

Who are the helmet bahini?

And why we should worry about the future of student politics



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A CLOSER LOOK

TASNEEM TAYEB

THEY come wearing helmets, brandishing machetes and sticks; they vandalise, they kill, and then they are gone, even beyond the long arms of the law. This could be an apt one-liner description of the notorious “helmet bahini,” who emerge to support politically-connected student activists fighting law enforcers, journalists, common protesters, and most recently the New Market shop owners and the unfortunate pedestrians who were entrapped in the bloodbath on April 19, in the New Market area.

One of the casualties of the recent bloody clashes between the students of Dhaka College and traders in the New Market area was 19-year-old Nahid Mia, a deliveryman for a computer shop in Elephant Road. His only fault: he happened to be at the wrong place, at the wrong time. A picture published by this daily shows Nahid lying motionless on the ground, while a “helmet bahini” goon donning a black helmet hacked at him with a machete. The graphic photo show at least nine other helmet-wearing men witnessing the macabre torture on Nahid that led to his death.

Finally adopting a proactive strategy, law enforcement officials have identified some of the attackers of Nahid. The man who had been seen hacking at Nahid has been primarily identified as Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) activist, Zakir. According to a report published in this daily, a Dhaka College student named Kaiyum had initially hit Nahid. One of Zakir’s accomplices in a yellow helmet has been identified as Sujon Islam, a resident of Room 101 of the North Hall of the college.

Many of the other attackers have also been primarily identified, mostly associated with BCL in various capacities. BCL General Secretary Lekhak Bhattacharjee denied the involvement of



any activists from the student wing of the ruling party in Nahid’s murder, however. “We are sure that no Chhatra League man was involved in the killing,” this daily quoted Bhattacharjee as claiming. In the context of such confident denials, one feels unsure what to believe: concrete evidence revealing the killer’s identity or a responsible individual’s statement.

In this case, perhaps one might rest their hopes in the ability and neutrality of law enforcement officials to apprehend the criminals. The photos and videos that journalists have been able to capture during the clashes, along with the CCTV footage supply enough evidence to identify the culprits. However, this hope can only be measured and cautious, as in the past they resulted only in sheer disappointment.

The helmet bahini did not make its debut during the recent New Market clashes. Rather, their capacity to inflict violence featured prominently during the Road Safety Movement, swooping in on the protesting students (school students, who can be called children) and journalists, beating them up with brutal force, striking terror in the hearts of the

▲ The presence of ‘helmet bahini’ in protests and clashes in recent years have been prominent, including the clashes in Dhaka’s New Market area last week.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

witnesses. All the while, the police did little to stop them. Just like the police took two and half hours to intervene in the case of the New Market clashes.

It is interesting to note here that, although BCL denies even knowing the helmet bahini members who have been identified over the last few years, whenever the Awami League student front is in the field, it is the dreaded band of helmet-wearing miscreants that come to their aid, taking their side, beating up the opponents to disperse them. A similar situation also unfolded during the Quota Reform Movement, when innocent students were viciously attacked and beaten up by BCL activists at various campuses across the country, and it was the helmet bahini that unleashed their horror to aid the brutality of the BCL men.

While the BCL has from time to time disowned the helmet bahini activists—after all, who would want to take ownership of such a reckless, violent force?—the repeated interventions of the helmet bahini in BCL’s fights and in their favour raise the obvious question: Is the helmet bahini supporting BCL as an auxiliary but unacknowledged force? This

could be BCL’s new strategy. And this is also a convenient arrangement for BCL, since it does not look nice if their activists are seen attacking people in daylight.

And if this is indeed the case, it bodes ominous portents for the future of student politics in Bangladesh. One has to admit that student politics as the Bangladeshes have known since the early 1950s has changed over the decades. The nature of student politics today no longer reflects or pays any form of respect to its glorious legacy. The role that the students had played in the Language Movement and the Liberation War, and even in the restoration of democracy in the early 90s, is now confined to only history records.

Student politics is no longer about patriotism, justice or equity. Now it revolves around greed for money, lust for power and vested interests of various groups, which are not necessarily always political. And whether the BCL acknowledges helmet bahini activists as their associates or not, the fact that student politics has metamorphosed into an eternal cycle of violence cannot be denied. And the inability of the law enforcement agencies to bring these culprits to justice is aggrandising their already inflated egos. Has justice been served in the cases of the Road Safety Movement or the Quota Reform Movement? No. But had justice been served, the helmet bahini might not have resorted to such violence in the New Market clashes.

It is also high time the ruling party revisited the changed nature and strategy of its student political wing. Violence, oppression, intimidation and violation of law in the name of student politics cannot be allowed to continue. Also, the rotten elements should be plucked out from the BCL and tossed into the hands of the law enforcers, in order to restore the former ethos and values of this student body and overall student politics. Activists of today’s student politics are going to lead the political parties tomorrow; they will be the future leaders who will hold the reins of the nation. Therefore, we must be extra careful as to whom we are allowing to be part of student politics. We certainly do not want violent goons and henchmen to run the nation tomorrow. To prevent that, actions must be taken now.

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

Applying the Covid blueprint to cholera

FIRDAUSI QADRI and MD TAUFIQUEL ISLAM

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WHILE the coronavirus has posed unique challenges at a time of deep global interconnectedness, pandemics are nothing new. The Covid pandemic is not even the only one we are currently experiencing. In much of the developing world, cholera outbreaks are proliferating.

Whereas the Sars-CoV-2 virus is “novel,” cholera—a water-borne diarrhoeal disease caused by the bacteria *Vibrio cholerae*—is ancient, as is its history of widespread devastation. The current cholera pandemic is the world’s seventh since the early 19th century.

Despite their apparent differences, Covid and cholera have much in common. Both are at least partly controllable by vaccination, and both spread most easily in crowded, unsanitary environments. Ensuring adequate shelter and strengthening water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) practices and infrastructure are, therefore, vital to limit transmission.

These commonalities explain why measures to limit Covid brought about a decline in cholera cases. But as the world’s governments roll back pandemic restrictions, cholera is returning with a vengeance. At the end of 2021, there were 16 active cholera outbreaks around the world.

Yet, the response to Covid still holds valuable lessons for bolstering the fight against cholera. Initiatives like the World Health Organization’s Global Research Roadmap for Covid-19 helped guide this effort, ensuring that resources were channelled to the areas where knowledge and innovation were most needed.

Research is no less important in the fight against cholera. That is why, last year, the Global Task Force on Cholera Control (GTCC) launched the Cholera Roadmap Research Agenda. Representing the collective vision of 177 cholera experts and other stakeholders, the agenda identifies the highest-priority research questions. Getting the answers is essential to achieving the goals set out in the GTCC’s Ending Cholera by 2030 global roadmap.

Many of the questions could just as easily be found in a Covid research agenda. For example, what is the fastest, most cost-effective way to deliver a limited supply of vaccines? How can we enhance the uptake and sustainability of response measures to prevent the disease from reaching epidemic- or pandemic-level proportions? How do we engage meaningfully with at-risk communities in designing and

implementing interventions? Which disease surveillance systems are the most effective, and when and where should they be deployed?

With Covid, strong political will and massive investment enabled researchers to produce answers quickly. Though cholera has been around much longer, solutions remain elusive. A key reason is that, whereas Covid ravaged developed and developing countries alike, cholera was eradicated from the Global North more than 150 years ago. It is much harder to mobilise resources to tackle a disease affecting the world’s poorest and most marginalised people.

With just a fraction of the commitment underpinning the fight against Covid-19, lifesaving progress could be made in cholera research. Epidemiological surveillance would enable the mapping of transmission patterns. New and innovative diagnostic tests could increase the speed, efficiency, and quality of detecting and confirming cases. And new or improved vaccines would strengthen the connection between emergency response and long-term control and prevention.

Optimising the timing and dosage of

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vaccines is essential, as is learning how to engage communities to ensure that the needs of marginalised populations are addressed. Transforming treatment for vulnerable communities requires studying the impact of antibiotics on cholera transmission, and understanding what enables—and blocks—integration of cholera treatment into case management by community health workers.

Equipped with this knowledge, countries and health partners would be better positioned to choose the most effective tools and approaches as they pursue their National Cholera Plans.

We have learned so much during the pandemic. We have listened to our public health officials and taken steps to limit the spread of the virus: wearing face masks, practising social distancing, quarantining, getting vaccinated, and washing our hands more regularly. We must leverage this increased awareness and momentum to

make further public health gains—not just in our own communities, but worldwide.

That means taking aim at other, much older scourges. We have the tools we need to defeat cholera, but we must still do the

research that is required to identify how, when, and where to use them. Only then can we protect the world’s most vulnerable populations from this all-too-precedented disease.

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নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি

বস্ত্র ও পাট মন্ত্রণালয়ের অধিনস্থ বস্ত্র অধিদপ্তর কর্তৃক বাস্তবায়নায়ী “শেখ রাসেল টেক্সটাইল ইঞ্জিনিয়ারিং কলেজ,সিলেট স্থাপন (১ম সংশোধিত)” প্রকল্পের প্রকল্প বাস্তবায়ন ইউনিট PIU (Project implementation Unit) এর জন্য কেবলমাত্র প্রকল্পের মেয়াদকালের জন্য অর্থ বিভাগ হতে জারিকৃত জাতীয় বেতন স্কেল,২০১৫ অনুযায়ী সাক্ষ্য (Consolidated) বেতনে নিম্নবর্ণিত পদসমূহে জনবল নিয়োগের লক্ষ্যে বর্ণিত শর্তে বাংলাদেশের প্রকৃত নাগরিকদের নিকট থেকে দরখাস্ত আহবান করা যাচ্ছে।

ক্র:নং	পদের নাম ও গ্রেড	সংখ্যা	বয়স	শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা
০১	হিসাব রক্ষক,গ্রেড-১৩	০১টি	অনধিক ৩০ বছর	বাণিজ্য বিভাগে স্নাতক ডিগ্রী
০২	অফিস সহকারী কাম কম্পিউটার মুদ্রাক্ষরিক, গ্রেড-১৬	০১টি	অনধিক ৩০ বছর	এইচ.এস./সি/সমমান এবং কম্পিউটারে কাজের অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে।

ক) শর্তাবলী:
(২) জনপ্রশাসন মন্ত্রণালয় কর্তৃক নির্ধারিত ০১ (এক) পাতার ফরমে স্বহস্তে লিখিত আবেদন করতে হবে।
এই নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তিসহ উক্ত ফরমটি বস্ত্র অধিদপ্তরের ওয়েবসাইট www.dot.gov.bd হতে ডাউনলোড করা যাবে।
(২) এক জন প্রার্থী যে কোন একটি পদে আবেদন করতে পারবে। আবেদনপত্র প্রকল্প পরিচালক, “শেখ রাসেল টেক্সটাইল ইঞ্জিনিয়ারিং কলেজ,সিলেট স্থাপন (১ম সংশোধিত)” প্রকল্প ,বিটিএমসি ভবন (১২ তলা), ৭-৯ কাওরান বাজার, ঢাকা-১২১৫ বরাবর আবেদন করতে হবে এবং সকল দরখাস্ত আগামী ২৫/০৫/২০২২ খ্রি: তারিখ অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ের মধ্যে ডাকযোগে পৌছাতে হবে। ত্রুটিপূর্ণ/অসম্পূর্ণ/বিলম্বে প্রাপ্ত দরখাস্ত বাতিল বলে গণ্য হবে।
(৩) দরখাস্তের সাথে শূধমাত্র প্রথম শ্রেণীর গেজেটেড কর্মকর্তা কর্তৃক সত্যায়িত (নামাঙ্কিত সীলসহ) সম্প্রতি তোলা পাসপোর্ট সাইজের ০১ (এক) কপি রশ্মিন ছবি জমা দিয়ে লাগিয়ে দিতে হবে এবং দুই কপি ছবি স্ট্যাম্পলার দিয়ে লাগিয়ে দিতে হবে।
(৪) আবেদনের সাথে প্রকল্প পরিচালক, “শেখ রাসেল টেক্সটাইল ইঞ্জিনিয়ারিং কলেজ,সিলেট স্থাপন (১ম সংশোধিত)” প্রকল্প এর নামে ১০০/- টাকার পোস্টাল অর্ডার (অফেরত যোগ্য) দাখিল করতে হবে।
(৫) আগামী ২৫/০৫/২০২২ খ্রি: তারিখে প্রার্থীর বয়স ১৮-৩০ বছরের মধ্যে হতে হবে। তবে মুক্তিযোদ্ধা / শহীদ মুক্তিযোদ্ধাদের পুত্র-কন্যাদের ক্ষেত্রে বয়সসীমা সর্বোচ্চ ৩২ বছর পর্যন্ত শিথিলযোগ্য। মুক্তিযোদ্ধা / শহীদ মুক্তিযোদ্ধাদের নাতি-নাতনির ক্ষেত্রে বয়সসীমা ৩০ বছর।
(৬) সরকারি, আধাসরকারি ও স্বায়ত্তশাসিত সংস্থায় চাকরিরত প্রার্থীদের অবশ্যই যথাযথ কর্তৃপক্ষের অনুমতি নিয়ে নির্দিষ্ট তারিখের মধ্যে আবেদন করতে হবে। অনুমতির কপি মৌখিক পরীক্ষার সময় উপস্থাপন করতে হবে।
(৭) প্রচলিত বিধি অনুযায়ী নিয়োগের ক্ষেত্রে কোটা নীতি (প্রযোজ্য হলে) অনুসরণ করা হবে।
(৮) খামের উপর প্রকল্পের নাম ও পদের নাম অবশ্যই উল্লেখ করতে হবে এবং আবেদন পত্রের সাথে ২০ টাকার ডাকটিকিটসহ ফেরত খাম পাঠাতে হবে।
(৯) অর্থ মন্ত্রণালয়ের পরিপত্র নং- ০৭.১১১.০.৩১.০১.০০.০০৫.২০১০-১৫, তারিখ: ১৪.০১.২০১৬ খ্রি: এর (ক) এর আলোকে বেতন-ভাতাদি প্রদান করা হবে।
(১০) লিখিত/ব্যবহারিক/মৌখিক পরীক্ষায় অংশগ্রহণের জন্য কোন প্রকার ভ্রমগততা বা দৈনিক ভাতা (টিএ/ডিএ) প্রদান করা হবে না।
(১১) এই নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তির বিপরীতে আবেদনপত্র গ্রহণ বা বাতিল, নিয়োগ প্রদান করা/না করা বিষয়ে নিয়োগকারী কর্তৃপক্ষের সিদ্ধান্ত চূড়ান্ত বলে গণ্য হবে।
(১২) যথাযথ কর্তৃপক্ষের অনুমোদনক্রমে এই বিজ্ঞপ্তি জারী করা হলো।

২৫/৪/২০২২
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