

VIOLENCE AT RU

# AL blames 'intruders', BCL expels 2 leaders

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As Bangladesh Chhatra League seems back with campus violence within a month of the new government taking office, ministers and ruling Awami League leaders yesterday rehashed same old rhetoric.

A day after the activists of Rajshahi University BCL, the pro-AL student body, attacked general students with firearms on the campus, the AL high-ups blamed it all on the "intruders," warning of tough action against them.

Such reactions are identical to those by top AL leaders following recurring campus violence in the past five years.

Meanwhile, Chhatra League yesterday expelled

its RU unit Joint General Secretary Nasim Ahmed Setu and Organising Secretary Samsuzzman Emon over Sunday's violence. The duo was seen brandishing firearms during the violence that left at least 100 people, including eight journalists, injured.

Over the past five years, public universities, medical colleges, polytechnic institutes and government colleges saw many incidents of violence, as the BCL men got involved in factional clashes and also fought with activists of the opposition parties. In some cases, the authorities had to close the institutions.

But most of the BCL men involved in those incidents went unpunished, as senior AL leaders

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readily put the blame on other student bodies such as Shibir, a pro-Jamaat organisation.

AL sources said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also the party president, had called top BCL leaders to the Gono Bhaban after the January 5 polls and asked them not to create chaos on any campus. The party has also promised in its election manifesto to go tough on campus violence.

But all these orders and pledges appear to have gone unheeded.

Within weeks of Hasina's instructions, the BCL men backed by police attacked RU students protesting fee hikes and evening shift master's courses. Following the incident, the

authorities suspended all academic activities and ordered the resident students to vacate their dormitories.

Talking about the violence, Communications Minister and AL Presidium Member Obaidul Quader yesterday said it was an act of the criminals who had infiltrated the BCL.

"The government is making a list of criminals, extortionists and cadres who have managed their way into the party. A cleansing operation will soon be launched in the Awami League," he told reporters in Sylhet.

Hasan Mahmud, AL publicity secretary, said the BCL was a big organisation and many people had infiltrated it.

Referring to the RU incident, he

said, "Criminals, backed by Jamaat-Shibir, got mingled with the general students."

But campus sources said Mizanur Rahman Rana, BCL RU unit president, was present during the attacks. BCL activists from Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology, Agrani School and College and other BCL units of the city also joined the RU BCL men.

The sources added that at least six BCL men, including Setu and Emon, brandished firearms during the violence. The four others are RU BCL organising secretaries Foysal Ahmed, Ashif Hossain and Mostakim Billah and ex-joint secretary Sudipta Salam.

The infiltration theory was first

offered by LGRD Minister and AL General Secretary Syed Ashraful Islam following violence in Dhaka and Rajshahi universities in 2010. On February 9 that year, he said Shibir men infiltrated the BCL.

"Some identified pro-Shibir men has been given important positions in the Dhaka University hall committees," he said.

The same day, Hasina said her government would not spare anyone involved in campus violence no matter what their political identities were.

Two days later, Hasina held a meeting with the then home minister Shahara Khatun, state minister for home Shamsul Haque Tuku and state minister for LGRD Jahangir Kabir

Nanak. She asked them to identify the Shibir men within the BCL and take stern action against them. But nothing was done.

Talking to reporters yesterday, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid said, "I'm sorry for what happened in Rajshahi. I'm worried and angry at the same time."

But he, too, tried to shift the blame on Shibir, saying the Islamist party men created chaos by joining the demonstrations of the general students.

"Whoever is responsible will be punished," Nahid said when his attention was drawn to the armed BCL activists who attacked the demonstrators.

Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, state

minister for home, also warned of tougher action against those involved in the violence.

"Those who are seen with firearms are not students. They are criminals and the government will take action against them no matter which party they belong to," he told reporters at the secretariat.

Meanwhile, the BCL yesterday formed a five-member committee to probe the incident. Headed by BCL Vice-president Joydev Nondee, the committee is to submit its report to its president or secretary within five work-days.

Talking to The Daily Star, BCL General Secretary Siddiqui Nazmul Alam said, "Those responsible will face tough organisational action."