members of Bangladesh Chhatra League are increasing to an alarming degree as no action was taken against their misdeeds although the civil societies repeatedly issued warnings to that end. Many unruly BCL members who are blessed by Awami League leaders and lawmakers across the country are aware they would be protected by their leaders. BCL members are frequently committing violent crimes at different educational institutions as no action is taken against them. Even no-one from the BCL was expelled for their involvement in violence or clash.



Photo 1: BCL men with weapons in Rajshahi University.
– Daily Sun

BCL attacked the opposition student bodies including Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir (BICS) at Rajshahi University, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal at DU. BCL also beat up two interns at Chittagong Medical College Hospital in September forcing all the interns to go for an indefinite strike. In Sylhet, BCL men vandalised a CNG refuelling station and beat up its staff as its owner refused to pay Tk 5 lakh toll resulting an indefinite strike there. BCL activists were also embroiled in a clash with

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladesh_Chhatra_League

Shibir activists at Dinajpur Government College on 3 October. In the aftermath of the clash, the college was shut down for an indefinite period. In these cases, the law-enforcers also did not arrest anyone.²

The latest of this incidents happened in Rajshahi University on October 2nd. At least 50 students were injured, three of them bullet-hit, in a fierce attack on Islamic Chhatra Shibir by Bangladesh Chhatra League activists at Rajshahi University (RU). Six Shibir members, including its general secretary Saifuddin Yahya, were injured by bullets. The BCL men also drove Shibir men out of the campus and put up barricades on the Rajshahi-Dhaka highway for around 30 minutes. RU Proctor Chowdhury Mohammad Zakaria was also assaulted by the BCL men when he tried to quell the unrest. Later, the activists of the pro-AL student body ransacked the residence of the vice-chancellor.

Incident of Attack

On 2 October 2012, Rajshahi University unit Shibir members gathered in front of Shahidullah Arts Building around 10:20 am to take out a peaceful procession from there at 10:30 am.

Seeing the Shibir gathering at Arts Faculty, the BCL men, equipped with firearms and other lethal weapons, took positions at different points of the campus and chased the Shibir activists half an hour later without any provocation, starting of a clash that continued for an hour and a half. About 60 BCL men led by Towhid Al Tuhin, Mithu, Amin, Nion, Atik and Sobuj Sarwar lauched a sudden attack on Shibir activists. Then Shibir members took shelter inside Shahidullah Building. The attack sent a wave of panic throughout the campus, sending the general students and university staff running helter-skelter for cover.³



Chhatra League men fired a hundred rounds, in which four Shibir activists were wounded. The injured are the organisation's university unit general secretary Saifuddin Yahya and activists Sharirul Islam, Ariful Islam and Jahangir. Others of Shibir injured in the clash are Jahirul Islam, Al-Amin and Shariful Islam of the Islamic history, Mobarak Hossain of law, Jahangir Hossain of folklore and Arif Hossain of management studies. Nabiul Islam, a student of the language department who is said to belong to no organisation, was also injured. The injured were admitted to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH).⁴

² The Daily Star, 04 October 2012.

³ <http://thenewnationbd.com/newsdetails.aspx?newsid=53379>

⁴ <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2012-10-03&nid=25784#.UG8Sc5jtfJI>

Among the BCL members who shot bullets from firearms are Former Joint Secretary of BCL Rajshahi University unit Akheruzzaman alias Takim, Former organising secretary Towhid Al Hossain Tuhin, deputy library secretary Nasim Ahmed Setu and deputy office secretary Atikur Rahman. Images showing that they were firing at Shibir activists were published in several media. Tuhin is accused in several criminal cases including murder and armed robbery. Nasim is also an accused in Sohel Rana murder case.⁵



Photo 3: BCL men with firearms. – Daily Prothom Alo.

Chhatra League men later drove the Shibir men out of the campus about 12:30pm and they hunted for Shibir men in places across the campus and beat up some general students suspecting them to be Shibir activists. Five more were injured in the incidents.

At least 50 students were injured and 5 of them were shot including the university Shibir secretary. Dozens of rounds of bullets were shot from the firearms held openly by the BCL

members in front of the policemen. Among the critically wounded are Secretary General of Shibir Saifuddin Yahya, Shibir activist Jahangir from Folklore Department, Sharif of Islamic Studies Department and Arif of Management Department.⁶ Bullets shot by BCL members injured Shibir workers including Bangabandhu Hall Shibir president Mobarak Hossain Babu, Ibrahim Hossain (Islamic Studies), Rabiul Islam (Linguistics), Al Amin (Islamic History) and 30 others.

The proctor and deputy proctor of the university were not spared from BCL attack. BCL men assaulted the proctor Chowdhury Muhammad Zakaria and his assistants. They dragged the proctor grabbing him by the collar out of the vice-chancellor's house.⁷ BCL men vandalised the proctor's office, officer's room, the public relations office, the Shahidullah arts building and the Sayed Ismail Hossain Siraji building.

In the evening after the incident, BCL members raided the student halls in search of Shibir members and severely beaten them. One Shibir activist of Bangabandhu Hall was taken to the room of BCL leader Sudipta Salam at room no. 203 and was beaten continuously until he was fainted and taken to medical centre.⁸

⁵ <http://www.prothom-alo.com/detail/date/2012-10-04/news/295024>

⁶ <http://www.amardeshonline.com/pages/details/2012/10/03/166897>

⁷ <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2012-10-03&nid=25784#.UG8Sc5jtfJI>

⁸ <http://www.amardeshonline.com/pages/details/2012/10/03/166897>

Proctor Beaten

BCL men assaulted the proctor Chowdhury Muhammad Zakaria and his assistants. They dragged the proctor grabbing him by the collar out of the vice-chancellor's house. Assistant proctor Zulfikar Ali later told reporters that the BCL activists had assaulted the proctor and five assistant proctors as they asked the activists not to damage the university bus.⁹ The BCL members attacked the Proctor as, according to them, "he did nothing to prevent the students belonging to Shibir from entering the university campus".



Photo 4: VC's House vandalised by BCL men. – Daily Prothom Alo.

Chhatra League men also went on the rampage, damaging the proctor's office, officer's room, the public relations office, the Shahidullah arts building and the Sayed Ismail Hossain Siraji building. They also damaged a university bus. They vandalised the gate of the vice-chancellor's house and defaced the name plate saying that it was under the patronisation of the administration that Shibir men dared to enter the campus.

Case against Shibir by the Gun-toting Shooter

A leader of the Bangladesh Chhatra League, who openly brandished firearms during Tuesday's clash at Rajshahi University (RU), went to Motihar Police Station in person and filed a case against Shibir men the next day. SM Towhid Al Hossain Tuhin, former organising secretary of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), filed the case against 21 Shibir activists by name, with 100 others remaining unnamed, said Anisur Rahman, officer-in-charge of the police station. The president and general secretary of the BICS's RU unit were among the accused.¹⁰

Tuhin, a third-year student in the department of finance and banking, was caught on camera by photojournalists of newspapers and television channels while he was shooting from his gun during the clash between the BCL and Shibir men. Newspapers and electronic media published photos and videos showing how plaintiff Tuhin was aiming a pistol at Shibir activists.

When asked by a reporter how a gun-toting man whose picture had been published in the media could leave the police station scotfree, the Officer in Charge of Motihar Police Station quickly put down the phone. The OC also



Photo 5: BCL leader Tuhin brandishing a revolver on 2 October. – Daily Star

⁹ <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2012-10-03&nid=25784#.UG8Sc5jtfJI>

¹⁰ <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=252332>

declined to talk to this correspondent when the latter went to the police station to meet him. When asked for his comment on how Tuhin had remained untouched, M Obaidullah, commissioner of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police (RMP), said he was on leave and knew nothing about it.¹¹

Role of Administration

The government as well as the authority of the publicly funded University of Rajshahi have failed to take actions against the heinous activities committed by BCL terrorists in the campus. RU Vice-Chancellor Prof M Abdus Sobhan, at a press conference at the Senate Building refused to take any measure against the persons involved in the incident of violent attack. He said “At present, our challenge is to hold the admission tests successfully. After the admission process, we will identify the students who had carried firearms during the violence after scrutinising video footage.¹² We need time to take measures regarding this incident.”¹³

The proctor and the student adviser also failed to prevent the BCL men from carrying out the attack which took place for several hours. No disciplinary action was taken against the perpetrators. No measure to ensure the safety of the students who were residing in Halls were taken as a result of which many student was tortured by BCL in the evening after the attack.

The government has not taken any measure to stop the student wing of the ruling party from destructive activities around the countries. It has failed to ensure that the persons involved in criminal activities are prevented and brought to proper trial.

Role of Police

The whole incident of attack on defenceless students by BCL armed members happened in the presence of police who did nothing to stop the violence. Members of BCL were seen to carry firearms while walking side by side with police men. When asked why the BCL members were not arrested in spite of openly using firearms, Additional Commissioner of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police Moniruzzaman said, our effort is going on and hopefully they will be brought under law.¹⁴



Photo 6: BCL leader Nasim Setu loading his gun while police men are walking by.

¹¹ <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=252332>

¹² <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=252332>

¹³ <http://www.prothom-alo.com/detail/date/2012-10-04/news/295024>

¹⁴ <http://www.prothom-alo.com/detail/date/2012-10-04/news/295024>

The police did not arrest any of the persons who were involved in the barbarous attack on students though the photos and videos of the perpetrators were shown in photographs and videos published in several press media. Rather police took a case brought by BCL leader Tuhin without arresting him. When he was asked how a gun-toting man whose picture had been published in the media could leave the police station scotfree, the Officer in Charge of Motihar Police Station quickly put down the phone. The OC also declined to talk to this



Photo 7: A Chhatra League activist, with policemen standing behind, attacks Chhatra Shibir activists with a gun and sticks on the Rajshahi University campus on Tuesday. — Daily New Age

correspondent when the latter went to the police station to meet him. When asked for his comment on how Tuhin had remained untouched, M Obaidullah, commissioner of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police (RMP), said he was on leave and knew nothing about it.¹⁵

Instead of protecting the injured students, the police arrested them under the false case filed by the attackers themselves. Injured Shibir activists Jahangir, Shariful, Mobarak and Mosaddek were arrested while they were under treatment in Rajshahi Medical Hospital. Five other students were arrested all of whom are Shibir activists while none of the BCL attackers were detained in the incident. Police arrested 15 activists of Shibir after conducting raids in different dormitories soon after the incident.

Recommendations

- The government must take immediate steps to prevent attack of Bangladesh Chhatra League on general students, members of other student organisations, teachers and public servants.
- The police must start legal proceeding against the members of BCL who have been involved with unlawful attack, torture and assault in order to ensure justice. The persons involved with offence should be arrested and charge should be formed against them.
- The administration of Universities has to ensure protection for the students from any unlawful attack and torture within the campus and halls. The persons liable for any criminal activities must be punished according to the rules and regulations of the institution. Proper investigation must be initiated to investigate the incidents of attack on students.

¹⁵ <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=252332>

- The ruling party should stop using the Chhatra League as a tool for establishing dominance by allowing terror and fear to be spread by the activists of BCL. The students should not be used for any illegal purpose.
- The civil society and media must raise the issue of continued destructive activities done by BCL under the protection of the ruling party to various forums. Human rights organisation must address the incidents of cruel torture committed by the members of BCL.
- International community must consider the issues of human rights violation and torture by the student wing of the ruling party while making any decision about their relation with Bangladesh. The issue of violence in educational institutions by BCL must be addressed seriously. Donor agencies should ensure that no person is tortured or humiliated due to the fact that he is not involved with Chhatra League or any other organisation.