

# Quota reform needed to protect FF's honour

Says Zafar Iqbal

UNB, Shahjalal University

Renowned writer and educationist Muhammed Zafar Iqbal yesterday said reform of quota system was needed to protect the honour of freedom fighters.

Talking to reporters at Dr MA Wazed Miah ICT Building of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST), he said the quota ratio in our country is not appropriate.

"There has been anger among people over freedom fighters' quota. Freedom fighters, their children and families are being humiliated. We must remain alert so that no one can disrespect them. Reform of the quota system is necessary to secure the honour of freedom fighters."

He said the quota system is to promote backward communities. The quota ratio should certainly be rational and consistent, added the SUST teacher.

He condemned the police attack on protesting students in the capital's Shahbagh on Sunday.



**Clockwise, furniture thrown out of the VC's residence on fire at 2:21am yesterday. Broken doors and bricks lie scattered on a corridor of the house. Burnt cars at the backyard. A smashed TV and damaged furniture in the meeting room. A vandalised almirah and furniture in other rooms of the house.**



PHOTO: FAHD MANNAN / AMRAN HOSSAIN / PRABIR DAS

# Several BCL leaders quit over 'attack' on protesters

DU CORRESPONDENT

Some Chhatra League leaders have announced their resignation over the Sunday's "attack" on agitating students demanding reform in quota for civil service recruitment.

Besides, many central and university unit leaders of Chhatra League, pro-Awami League student front, yesterday expressed their support for the movement.

The BCL leaders made their announcements in social media. Among them are Saifullah Saif, general secretary of Dhaka University tourism department BCL, Osibur Rahman, deputy hospitality secretary of Shaheed Sergeant Zahurul Haque Hall BCL, and Sharif Hasan Sujon, general secretary of applied physics department BCL.

In a Facebook post, Saifullah said the BCL was founded by the Father of the Nation; it plays a role in DUCSU and works to protect students' rights. The organisation is a friend of general students, he added.

He doubted whether the BCL was following Bangabandhu's ideals at all. "My Bangabandhu is different. That's

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# A horror, but what for?

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smashed to bits.

The protesters who had stormed the residence in the wee hours of yesterday left almost nothing in one piece. They went to the backyard and torched two cars and vandalised two more.

They looted valuables from the steel almirahs, cupboards and trashed the food inside refrigerators and freezers.

Shards of glass, parts of doors and furniture, broken flower pots and bricks were strewn across the floors of the hundred-year-old four-bedroom building.

"Only the four people [the VC and his family members] are okay. Everything else in this house is destroyed. It was a brutality beyond belief," said a relative.

The motive behind the attack is unclear but questions are being asked and the guessing go on since the VC has nothing to do with the quota-reform movement. The role of law enforcers was also dubious as none of them could do anything to stop the hour-and-a-half-long mayhem.

The attack triggered widespread criticism and condemnation. The extent of the destruction shocked many.

Immediately after the attack, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called VC Md Akhteruzzaman. She enquired about

his family members.

After a daylong demonstration of students demanding reforms in the quota system in civil service and a nightlong clash, more than 500 people carried out the wholesale destruction in the residence from 1:00am, according to the security guards of the residence.

The protesters, however, claimed that their people were not involved in the attack. Dhaka University Teacher's Association (Duta) said the attackers were "outsiders" and termed the attack "pre-planned and politically motivated".

Some of the attackers had masks on. Many carried sticks. A group of them scaled the boundary wall and went over the barbed wires and broke the lock of the main gate. The others then stormed the residence, the guards said.

There were five guards -- three at the gate and two inside -- along with four policemen stationed right outside.

The attackers took away the mobile phones of the guards.

The VC, his wife, and two children were on the first floor.

"We saw several hundred people trying to break in and they eventually succeeded. We saw from the balcony ...," said the VC's wife Salma Zaman.

"We saw them climb up hastily and break whatever they found. I don't

have the words to express the horror," she told The Daily Star.

"We don't know who carried out the attack and why. We are grateful that we are alive," said Salma still shaking in trauma.

The attackers ripped apart the CCTV cameras first and then ransacked the guest room where the recorded footage is kept. Then they took broken chairs and a table outside and set them on



fire.

The floor of the large meeting room on the ground floor was littered with broken glass. A TV set lies broken at one end. Even the fan hanging from the ceiling had its blades bent.

Broken and mangled cutlery and utensils covered the floor of the small kitchen next to the meeting room. The

cupboard was empty and its glass doors smashed. The almirah next to it was empty and its doors were flung open.

Even the kitchen sink was destroyed.

There is a room which the VC uses as an office. The desk was in pieces, its drawers and documents were scattered on the floor. A showcase of medals and crests was vandalised.

"First I heard voices and then slogans. Then only sounds of things breaking. I was shaken," Md Hasan, one of the security guards who was inside the house, told this newspaper.

He hid in the store room but the attackers found him.

"They slapped me and asked me what I have on me before letting me go," he said.

Upstairs, things were worse.

In the master bedroom, three closets and two wardrobes were emptied. Clothes, valuables, documents, and broken glass were scattered all around, making it difficult to even walk.

A framed photo of the VC's mother Eron Bhanu was also in pieces. A refrigerator was leaning on a file cabinet.

All the appliances there had been smashed, damaged or destroyed.

In the small adjoining room, three more almirahs -- one of which had a locker -- dressing table and three cup-

boards were emptied.

The bedroom toilet was not spared. Toiletries lie on the floor and the commode was broken.

Behind the dining room, there is a small room with a refrigerator and a freezer; both were turned upside down.

Salma said, "We kept telling him [the VC] that we should leave, but he assured us that it [the protest] was not a matter of the university and he would explain that to them [the attackers] and they would leave."

"When they were breaking the gates, I requested him to call in law enforcers ...," Salma said but the VC refused saying that there would be bloodshed on campus if he did so.

When the protesters broke in, the VC and his son tried to reason with them, she said.

"I along with my daughter first hid and then fled through the backdoor," she added.

Akhteruzzaman, in a press conference yesterday, claimed that the attack was made with the intent to kill him.

"I took the initiative to arrange talks between the government high-ups and the students ...," the VC said, adding, "The students' demands have been relayed to the government, yet my house was vandalised."

The protesters claimed that the

attack was carried out by "criminals" with the intent to foil their movement.

Rashed Khan, of Sadharan Chhatra Adhikar Sanrakshan Parishad that is organising the movement, at a press briefing yesterday said the attackers were not its protestors and that they do not know them.

Strongly condemning the attack, Duta President Maksud Kamal said, "The attackers were outsiders and they carried out the attack wearing masks."

"We think that such destruction in the name of quota reform movement is a planned attempt and a deep conspiracy to make Dhaka University and the country unstable," he said in a statement.

He demanded proper probe and quick trial.

He said Duta would form a human chain at Aparjeyo Bangla in DU protesting the attack.

Deputy Commissioner Maruf Hossain Sardar of DMP Ramna division said the four policemen outside the residence was outnumbered by the attackers. By the time reinforcements arrived at the scene, the attackers had left.

Relatives of the VC, a number of DU teachers and political leaders expressed shock and conveyed sympathy to the family members.

# 'Postponed', not quite

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They will take position at the foot of Raju Sculpture near TSC around 11:00am today and stage a "March to Dhaka" programme on April 16, she said.

"The existing committee didn't consult us and just decided to postpone the demo. We don't agree with this. The protest will go on," said Bipasha.

Ahmed Salikin, a postgraduate student at DU, said, "We don't want to stay away from the movement based on this decision. We cannot allow the government to buy time."

The demonstrators later left the TSC area.

After the meeting at the Secretariat, Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader said the students agreed to suspend their movement till May 7, following government assurance.

"The prime minister has sent us with some message .... She has already given directives to the authorities concerned to examine the existing quota system to find out a solution," Obaidul, also road transport and bridges minister, told reporters.

"The government is not rigid on this. We will positively consider the rationale of their demands."

He, however, said action would be taken against those who attacked the residence of Dhaka University vice-chancellor during early yesterday's violence.

Quader also called upon police to release "innocent" detainees and said the government will bear the treatment expenses of those injured during the protest.

After his briefing, Hasan Al Mamun expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for taking their demands into consideration, giving the minister necessary directives and

pledging to inform them within the first week of May after doing "reasonable reforms" through the public administration ministry secretary.

Though Hasan said the government assured them of a "reasonable reforms" by the first week of May, Quader said the authorities will "examine the system" by the time.

As the delegation conveyed the developments to their fellow protesters at Shahbagh, a section of them demanded specific announcement from the government to resolve the issue.

The meeting took place following agitations in different universities across the country, with demonstrators blocking different roads and highways, disrupting communications.

In Dhaka, protesters re-grouped from morning on Dhaka University campus hours after they clashed with law enforcers between Sunday night and early yesterday.

At least 60 students were injured as police swung into action against demonstrators on Dhaka-Aricha highway.

Students and job seekers have long been demanding reforms of the quota system, terming it "discriminatory" and "hugely disproportionate".

Currently, 44 percent of the public service recruitments come from merit list and the remaining 56 percent from various quotas.

On February 17, students under the banner of Bangladesh Shadharan Chhatra Odhikar Sangrakkhan Parishad launched the movement over five-point demand, including reducing the quota privilege to 10 percent from 56.

The movement turned violent on Sunday as police fired several hundred teargas shells and rubber bullets, used water cannons and charged

batons to disperse the demonstrators who blocked the Shahbagh intersection for over five hours.

At least 75 people were injured and several others detained as violence flared up with Shahbagh and its adjacent areas turning into a battlefield.

The protesters called strikes at all universities and university colleges for yesterday.

Around 1:00am, a section of the protesters broke the lock of main gate of the DU vice-chancellor's house, vandalised furniture and damaged four cars inside the compound, according to witnesses and fire service personnel.

About half an hour later, BCL men swooped on the protesters and chased them away from the VC residence. Several gunshots were heard at that time, added the witnesses.

Agitators denied their involvement in the attack, blamed outsiders and called for proper investigation.

About the detainees, Maruf Hossain Sardar, deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (Ramna Division), said, "We have contacted the university authorities. But no one came yet. We will release them after their relatives sign bonds."

After the nightlong clash, around 250 BCL leaders and activists led by its President Saifur Rahman Sohag and General Secretary SM Jakir Hossain were seen marching towards Curzon Hall from Shahbagh at daybreak. They were with sticks, rods and other weapons.

As soon as they reached near Shahidullah Hall, a running battle began between a group of demonstrators and BCL activists. Police fired teargas again.

Later, BCL activists took positions in front of Madhur Canteen.

Earlier at night, many female students came out of their halls and

joined the protest. Around 300 of them got stuck inside TSC during chase and counter chase among police, BCL activists and protestors till 6:00am.

Speaking at an impromptu press conference at DU Central Library compound around 10:30am yesterday, Rashed Khan, joint convener of the agitating platform, demanded the authorities release the detainees without delay.

After that, the demonstrators marched in a procession through TSC, Doyel Chattar and Shahbagh areas.

Around noon, they tried to bring out a procession again through the university campus, but police stopped them and lobbed teargas shells.

Protesters gathered at the foot of Raju Memorial Sculpture in the TSC area. Some were seen putting up barricades at each point for entering the TSC area.

They didn't allow vehicles to pass and were asking for identities of people.

At one moment, a group of BCL activists were seen marching towards them from Shahbagh. Some of them were on bike. The agitators chased them away.

Meanwhile, at least five reporters and camera persons from media outlets were assaulted by some protesters.

A reporter and a cameraman of Independent TV were physically assaulted near TSC for what the attackers said was reporting against their movement.

Camera persons of ATN news and Channel 24 were also assaulted while an Ekattor TV crew was forcibly driven away from the spot while discharging duties.

However, Rashed Khan told journalists that those who are attacking

journalists are outsiders and that they had urged all the protesters gathering there not to attack the media persons.

Around 3:00pm, the agitators announced that a 20-member delegation of their platform will sit with the government representatives.

Led by platform's convener Hasan Al Mamun and Faruk Hasan, the delegation went to the Secretariat around 4:00pm.

Besides Obaidul Quader, AL leaders Jahangir Kabir Nanak, Khaled Mahmud Chowdhury took part in the meeting.

**COMMENTS OF TWO SECRETARIES**

In another development, Md Mozammel Haque Khan, senior secretary of the public administration ministry, said the government has no plans to reform the existing quota system right now.

"Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina supports the existing quota system. She believes it should stay," he said while talking to reporters at his office yesterday.

But Cabinet Secretary Mohammad Shafiul Alam said the public administration ministry will scrutinise the existing quota system and inform the prime minister about it, reports UNB. He was talking to reporters after a cabinet meeting at the Secretariat where an unscheduled discussion on quota system was held with the prime minister in the chair.

"No decision was taken at the meeting on the quota system in government service but it must be scrutinised," he said.

On March 7, the government issued a notification relaxing its previous system of preserving vacant posts. Now different government positions, which remain vacant for not getting eligible candidates from quota, will be filled from the merit list.

# It's a big worry

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clear recognition of the gravity of the banking sector woes in Bangladesh," it said, citing the central bank's Financial Stability Report 2016.

NPLs have been rising at a fast pace over the past years. NPLs surged to over Tk 80,000 crore or 4 percent of the GDP for the first time at the end of September 2017 from Tk 65,731 crore a year back.

The total NPLs accounted for 10.67 percent of the total outstanding loans in the banking sector at the end of September 2017.

In addition, over Tk 40,000 crore bad loans were written-off.

"Once restructured, rescheduled loans and write-offs are factored in, the NPL size would increase very significantly."

Poor management of state banks accompanied by malpractices and corruption has contributed to the high volume of NPLs.

"SCBs have been awarding loans even without routine assessment of the potential risks associated with the borrower. The government's tendency to fund loss making state owned enterprises through SCBs has aggravated the problem even further."

"Defaulters are hardly ever penalised while on the contrary loans are restructured to permit further lending to the same borrowers. Such regulatory forbearance has given wrong signals leading to moral hazards."

The multilateral lender also said the two amendments in the bank company law passed recently were dubious in nature and likely to undermine good governance.

"Major changes were made to Islami Bank management, which had already been suffering from poor governance, on allegations of terror financing and political violence."

The WB suggested tackling the sector's poor risk management practices through supervising and improving the legal and financial frameworks for loan recovery.