

Continued BCL atrocities and indulgent incumbents

THE latest spree of violence by the Bangladesh Chhatra League, which has led to indefinite closure of three educational institutions in Kushtia, Rangpur and the capital Dhaka in the space of a week, coupled with the sustained indifference or inability or unwillingness of the government and the ruling Awami League to rein it in, could be indicative of a couple of disquieting possibilities. First, the incumbents have little or no control over the students' organisation, and have limited their actions to sporadic articulation of reproach and/or issuance of warning of actions — organisational, legal or otherwise. Second, they are actually happy with the role that the Chhatra League has played thus far, be it in creating a reign of terror in different educational institutions or perpetrating, in tandem with the law enforcement agencies, atrocities on the opposition political parties or, for that matter, any quarters who would dare to raise voice against the government's undemocratic policies and anti-people actions. Suffice it to say, it is bad news either way.

The Chhatra League has been constantly in the headlines, for the wrong reasons, one must add, since the AL-led political alliance assumed office in January 2009, with its atrocities having increased both in frequency and ferocity. In the early days of the incumbent government's tenure, the Chhatra League was seemingly preoccupied with campus control, driving away its political opponents, especially Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, student front of the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party, from one educational institution or the other. Then, after its dominance had been established, more or less, on different campuses, infighting began, with different BCL factions going after one another over control of tender manipulation, rent-seeking, admission business, etc. These clashes, needless to say, resulted in injuries to, and even death of, individuals, sometimes of their own. Soon, the Chhatra League branched out to other areas of criminality — abduction, extortion, sexual harassment and even murder. Of late, the Chhatra League seems to have settled into the role of a pro-government militia, so to speak, assigned to suppress any form of dissent — political or otherwise, on campus or out in the street — in tandem with the law enforcement agencies; no one — political or social activist, teacher or student, eminent personality or regular citizen — seems to get spared from BCL highhandedness.

There seems to be more reasons than one to suspect that the incumbents may be more than happy with the Chhatra League's performances thus far. First of all, while the key functionaries of the government and the ruling party, including the prime minister, have sporadically talked tough against its myriad misdeeds, such talks have hardly translated into commensurate actions. Of course, some leaders and activists were expelled and the prime minister once even stepped down as the BCL organisational chief; these acts and actions have appeared somewhat gimmicky, given the general indulgence that the incumbents have given to the Chhatra League. It is pertinent to recall here that, in the immediate aftermath of Biswajit Das's killing by some BCL activists during the opposition-sponsored road blockade, the incumbents sought to protect the perpetrators.

Just the other day, the communications minister, once a president of the Chhatra League, slammed BCL activists for 'tarnishing the image of the Awami League.' Given the continued atrocities of the Chhatra League, it seems that image is not, and has never been, a priority for them. In such circumstances, expecting decisive and demonstrative actions from the government and the ruling party to rein in the BCL troublemakers may not be forthcoming, unless and until the conscious sections of society raise their voice and mobilise public opinion to bring the pressure to bear on them to take corrective actions.