

# Well done, BCL sisters!

## They are fast 'catching up' with their male counterparts



**NO STRINGS ATTACHED** 

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#### **AASHA MEHREEN AMIN**

wins in international tournaments which made them more impressive than their male counterparts. Not that they were treated with the same pampering and reverence that our male cricketers get from the state or society. At least their prowess and skills are being acknowledged.

But now we must recognise a different arena where some women are "excelling," with the apparent support of the powers that be. These are the female student cadres of the ruling party who are following the playbook of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) to the T.

Remember last year in Eden College, when two factions of BCL's women members got into violent clashes? A student leader was ancient act of chula chuli (tearing each other's hair out), associated with long-haired banshees, as well as reports of universal torture tactics like punching, kicking, and even a case of asphyxiation using a scarf.

The latest news of female thuggery comes from the Islamic University in Kushtia, where a woman Chhatra League leader and several of her cohorts allegedly took a female student to a common room and tortured her for four hours, because she had stayed in the dorm without informing them. According to the student's formal complaint, the attackers clamped her mouth and continued to beat her up while verbally abusing her and threatening to kill her. They used the common language of political thuggery, "Do you have any idea who we are, how

bad we can get?" In typical gangster style, they allegedly kicked her, gagged her, choked her with a scarf while spewing creative expletives at her. At one point, these female Attilas

People are now finally noticing how stripped their victim, took videos good our young women are in cricket and threatened to release them especially after their consistent on social media if she dared to disclose what had happened to her. The victim, despite being terrified enough to escape to her village home, still displayed the courage to file a complaint.

> Not surprisingly, the leader of the gang completely denied the allegations, saying she had always helped other female students and looked out for their interests. She told the media that she had also submitted a written complaint to the university administration against the student who was allegedly tortured, and had filed a separate complaint against her, signed by many of the resident students.

If you think this was a one-off incident, think again.

According to a Prothom Alo accused of torturing two female report, other students who were students (also members of the BCL) approached but who would like to for six hours. There was a video of the remain anonymous (and perhaps alive), said the student leader and her gang tortured another student last vear.

Interestingly, the Chhatra League brothers have also been active again despite all the negative publicity from the Abrar Fahad murder in Buet in 2019, when the level of terror wielded by the university mafia was on full display by the media, leading to public outrage and a befitting court sentence.

This time, the "show of strength" came from BCL's Chattogram Medical College chapter. Four students were beaten to a pulp as they were suspected to be members of Islami Chhatra Shibir. Of course, that seemed like enough reason to attack, torture, and send individuals to the ICU, as was the case with two of the victims. The "aggrieved" cadres even went inside the ICU and threatened the two again. The two were shifted to a cabin and had to have security outside the door, lest the angry men came back for more

Like the war cry of the Sentinelese (one of the most aggressive tribes of the world), the instructions to attack and annihilate "the enemy" however far-fetched the perceived threat may be - are reaching educational institutions in other districts, too. In Rajshahi University, BCL leaders allegedly confined a student and tortured him, accusing him of belonging to Islami Chhatra Shibir and threatening to kill him. When the victim said that he was Hindu, which made him an unlikely member, the attackers allegedly said, "Then nobody can do anything if we kill you."

These examples of "showing brawn" may not just be the regular practice of controlling the university residential halls that have survived and prospered over the decades, leaving the university administrations - especially the authority of the hall supervisors and proctors - quite redundant. Such practices may be part of a election-vear well-thought-out strategy to re-establish the BCL's "supremacy" in the form of terror, and justify violence through labelling individuals who show the slightest signs of nonconformity as belonging to Shibir. If this is the case, we will be hearing or reading about regular incidents of students being tortured or thrown out of halls for being Shibir members," although the real reason is as simple as not showing enough "respect" to the Boro Bhais or Apas.

For ordinary citizens, attacking a person, confining them in a room, torturing them or taking compromising videos, threatening to expose the victims on social media or threatening to kill them would be crimes that would lead to arrest, cases filed, being charged, put on trials and imprisoned. But when it comes to the BCL, ordinary laws do not apply as they are not "ordinary"

people. The image of women as nurturers and champions of peace and nonviolence is taking a heavy hit in the wake of these bellicose female cadres. Their wrestling and fighting skills would have been better utilised in Wrestle Mania matches or for commando operations in the armed forces. But one thing is for sure: when it comes to complete disregard for academic environment, the law, or basic humanity, they are fast catching up with their "bros."

## The raids in BBC's India offices should worry us all



is an independent journalist. His Twitter handle is @

#### KAMAL AHMED

The Indian income tax department's sudden raids at the BBC offices in New Delhi and Mumbai have drawn widespread condemnation against the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. They have shocked journalists, activists, and opposition politicians alike. Such a high-handed action against one of the oldest and most trusted global broadcasting networks will understandably be a cause for concern and discomfort in Western capitals, as well as those in every democratic country.

The raids, which the income tax officials have described as "surveys," follow the recent controversy over the BBC's two-part investigative documentary, titled *India: The Modi* Question, which for the first time revealed a confidential investigation by the British government into the 2002 Gujarat riots that left more than a thousand Muslims dead. The investigation report concluded that the violence had "all the hallmarks of genocide" and found Modi "directly responsible" for not stopping the killings of Muslims.

The BBC didn't air the documentary in India or anywhere else except the UK and did not explain who described the BBC as the "most corrupt organisation in the world." He said, "India is a country which gives an opportunity to every organisation, as long as you don't spew venom." His explanation that the searches were lawful and the timing had nothing to do with the government failed to mask his party's plan of vengeance against a news organisation that they now characterise as "anti-Indian."

Opposition leaders were quick to protest the raids. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said, "Here we are asking for a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe into the Adani-Hindenburg row, and there the government is hounding the BBC." Leaders of Samajwadi Party, Trinamool Congress, and other regional parties have condemned the raids and called them an act of desperation.

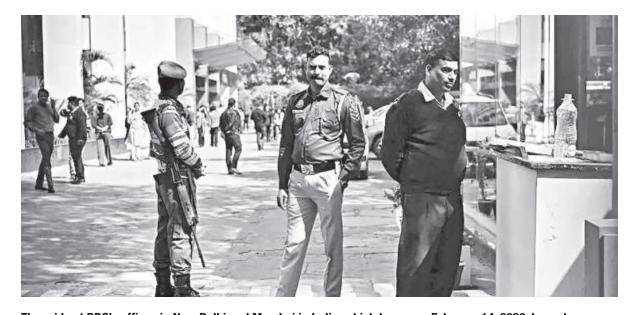
Rights group Amnestv International, which was forced to stop its operation in India following its accounts being frozen by another government agency, said, Overbroad powers of the Income Tax Department are repeatedly being weaponised to silence dissent." Tax raids have been carried out on

Kamal Ahmed to be a clear-cut case of vendetta. And that such actions against an international broadcasting network will damage the reputation and image of India as the largest democracy in the world.

What is even more disturbing is the seizure of laptops and mobile phones of journalists working there. As the raids continue for the third day on February 16, people have been expressing their concerns and anger in real time on social media platforms. MK Venu, founding editor of The Wire, asked in a tweet whether due process was followed in seizing phones, reminding that the Supreme Court of India in a separate case made some observations about searching phones. Karishma Mehrotra, a correspondent of *The* Washington Post, termed seizing journalists' phones "stunning and apparently retaliatory."

Some leading Indian newspapers including the *Indian Express* and Hindustan Times ran special explainers outlining the differences between tax raids and surveys. Quoting the Income Tax Act, they said tax officials cannot seize any books of accounts, cash, and documents during the course of the surveys, but in searches such actions are permitted. Whatever official narrative is given, there's no doubt that this latest episode will be seen as a dangerous attack on press freedom and a slide into authoritarianism.

The global advocacy group on media freedom, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), said that press freedom in India had deteriorated since Modi



The raids at BBC's offices in New Delhi and Mumbai in India, which began on February 14, 2023, have drawn severe criticism.

the reasons behind such restricted Oxfam and several think tanks, too, came to power. India now ranks 150th dissemination. But that didn't help the agency to shield itself from the wrath of the government of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The Indian government used its emergency powers under the Information Technology Rules to block YouTube videos and social media posts sharing links to the documentary, and slammed the documentary as "hostile propaganda and anti-India garbage." Besides the government's invoking of emergency law to stop the documentary's showing in India, some right-wing groups associated with Hindutva politics petitioned the Supreme Court, seeking a complete ban on the BBC in India over the documentary, which the court has declined, calling the petition "entirely misconceived."

All these official and unofficial acts were a warning signal for what would ultimately follow.

The tax officials' attempt to disguise the raids as surveys wasn't helped either by the comment of BJP spokesman Gaurav Bhatia,

for carrying out their critical roles against some government policies.

The top professional body that guides journalism in India, the Editors Guild of India (EGI), expressed its concerns, saying it was "distressed by the continuing trend of government agencies being used to intimidate and harass news organisations that are critical of (the) ruling establishment." It listed similar surveys by tax officials at the offices of NewsClick and Newslaundry in September 2021, at Dainik Bhaskar and Bharat Samachar in June 2021, and raids conducted by another agency, the Directorate of Enforcement, at the office of NewsClick in February 2021. The EGI noted that, in each case, the raids were against the backdrop of critical coverage of government agencies by the news organisations.

The Press Club of India described the "surveys" as part of a series of attacks on the media by the Indian government in recent times. It said that this latest instance appeared out of 180 countries in its World Press Freedom Index, which is a historical low for a nation that regularly takes pride as the world's largest democracy. India's worsening media environment is a matter of concern in other countries too, particularly in its neighbourhood, as other leaders frequently emulate experiences of an aspiring superpower. As India holds the presidency of the G20 nations and promises to set an alternative course to the current world order, its slide into authoritarianism and dictatorship should worry us all. However, many observers

express their frustrations over the international community's inaction due to geostrategic and economic considerations. Western powers' need for a powerful ally to counter China's increasing global influence means there is little appetite in Western countries to confront India's current Hindu nationalists on the crucial issues of human rights, freedom of press, and weakening of democracy.

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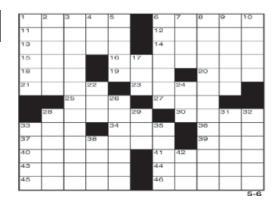
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