

BCL violence again

Why is the story the same even after PM's stricture?

2
Shares



Former students of Jahangirnagar University yesterday protested BCL attack at the university's campus and demanded the VC's resignation. The photo was taken in front of National Museum in Shahbagh. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Aasha Mehreen Amin

You have to hand it to them—rain, hail or storm, Chhatra League manages to hog the headlines. The latest has been an attack on protesting students at JU who were demanding the resignation of the VC for alleged corruption. They did not even spare some teachers who were with the students. Before that

it was when members of this organisation attacked the principal of Rajshahi Polytechnic Institute and actually threw him into a pond—because he, the head of the institute had dared to bar a few of their fellow members to sit for an examination because they did not meet the class attendance requirement. One would have thought that after the brutal murder of Abrar Fahad inside a Buet dormitory by members of Chhatra League and the widespread public outrage after that, followed by arrests of the murderers, the organisation would tell its gang members —oops—organisation members to at least lie low.

But no. They just could not refrain from what they have been trained to do for years—be bullies with no fear of consequences. Even after two of their top leaders, the president and general secretary of the central BCL were removed from their posts for allegedly demanding their “share” in the funds for development work at Jahangirnagar University, they could not resist maintaining their reputation for being belligerent and violent. Students of JU have been protesting since August demanding a judicial inquiry into the reported involvement of the Vice Chancellor in mismanagement of the budget allocated for a campus development project. It was because there had been no investigation into the allegations that the students had demanded the VC’s resignation. True, confining her and her family in her home for hours was quite excessive—such a drastic step should not have been taken—but it did not warrant such a violent attack on them by the BCL members. The VC’s reaction, moreover, gives an idea of how powerful the BCL is considered. In an astounding move, the VC, after the BCL members had “dispersed” the protesting students by attacking them, instead of expressing sorrow for the whole incident that involved not only students but teachers, she exclaimed how “grateful” she was to the BCL for saving her, calling the act a “mass upsurge” and the protesters as members of Islami Chhatra Shibir, thus parroting the old justification for violence that the BCL has been touting all along. It was the same rationale used to justify the brutal beating of Abrar Fahad which led to his painful, untimely death.

It is not difficult to see what a dilemma the government must be in. After years of letting Chhatra League reign freely and supremely on the campuses of all public universities and colleges, terrorising ordinary students in the halls for the most preposterous reasons—for failing to be obsequious enough for instance—and being more interested in getting tenders for constructions on campus than enlightening their minds, the parent party must be in a tizzy trying to figure out how to bring them under control. After all it cannot be very comfortable to see members of affiliated groups being

constantly in the news—almost always for the wrong reasons. Not just that, it seems these “unruly elements” of the organisation, that has tried to live off its glorious heritage for far too long, have only managed to add fuel to the fire. Their swooping on unarmed students at various times—during the road safety and quota reform movements and of course on other smaller scale protests on various campuses including the most recent one in JU, has only made the voices of protest louder.

So unless these power hungry individuals who enjoy endless freedom to unleash their most sadistic sides are brought under control there will continue to be attacks by Chhatra League members on unarmed people and the negative public backlash that goes with it. Frankly speaking, the Awami League’s power is well entrenched with practically no opposition to challenge them. In such a situation where the government is trying its best to boost development and growth, it does not need the nuisance of the unwarranted rabid behaviour of some Chhatra League cadres bringing infamy to the parent party, not to mention provoking public disaffection. The Prime Minister has very categorically shown her disapproval of the unruliness of Chhatra League—especially through the expulsion of the two top BCL leaders but it seems even this is not enough to deter the belligerent elements of the organisation.

So what can be done to rid the campuses of such terror?

There have been arguments in favour of banning student wings of political parties from all campuses. That seems to be the ultimate solution from the ordinary people’s point of view with the guarantee that

this will not pull the plug on student politics in general. From the AL's point of view, removing Chhatra League from all campuses poses a huge dilemma—what will they do with thousands of (mostly) young men whose *raison d'être* will become hard to justify? After enjoying not only freedom to do what they want, but also many material benefits such as expensive cars and luxury apartments, how will the leaders of the organisation maintain their lifestyle?

The need to inflict pain and suffering on the helpless to feel good about oneself is no doubt a kind of pathology that may or may not be cured. It is frightening that many members of Chhatra League have demonstrated their proclivity to brutality at the drop of a hat. One thing is for sure—things cannot just go on like this. Our educational institutions are being held hostage by members of this organisation. They are crippling our education system by creating an environment of constant fear and unease. They are making university administrations weak, powerless and unethical in the eyes of the students. Can the ruling party continue to allow its student front to paralyse our campuses and severely impede the academic atmosphere required to nurture our bright minds?

The success with which corrupt Jubo League leaders have been reigned in for their illegal casino businesses after the PM's directive shows that it is not an impossible thing. Such a directive is now needed to remove all criminal elements from the BCL. This will mean unbiased disciplining of all those members of the organisation who have taken part in attacks or corrupt activities. It will mean putting an end to the limitless impunity they enjoy, the implicit support they can count on from law enforcers, unscrupulous university administrators and their big brothers in the parent party. Closing Jahangirnagar University and forcing students to leave the dormitories is hardly the solution. Students protesting unnecessary environmental degradation and administrative corruption are not the problem. Those justifying it and using violence are.

Aasha Mehreen Amin is Senior Deputy Editor, Editorial and Opinion, The Daily Star.