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JCD men fight at DU

Trade gunshots; rebels stab central president; 24 others hurt; strike called

DU CORRESPONDENT

Clashes between Jatlyatabadi Chhatra Dal factions at Dhaka University yesterday left at least 25 people including proctor, JCD chief and four policemen injured.

The fighting resulted from a feud over places in the new central committee of JCD, student wing of the opposition BNP.

Chhatra Dal cadres fired some 50 rounds of bullet and exploded 20 hand-made bombs in a sharp reminder of the violence-plagued days of DU.

Panic gripped thousands of students as the sound of gunfire and explosions echoed through the campus, which hardly saw any shooting in last couple of years.

Yesterday's was the first major incident of violence since the unrest stemming from the beating of students by army men rocked DU in August 2007.

At a press conference in the afternoon, JCD leaders blamed

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JCD men fight

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Bangladesh Chhatra League, student wing of the ruling Awami League, for the fighting. They announced a strike at DU for today and the day after tomorrow.

The wounded included JCD activists Mohidul Islam Hiru, Javed Hassan, Abul Hasan, Masud Khan Pervez and Iftekher Kabir.

Javed Iqbal, Selim, Imu, Wahid, Emon, Swapan and Shovon are among the general students hurt.

Chhatra Dal President Sultan Salauddin was given treatment at the Islami Bank Central Hospital and DU Proctor KM Saiful Islam Khan at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Medical University.

The clashes broke out at around 10:40am when leaders of the new committee were on their way to the vice-chancellor's office from Madhur Canteen.

A group of JCD men, left out of the committee, were lying in wait near Surya Sen Hall. As soon as Tuku, General Secretary Amirul Islam Alim and other office-bearers entered the Mall Chatter area, they opened fire on them.

Some activists of Surya Sen and Mohsin Hall BCL were backing the rebels, said witnesses.

Though startled at first, Tuku's supporters did not take much time to return fire. Chases and counter-chases between the feuding groups continued for around 30 minutes.

Alongside firearms, both the groups used sharp weapons and hockey sticks. They also threw stones at each other.

Police shot at least 48 teargas canisters to disperse them.

The cadres however got locked into fresh fighting at several points across the campus till 1:30pm.

Tuku and Alim took shelter at a teachers' room in the Arts Building. At 12 noon, DU Proctor KM Saiful Islam Khan and some 50 policemen went there to bring them out of the building safely.

But at the rear entrance, rebels backed by some BCL men forced their way through the cordon and attacked the Chhatra Dal leaders. They beat up Tuku and attempted to pierce a sharp weapon in his neck.

The proctor, Ramna Zone Assistant Police Commissioner Abdul Ahad, Officer-in-Charge of Shahbagh Police Station Rezaul Karim and two constables were hurt trying to save the JCD leaders.

The attackers chanted slogans calling Tuku a patron of militants.

Earlier in the morning, the

new committee members came to the campus for the first time after its formation 18 days ago. They took position at the Madhur Canteen at around 6:00am. An hour later, they chased the rebel faction as the latter tried to get in the canteen.

The aggrieved leaders and workers had kept the central committee members off the campus since BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia declared the 171-member central body on January 1.

Late in the afternoon, BCL brought out a procession protesting the violence on the campus.

In the evening JCD men brought out a procession and vandalised a few vehicles at Paltan in the capital.

PRESS BRIEFINGS

At the press conference at its central office, JCD called a two-day students' strike at DU for January 19 and 21. They also demanded resignation of DU VC AAMS Arefin Siddique for "not cooperating with them".

The organisation will stage demonstrations in educational institutions across the country today.

Reading out a statement, General Secretary Amirul Islam Alim said, "When the new committee was going to the vice-chancellor's office to pay him a courtesy call, a group of Chhatra League leaders attacked them."

Talking to reporters on the campus, rebel faction leader Ahsan Uddin Shipon said it was entirely an internal matter of Chhatra Dal.

"The organisation cannot be run under Tuku-Alim. They gave posts to many in exchange for money, depriving the dedicated leaders and workers."

DU VC Arefin Siddique said the fighting seems to have been designed to disturb the calm of the campus.

"Dhaka University has come out of the culture of strike. Students won't accept any programme that would hamper their academic life," he said about the strike called by JCD.

Even though JCD called for a strike, the DU VC told reporters that classes and exams would be held as per scheduled.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia in the evening went to hospital to visit the injured JCD chief.

DELWAR

BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain yesterday blamed BCL for the attack on JCD leaders at DU.

In a statement, he said the government made the attack to divert public attention from the conspiracy to "sell the country".

He said if AL does not stop "behaving like fascists, people will give it a befitting reply".