

KILLING AT RU HALL

Family, friends question role of BCL men

ANWAR ALI and MA SAYEED, Rajshahi

The masterminds themselves have filed a murder case over Friday's killing of a Chhatra League leader at Rajshahi University to divert attention from the real perpetrators, said the victim's family and close friends.

Some RU unit BCL leaders were involved in the murder of Rustam Ali Akand, 22, a fourth-year student of political science, in his room at Suhrawardy Hall, said the victim's elder brother, Rowshan Ali Akand.

"When attacked by fellow Chhatra League activists, Rustam called up one of his close friends. He could not talk over the phone, but his friend could hear all his yells, killers' conversations and the gunshot."

Selim Reza, an RU BCL activist and second-year student of history, shot Rustam in the presence of Abdullah Al Galib, RU BCL publicity secretary, Rowshan said quoting his brother's friend who had heard their names over the phone.

Rustam was a joint secretary of the hall unit BCL and was supposed to vie for the

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president's post in the party council at RU tomorrow.

Selim has not been seen on the campus since the murder. Galib seems to have gone insane; he had been warning everyone he met on the campus not to talk to the media about the murder, said Rustam's friends.

Rowshan, who came to Rajshahi from Gaibandha yesterday to attend a mourning meeting, said the killers have been roaming freely on the campus while the witnesses are in a state of panic facing constant threats.

Asked if he would file a case, he said he and his family could not afford to pursue a legal battle.

Mehedi Hasan, vice-president of RU BCL, filed the murder case, accusing four named and eight unnamed activists of Islami Chhaura Shibir, a pro-jamaat-e-Islami student body. He named Galib, Shahjahan Samrat, deputy literary secretary of RU BCL, and another party member Enayet Kabir as witnesses.

A friend of Rustam said he had seen Shahjahan hurry out of Rustam's room with a pistol and a mobile phone wrapped in a T-shirt after the incident.

Mehedi controls BCL activities at the Suhrawardy Hall, and Selim Reza, who has earned a bad name at the university, is his recruit in the party, a BCL insider said.

Mehedi took Selim from Ziaur Rahman Hall to Suhrawardy Hall a couple of days before the murder and drove two students out of a room for him. He did all this because he wanted to have Selim elected president of the hall unit, the party member said.

A student of 2006-07 session, Mehedi completed his master's in social science in 2011, according to university records.

However, in the case statement, he has identified himself as a final-year student and a resident of the hall.

"He [Mehedi] is not a student any more. He has been staying at the hall illegally," said hall Provost Prof Asabul Haque, adding that he had not been aware of Selim staying in the hall.

Asked why Mehedi had not been evicted yet, he said there were political issues.

"Because of Mehedi, the political environment of our hall had deteriorated," said a BCL activist. The hall staff and other students made similar allegations against Mehedi.

"Rustam and we were trying to establish a healthy political culture at the hall," he said alleging that Mehedi was addicted to drugs, possessed fire-arms and extorted money from students.

Talking to The Daily Star, Mehedi admitted that political influence helped him stay at the hall since he became vice-president in July 2013.

Asked why he had brought Selim to Suhrawardy Hall, he said, "I brought him for political reasons, but I should not be held responsible if he [Selim] has committed any crime."

He then quickly said no BCL activist had been involved in the murder.

About the filing of the case, Mehedi said it was a political decision. "I just signed it."

Rustam took out an education loan of Tk 1.25 lakh from Grameen Bank around four years ago and was paying off Tk 6,000 in instalments every month, Rowshan said.

He works at a community clinic project for Tk 10,000 per month and is the sole breadwinner of the four-member family.

"We were hoping that my brother would one day share the family expenses," Rowshan said, adding he had not married yet because he had been waiting for Rustam's graduation.

Several RU students, BCL activists and the victim's classmates and friends talked to The Daily Star correspondents, wishing not to be named in this report in fear of reprisals by the murderers.

BCL CALLS OFF STRIKE

Bangladesh Chhatra League yesterday postponed its indefinite strike at RU until April 29 following directives from the party high-ups. The announcement came at a hurried press conference at RU.

In another development, Dasmari regional Shibir treasurer Sanaullah alias Jackey and Shibir activist Khurshid Alam of Notun Budpara were remanded for a day. They were picked up from Binodpur on Sunday.