



BCL seems to be entirely focused on suppressing any kind of opposition or criticism.

FILE PHOTO: COLLECTED

## University of BCL



**NO STRINGS ATTACHED**

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Recent incidents of attacks on public university campuses by members of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) have made it quite clear that the organisation representing the student wing of the ruling party will just not tolerate any kind of real – or perceived – political challenge. In fact, they have unabashedly demonstrated that their “power” lies in their licence to beat up anyone they want, anytime they want – academic decorum be damned. In the unwritten rules of the game, even the highest ranking official of the university, the vice-chancellor, has absolutely no hold over the BCL. Thus, proctors, provosts, anyone officially in charge of the security of the dormitories or the campus in general are just disempowered enablers of a student wing that has become the real administrator of a public university.

Most “ordinary” people will say this is old news. But there may be some who will try to argue that these are gross generalisations. For the second group, here are two recent examples:

On September 27, leaders of the newly formed Dhaka University unit of Jatityabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the student wing of BNP, who were scheduled to meet the VC, were attacked by around 50-70 BCL members and beaten mercilessly with sticks and cricket stumps. Even when two of the JCD men fell unconscious, the attackers continued to beat them. At least eight JCD members were severely wounded in the attack. Strangely enough, despite the pictures published in newspapers confirming the attack by BCL members, the university’s BCL unit general secretary denied this completely, adding that it was an internal feud of the JCD. After the incident, the VC showed surprise to the media, that such an incident had occurred and said he was trying to find out why this had happened. This means that no proctor, no university staff, no student, no teacher, absolutely no one could give the VC a call and tell him that students of his university were being assaulted

by other students? More importantly, none of these individuals who are in charge could provide security to these students.

Less than two weeks later, on October 8, BCL men again attacked students on the DU campus – this time members of Chhatra Odhikar Parishad, who had organised a memorial programme to observe the third death anniversary of Buet student Abrar

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Fahad, who had been brutally tortured to death inside a dormitory on campus by members of BCL. Absurd as it may be, the police decided to arrest not the attackers, but those who had been attacked when they went to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) to get treated for their injuries. What’s more, BCL members filed cases against members of the parishad, with 24 of them already in jail and their bail recently denied. Besides the usual lip service of a “probe body” to investigate the incident, the university authorities have remained virtually silent.

The student fronts of ruling parties

have traditionally dominated our public universities for many years. During the BNP rule, it was the JCD that reigned, and the practice of controlling who could get a seat in the hall (dormitory) was a given. Tender business, brawls with rival groups – especially BCL – and generally causing trouble on and off campus has been the basic job description of the student fronts of the ruling parties. But with the last 13 years of unchallenged Awami League rule, it is natural that its student front would be at the zenith of power.

Unfortunately, with tacit indulgence of their leaders, the BCL’s *raison d’être* has become to suppress any kind of opposition – especially the JCD, but also anyone who will make the slightest criticism of the ruling party. For Abrar, being critical of the government’s foreign policy was enough for his life to be cut short by some BCL members.

Which brings us to the question: what exactly is the role of a student body representing a political party? Do they exist to bully those who have different political or ideological views, and to terrorise students in the halls through extortion and physical violence? Should we just accept that a student who needs to stay in the dormitory must pledge his/her allegiance to the BCL bigwigs, which may entail taking part in beating up rival groups, paying unofficial fees to the BCL *Boro Bhaais* for their “seat,” and being subject to all kinds of verbal and sometimes physical abuse? That the provosts, proctor, even the VC have no real authority to stop what, by any definition, constitutes crime?

The fact that these practices have gone on unabated and unchallenged for decades reflect the absence of any kind of administrative control. But it is not just helplessness of the upper echelons of the administration that has allowed this anarchy to go this far. Political opportunism within the faculties and the university governing bodies are big factors in enabling political goons to practically take over the campuses. Overriding all this is the indifference of the ruling party leaders, who have given *carte blanche* to the BCL to do whatever they like on and off campus, often with the support of law enforcement members.

As elections approach, the BCL will become even more dominant on campuses; ordinary students will be left powerless and unprotected as they face inevitable disruption in their academic journey. One can only wonder if the university administrations will have the moral courage to change this destructive narrative.

## Let the youth participate in our SDG journey



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The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) came about as a result of countries around the world wanting to “meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The promise of guaranteeing the rights of our future generations to meet their needs is one that ties up the idea of “youth” to the SDGs in a fundamental way.

The reason behind putting “youth” in quotation marks and calling it an idea is because the future encompasses vast swathes of time, pulling in stakeholders in droves, inflating the number of people who find themselves crowded under the umbrella of a “future generation.” This overflowing nature of the basket of stakeholders when it comes to the SDGs is more than what political leaders of our time are willing to work with – it’s probably more than what development leaders want to think about. We have seen that in the slow pace of reaction to the climate crisis; we have seen that in the one major criticism of the SDGs – that they fail to ignore local context. Discussions on the SDGs often veer towards the exclusion of marginalised communities from mainstream economic activities, thereby excluding them from the fruits of development. None of these things bode well for the promise of not compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

We only need to look at the SDGs themselves to understand why youth mobilisation is important. The term “climate crisis,” for example, evokes vastly different reactions among age groups, understandably so. For the generations who have already lived their lives surrounded by greenery, breathing non-toxic air, the crisis is often still a thing of the future. But the 20 year-olds who were born in Dhaka, whose lungs have only known polluted air, clearly care more about the climate. Climate Action (SDG 13) means vastly different things to the older and the youngster, and I think it’s clear that the younger person cares more about sustainability. The future is tied to the youth’s life and existence, and that sort of engagement in a goal must be utilised to better the lives of future generations.

Let’s consider Gender Equality (SDG 5), and the drastically varied expectations of it through generations. Capturing the shifting tides of feminism and the new ideas it includes with every new wave is a challenge, but it’s a challenge that can only be faced if young women are not only allowed to have a say, but be given the space to implement their ideas. The constant shift in gender roles across generations must be understood to achieve SDG 5. Add to this the layer of complexity that comes with the varied opinions on gender equality in different regions across the world, or even different regions in the same country, and it’s clear that the challenge of achieving gender equality will take a lot of hard work and participation from young people at the grassroots. For these young people, this shift in understanding isn’t new; it’s a lived reality, and this perspective must be taken into account if sustainable gender equality is the goal.

Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8) is an interesting goal because of the direct nature of its relationship to youth empowerment. The youth cannot be empowered if they can’t fend for themselves and survive the economic realities of the times they operate in. But discussions on this SDG have the tendency to shift towards a skill gap or the mismatch in the supply of skills to what employers demand. These ideas are fundamentally unfair to the

youth, who spend roughly two decades of their lives in an education system built by the older generation, only to come out of it and hear that almost everything they have learnt is outdated. The youth is expected to participate and bring their fresh ideas to the table, but to get to this table, they are being asked to acquire skills many of them don’t have the resources to acquire. Without the skills, there is no decent work, and as the SDG suggests, decent work and economic growth comes hand in hand. The lack of skills and resources is akin to the chicken and the egg problem, and employers, educators, and policymakers need to come together to break this cycle of misery. What should follow is a youth demographic with the right skills, or the opportunity to acquire them.

But that is not the end of the story.

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Youth empowerment cannot be limited to the idea of youth participation or just the extension of opportunities to youngsters.

While everyone agrees that the youth is vital to the achievement of sustainable goals, they must also understand that what was decent work a generation ago may not be decent work today. It must be ensured that the youth of today have enough – enough to look after themselves, and enough to be able to care for the generations that come after. If a young individual is expected to traverse the rungs of power and get to the top before they can enforce change, their youth will vanish by the time they get there. They need to be given the opportunity to care about the future now, while they are still young, because caring for the future so far has not been humankind’s strong suit.

On September 1, Citizen’s Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), organised a conference on “SDGs and Youth in Bangladesh: Present Perspectives and Future Outlook.” The event was organised in association with the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), ActionAid, and Plan International, among other notable organisations. Such conferences are important in highlighting why youth involvement is vital for the SDGs, and to ensure that the youth is equipped with what it needs to take this world into a future that is prosperous for all.

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**ACROSS**

1 Japanese sport	protector	7 Goddess of the hunt
5 Louver parts	36 Some software downloads	8 Real brats
10 Monk’s music	39 Bar topic	9 Gems
12 Insertion sign	40 Corn-husker city	11 Shaped shrub
13 Cost as much as	41 Barber shop	17 Cart puller
14 Texas player	43 Moon of Saturn	19 Future embryos
15 Verb for you	44 Restaurant patron	22 As a group
16 Sewing aid	45 Oozes	24 Wyoming city
18 Dialect	46 Squeal	25 Establish
20 Homer’s bartending pal		27 Id –
21 Bud holder		28 Train stops
23 1040 org.		30 Gibbon or gorilla
24 Tale teller		33 Brighten
26 Mysterious loch		34 Belly feature
28 Dapper fellow		35 Annoying fellow
29 Thanks-giving dish		37 Fellow
31 Hosp. sections		38 Painter
32 Gizmo		42 Cow chow

**DOWN**

1 Throw away	33 Brighten
2 Colleague of Spock and Sulu	34 Belly feature
3 “Olympia” painter	35 Annoying fellow
4 Toronto’s prov.	37 Fellow
5 “Get lost!”	38 Painter
6 Ultimate	42 Cow chow

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