

# BCL unleashes fury on quota protesters

Over 300, mostly demonstrators, hurt at DU during 5-hr-long pitched battles; female students, BCL men among the injured; agitators to hold nationwide protest rallies today



A student protester being beaten by alleged BCL activists in Dhaka University, as attacks were launched on quota reform demonstrators from last afternoon, PHOTO: PRABIR DAS; PROTHOM ALO

Chhatra League activists yesterday attacked quota protesters on Dhaka University campus, triggering fierce clashes that left at least 300 people injured -- mostly protesters including female students and also some BCL men.

Clad in helmet and armed with sticks and iron rods, hundreds of Chhatra League activists, many from outside DU, beat up the demonstrators across the campus.



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They were also seen whacking female protesters with sticks.

**"They are afraid of the fact that we can also speak about our rights. They want to gag our voice at any cost."**



— A female student of DU

Bruised and bloodied, students ran for their lives.

At one point, the demonstrators retaliated by throwing brick chunks and beating up some Chhatra League men.



A man about to attack a female student in DU's Doyel Chattar, PHOTO: PRABIR DAS; PROTHOM ALO

For about five hours, mayhem reigned supreme. After the pitched battles, the streets there were littered with thousands of brick chunks.

A group of Chhatra League activists even swooped on demonstrators at the emergency department of Dhaka Medical College Hospital in the evening, causing panic among doctors, nurses, patients, and their attendants. Many ran for cover.

The attack disrupted medical services at the country's prime medical facility.

**“They [demonstrators] brought students from different halls by threatening them. They carried out attacks on students with locally made weapons.”**

— Saddam Hussain Chhatra League President

"We deployed additional nurses and doctors to deal with the situation. Injured from both groups are getting treatment here," said DMCH Director Brig Gen Md Asaduzzaman.

Around 297 received treatment at the DMCH and six at the Sarkari Karmachari Hospital, said inspector Md Bachchu Mia, in charge of the DMCH police outpost.

### TIMELINE

**DECEMBER 30, 2010**

The government allocates 30% quotas in govt jobs for grandchildren of freedom fighters.

**JULY 13, 2013**

DU campus turns into battlefield; Cops, BCL activists attack anti-quota protesters.

**JANUARY 31, 2018**

A writ petition is filed with High Court seeking re-evaluation of quota system in govt jobs.

**MARCH 5, 2018**

HC rejects the writ.

**APRIL 8, 2018**

Protesters block the Shahbagh intersection for several hours; Cops, BCL activists swoop on protesters, chase them away.

**APRIL 27, 2018**

AL representatives meet with the protesters, assure them of immediate decision on quota issue.

**OCTOBER 4, 2018**

Official circular abolishes freedom fighter quota in first- and second-class govt jobs.

**JUNE 5, 2024**

HC rules circular scrapping freedom fighter quotas illegal.

**JUNE 9, 2024**

The government challenges HC rule with Supreme Court.

**JULY 1, 2024**

Students and jobseekers start demo, seeking reform to the quota system.

**JULY 4, 2024**

Supreme Court upholds High Court verdict.

**JULY 11, 2024**

HC says govt can change, reduce, or increase the ratio or percentage of quotas.

**JULY 14, 2024**

Late-night student protests rock DU, other campuses over PM Hasina's "disparaging remark".

**JULY 14, 2024**

In its full verdict, HC declares abolishment of freedom fighter quotas in govt jobs illegal.

**JULY 15, 2024**

Public university students come under attack while staging demos at various campuses.

Nahid Islam, one of the organisers of the quota protests, said, "We don't know the exact figure. But our estimate is that over 200 fellow demonstrators were injured in the attacks and many are in serious condition."

Students of at least four other universities -- Jagannath University, Jahangirnagar University, Rajshahi University, Chittagong University – also came under Chhatra League attack yesterday. At least 60 students were injured there.





A man brandishes a gun towards the protesters in the Shahidullah Hall area. PHOTO: PRABIR DAS; PROTHOM ALO

## MAYHEM AT DU

Tension was running high on the campus since late Sunday night when hundreds of students came out of their dormitories protesting what they said was a "disparaging comment" by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina regarding quota protesters.

They chanted slogans like "Tumi ke? Ami ke? Razakar, Razakar! [Who are you? Who am I? Razakar, Razakar!]," "Cheyechhilam odikhar, hoye gelam Razakar [We wanted rights, but we have been labelled as Razakars]".

The prime minister on Sunday said, "Why do they [the protesters] have so much anger against the freedom fighters?... If the grandchildren of freedom fighters don't get quota benefits, should the grandchildren of Razakars get the benefit?"

Yesterday, the violence started about two hours after Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader said the Chhatra League would give a fitting reply to those student leaders of the quota reform movement who labelled themselves as Razakars, and were arrogant.

The demonstrators had announced a rally in front of the Raju Bhaskarjo at noon yesterday to protest the PM's remarks and attacks on them at different universities on Sunday night.

Chhatra League also announced a rally there at 3:00pm to protest "the students' derogatory comments on the country's independence".

Around noon, the quota reforms demonstrators started gathering at Raju Bhaskarjo. A group of them went to different dormitories to mobilise more students around 2:30pm.

When the group reached Bijoy Ekattor Hall around 3:00pm, some Chhatra League hall unit members threw brick chunks and flower pots at them from inside, said witnesses.

As the news of the attack spread, demonstrators from Raju Bhaskarjo rushed there and retaliated by throwing brick chunks at the Chhatra League men.

Around 3:30pm, Chhatra League men took position inside the hall while the demonstrators in front of it.

Both groups kept throwing brick chunks at each other and at one stage, BCL activists from five nearby dorms rushed out and along with their fellows inside Bijoy Ekattor Hall chased the demonstrators, sparking a running battle.

The demonstrators eventually retreated to the area in front of DU vice-chancellor's residence.

Within a few minutes, numerous Chhatra League activists, many non-DU students, attacked the demonstrators, including female students.

The Chhatra League men, many wearing helmets, were seen chasing down the students, kicking them and beating them with cricket stumps, and bamboo and hockey sticks for around 15 minutes, said witnesses.

Some female students were seen lying on the ground and in tears during that time.

"How could they dare attack the female students? It cannot be an act of an educated person," said an injured female student.

She said Chhatra League men brought in outsiders to attack them. "Where were the VC and proctors when we were being attacked? Are they not our guardians?"

Another female student said the "Chhatra League goons" attacked the front part of their procession where most of the female students were.

"They are afraid of the fact that we can also speak about our rights. They want to gag our voice at any cost," she said.

Around 5:00pm, as the demonstrators took the injured to the DMCH for treatment, a group of Chhatra League activists stormed the hospital, and another bout of chase and counter chase ensued.

A pedestrian caught in the middle was injured and was seen being led away with his shirt all bloodied.

Chhatra League activists were patrolling outside the gate of the DMCH emergency department, and they chased away students from the hospital area.

Chased by BCL men, a large group of the demonstrators went inside Shahidullah Hall while some managed to stay inside the DMCH.

As some Chhatra League men went to the DMCH with injured activists, the demonstrators beat up three of them around 6:50pm.

Half an hour later, around 70 Chhatra League activists again stormed the DMCH emergency department. Armed with sticks and clad in helmets, they beat up demonstrators inside the hospital.

Meanwhile, at Shahidullah Hall, the demonstrators and Chhatra League men hurled brick chunks at each other. The demonstrators were inside the hall and the Chhatra League activists outside.

The demonstrators vandalised several rooms belonging to Chhatra League activists.

Crude bomb explosions and gunshots were heard outside the dorm.

The police in the area were mere bystanders during the whole time.

Late last night, the demonstrators vandalised 10 motorbikes allegedly owned by BCL men in front Amar Ekushey Hall. Witnesses said the bikes had more than 20 men on them who ran away .

### **'THEY TARGETED FEMALES'**

Around 3:00pm, almost 500 BCL activists carrying sticks targeted and charged towards the female student protesters near the Kalabhaban, said Sanjana Afifa, a DU resident student of Shamsunnahar Hall.

"Once they spotted us, they lunged towards us and threw brick chunks. We all ran and tried to hide but they hunted us down ... At one point, I hid inside a bus and I heard the attackers coming inside screaming 'you are Razakar, you are Razakar'. Many of those hiding in the bus with me were dragged out and beaten. I pleaded them to let me go, only to find so many others lying on the ground, bleeding."

Another female student of the same hall said, "I ran towards Fullar Road at one point and saw Chhatra League men carrying out a full-throttle attack there. At one point, a brick hit my head and I fell. Instantly, 3-4 people came and began beating me with sticks. I just lay there, getting beaten. A senior male student rescued me and took me to hospital. After treatment, I was able to return around 7:00pm."

She added that along with her, around 30 other female students of her hall were attacked and injured.

Sufiya Kamal Hall's resident student Umama Fatema said the attackers identified her from television.

"They screamed, 'we saw you on TV, we will kill you', and around 25 people charged towards me ... They targeted me, I had to cry and beg them to let me go. I ran and they still chased after me. When I reached Fullar Road, two women passing by hid me behind them and asked me to stop crying so that the attackers cannot hear me."

Another student of Begum Rokeya Hall Arpita Das said, "I somehow got out alive. Most of those who beat us up did not look like students. I tried to protect myself and run wherever the others ran. I saw a girl behind me fall to the ground and then people beating her up mercilessly. They beat whoever they saw in their path. At one point, I ran into the SM Hall ... There were so many people with blood all over them. We tried not to scream or cry ... At one point, the provost told us to hide in the TV room."

## **"WE WON'T LEAVE"**

Through a video message on his Facebook page, demo organiser Nahid said that yesterday was a very sad day for Dhaka University.

"The situation at Dhaka Medical College Hospital is horrible. The injured are lying on the floor. There are no treatment facilities there. The Chhatra League goons even attacked female students at the emergency gate," he said.

"We will resist unitedly. We are promising we will be on the ground. We will not leave the ground," he said.

Nahid told reporters at Doyel Chattar around 9:30pm that they have announced fresh demonstrations and protest rallies at 3:00pm today at campuses across the country.

He urged the students to join the programmes and threatened harsher demonstrations like blockade if their demand was not met.

## **BCL TAKES NO BLAME**



Chhatra League President Saddam Hussain said the demonstrators forced students to join their protests to create an unstable environment at DU.

"They [demonstrators] brought students from different halls by threatening them. They carried out attacks on students with locally made weapons. But they fled away when the students untidily resisted them [demonstrators]," he told reporters at DU in the afternoon.

Chhatra League General Secretary Sheikh Wali Asif Enan alleged that Chhatra Dal and Chhatra Shibir goons attacked different halls in DU.

## **KEEP DORMS FREE OF OUTSIDERS**

Dhaka University authorities, after an emergency meeting of the provost standing committee last night, directed its respective hall authorities to keep the dormitories free of outsiders and to strengthen security on campus.

DU VC Prof ASM Maksud Kamal chaired the meeting, which was attended by the provosts of all dormitories.

Meanwhile, students of several private universities, including United International University, North South University, Independent University, Bangladesh, American International University Bangladesh, and Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology took to the streets yesterday and blocked several city streets.