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## Repeated BCL tortures make campuses unsafe

Staff Correspondent | Published at 12:34am on February 19, 2023



Repeated incidents of torture on students by leaders and activists of the ruling Awami League's student wing, Bangladesh Chhatra League, have rendered dormitories of major public universities across the country unsafe.

Though such incidents are not new in the country, the number and severity of these tortures have increased in recent years.

Even after filing complaints against both physical and mental abuses, victims do not get any permanent solution, for which university campuses have turned into 'concentration camps' for them, they said.

Senior educationists blamed the ongoing culture of impunity for the recurrence of the incidents.

The High Court on Thursday sounded alarm over torture on students in residential halls of different educational institutions against the backdrop of physical torture on a female student of Islamic University Bangladesh in Kushtia allegedly by a group of BCL leaders and activists.

The court asked the deputy commissioner of Kushtia to form a three-member probe body within three days to investigate the incident, in which a first-year student was subjected to brutal torture for four hours by a group of the university's BCL unit members, led by its vice-president Sanjida Chowdhury, on February 12 at Deshratna Sheikh Hasina Hall.

Four other students of IU Deshratna Sheikh Hasina Hall said that they were also tortured and harassed a few months ago.

'The students who live in the public university halls across the country cannot think and act normally,' senior educationist, author and former Dhaka University Bangla professor Abul Kashem Fazlul Haque told New Age on Saturday.

By sacrificing their conscience, intelligence and sense of reason for self-defence, they live in these halls by hiding themselves from the ruling political party's student wing, he observed, adding, 'This situation is very dangerous for the nation and the state.'

Professor Mohammad Kaykobad, Distinguished Professor at BRAC University, said that any sort of injustice would continue if incidents of injustice went unpunished.

'We believe that the [ruling party] leaders will not break laws and will show the people and the nation the right paths,' he said, adding that for the protection of their image the leaders should take steps to mete out exemplary punishments to those who commit a crime.

However, he hastens to add, such punishments don't take place in reality.

New Age correspondent at the IU reported that many students said that the university became unsafe for them due to a number of ragging and assaulting incidents reportedly committed by BCL leaders and activists.

Earlier this year, a group of IU BCL unit activists beat up Riyad Hossain, a student at the accounting and information system department, over taking a seat at the university bus on February 6.

Nazrul Islam, a guardian of an IU student, said that they sent their sons and daughters to the university for higher education but they felt sad when they heard about these incidents.

Such incidents continue to happen at the university repeatedly as no action was taken against the perpetrators by the university administration, said IU Bangladesh Chhatra Union unit president Emanul Islam Shohan.

IU pro-vice-chancellor Professor M Mahbubur Rahman told New Age that they had given direction to the hall authorities and the proctorial body to be alert on the campus so that none could be harassed and tortured by anyone.

They would conduct counselling for creating awareness, he added.

BCL leaders and activists of the Dhaka University unit allegedly beat a student for his suspected link to Islami Chhatra Shibir, student wing of the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, at the university's Bijoy Ekattor hall between 11:00pm on January 22 and 9:30am on January 23 this year.

New Age correspondent at Jahangirnagar University reported on Saturday that as per statements of teachers and students, BCL men staged over 50 incidents of torture and harassment at the halls in the past three months.

On February 12, JU BCL unit deputy international affairs secretary Jisun Ahmed Rony and member Arfin Alam Sunny beat five second-year students at the guest room of AFM Kamaluddin Hall over 'not showing manners' to seniors.

Later, Jisun and Sunny allegedly forced a victim named Shaikat, among the five, to leave the campus and threatened him not to file any charge in that connection with the administration.

On January 2, 2023, JU BCL deputy secretary Tauhidul Islam Jihad ousted a final-year student of the economics department, Md. Fahim, from his seat at AFM Kamaluddin Hall over his 'involvement' with Shibir.

JU Bangladesh Chhatra Union unit organising secretary Alif Mahmud said, 'BCL leaders and members have created a scary environment at the halls aiming to use the students in implementing their political agenda.'

JU BCL president Akhtaruzzaman Shohel termed the above-mentioned occurrences as isolated incidents.

JU proctor ASM Firoz-Ul-Hasan said, 'We take action within a short time, as possible, against any allegation regardless of the political identity [of those involved].'

New Age staff correspondent in Rajshahi reported that Rajshahi University BCL leaders and activists had allegedly forced at least 23 students out of their halls as they have tortured, intimidated and extorted a number of students in recent times.

Students have lodged at least 42 complaints against BCL leaders and activists with the university and hall authorities in the past two years.

Lastly, on February 14, BCL leaders and activists threw out on the ground the bedding materials of mass communication and journalism department second-year student Krishna Ray and placed another student in his seat at room 383 of Shaheed Suhrawardy Hall.

When Krishna protested, BCL men beat up and threatened to kill him, saying that they will brand him as an activist of Islami Chhatra Shibir.

Samiul Islam, a third-year folklore student, fled Shah Makhdum Hall after BCL activists tortured and threatened to kill him on January 25 if he did not meet their demand for Tk 10,000 in extortion.

BCL leaders even forced out a physically challenged student, Sourav, from his room 438 at Matihar Hall on March 29 in 2022.

Farid Uddin Khan, an economics professor staging demonstration on the RU campus against BCL torture, said that parents were feeling an extreme insecurity to keep their children at the halls, adding that even with their low incomes they are trying to keep their children at mess.

RU pro-vice-chancellor Professor Sultan-Ul-Islam told New Age on Saturday that they had held a meeting with hall provosts to address the problems.

‘We are working to solve the problems — both politically and non-politically. These problems have not been created in a single day. We may not solve the existing problems in a day, but we are trying,’ he added.

New Age correspondent in Chattogram reported that students of the Chittagong University and their guardians have expressed their concern over the anarchy long been run by BCL leaders and activists at the residential halls.

Shafiqur Rahman, a student at the Bangla department, told New Age that he avoided living at Suhrawardy Hall as BCL groups clashed with each other at the hall.

Sultan Ahmed, father of Shafiqur, told New Age that he did not allow Shafiqur to stay at the CU hall due to BCL anarchy on the campus.

CU pro-VC Professor Benu Kumar Dey told New Age on Saturday that they took actions against the students who were involved in clashes on the campus.

‘But it is impossible [to take action] sometimes due to different reasons. We have the “liability” as we have reportedly failed to control the students,’ he said.

Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology student Abrar Fahad was beaten to death at his hall on October 7, 2019 by then BCL leaders and activists of the BUET unit over his Facebook post criticising a water-sharing deal with India.

According to Abul Kashem Fazlul Haque, punishments to the responsible people are necessary while people need to inculcate morality and change their mindset.

‘All political parties, including the Awami League, should have the goodwill in this regard,’ he added.

BCL central committee president Saddam Hussain told New Age on Thursday that his organisation had recently expelled 21 activists involved in controversial incidents, adding that they want to build ragging-free campuses.



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