

BCL given cold-shoulder

Top AL leaders, ministers staying away from programmes of crime-obsessed student leaders

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The Awami League has finally chosen to leave Bangladesh Chhatra League to its own devices for the disgrace it earned in the last 14 months through violence, admission trade, and tender scam.

Frustrated with their crime-loving student leaders, some top Awami League leaders and ministers decided to give them a lesson by staying away from all Chhatra League programmes.

This is not any official decision from the ruling Awami League or the government policy makers, but Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina herself had recently advised some of her close aides in the government and party to avoid Chhatra League, which has been sullyng the image of the government along with its

sources close to the prime minister.

Chhatra League had always been officially Awami League's student wing until less than two years ago when Awami League had to cut the umbilical cord with Chhatra League to be in compliance with the amended Representation of People's Order, 2008.

However, Chhatra League's activities still cast a shadow on the government's image and cause embarrassment, said a number of ruling-party leaders.

Matia Chowdhury, one of the senior leaders of Awami League and a revered senior minister of the cabinet who had earned the title "Agni Kanya" for her extraordinary role as student leader in the 60s, is also seriously unhappy with Chhatra League's recent activities.

Matia told The Daily Star at her office that she will refrain from attending any

programmes organised by Chhatra League or programmes where there would be Chhatra League discussants.

Asked why she is avoiding Chhatra League, she said she feels uncomfortable as the student organisation achieved quite a bad repute.

Lawmaker Obaidul Quader, a presidium member of the Awami League who was once president of Chhatra League and assigned to look after the student organisation on behalf of the party, also stopped attending Chhatra League programmes, his close aides said.

Quader said, "I believe that the only solution is to take punitive and corrective measures to bring Chhatra League back on track."

Awami League General Secretary Syed Ashraful Islam, now abroad, also prefers

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not to join Chhatra League programmes, sources close to him said, adding that he had already declined to join Chhatra League's Mymensingh district council.

"I won't attend any programme of Chhatra League," said Awami League acting General Secretary Mahbul Alam Hanif, who until recently used to attend Chhatra League programmes frequently.

Hanif, a special assistant to the prime minister, said he is tired of keeping an eye on Chhatra League. He declined to elaborate.

Sources say the top Awami League leaders are going to abide by "no official connection between Awami League and Chhatra League" to avoid going to Chhatra League programmes.

Apparently, the factional feud in Chhatra League at the Polytechnic Institute in Barisal that resulted in a bloody violence on May 4 was the last straw for many Awami League leaders.

The sources said on May 7, when a large number of Chhatra League activists led by its president and general secretary went to prime minister's official residence to meet her, Hasina avoided talking to them. She just gave them a smile and said "have some sweets and then leave", the sources added.

The same day, Home Minister Sahara Khatun did not join a Chhatra League programme at the Teacher Student Centre on Dhaka University campus.

Asked by The Daily Star as to why senior leaders and ministers are avoiding Chhatra League programmes, Chhatra League President Mahmud Hasan Ripon declined to

comment. Recently Jagannath University, Barisal Polytechnic Institute, Dhaka University, Jahangirnagar University, Chittagong University, Rajshahi University, Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology, Khulna University of Engineering and Technology, Edward College in Pabna, Dhaka College, Kushtia Govt College and many other educational institutions across the country witness unruly activities of Chhatra League activists.

Most of the violence was over establishing supremacy, tender manipulation, and admission trade in educational institutions. Many universities and colleges had to be closed indefinitely for this.

At least five people were killed during the violence, including one each in Dhaka Medical College, Rajshahi University and Dhaka University.

Two factions of Chhatra League clashed with each other in presence of police at Jagannath University on May 10 leaving at least 20 injured.

comment.

A top-ranking Chhatra League leader told The Daily Star, "I think the Awami League leaders and ministers have reservations about our programmes."

The prime minister had designated three Awami League organising secretaries -- Jahangir Kabir Nanak, BM Mojammel Haque and Ahmed Hossain -- with the charge of looking after Chhatra League activities, but they apparently failed to put a rein on it.

They are to meet Hasina upon her arrival from South Korea and Malaysia on May 21 and discuss the Chhatra League question.

Ahmed Hossain told The Daily Star that holding of Chhatra League's long due central council, bringing it back on track, and ways to handle the organisation are likely to be discussed.

"We will discuss overall Chhatra League affairs. How we will handle Chhatra League and what will be the extent of our supervision, among many other issues," he said.

Chhatra League started to earn bad reputation from the night of Awami League's victory in the parliamentary election late December, 2008. It flexed its muscles in educational institutions and elsewhere in the country.