

Why is CU so loath to punish BCL cadres?

Recent rounds of violence demand stern response

The recent clashes between different factions of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) in Chittagong University (CU) have once again underscored how unruly the ruling party's student wing has become thanks to continued tolerance of its crimes. These incidents involving the so-called Sixty-Nine and Choose Friends with Care (CFC) factions—the first claiming allegiance to former mayor AJM Nasir Uddin, and the latter to Education Minister Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury—saw scores of people including cops injured, some critically. At least 60 BCL cadres, according to a report, have been seen brandishing matchets during the clashes. This is what thugs do, and their garb of students sends a chilling message to both current and upcoming batches of ordinary students.

The question is: why is the university administration so loath to punish these criminals, or so eager to protect their studentship? The identity of eight such cadres has been confirmed from video footages and pictures as well as by talking to BCL insiders. One is Khaled Masud, a frequent machete wielder who was already expelled twice from the university for engaging in violence and beating up a journalist, with the expulsion orders withdrawn every time on "humanitarian grounds". Another is Arafat Raihan, who was also expelled for beating a journalist last year only to be reinstated mere months later. None of the other culprits, mostly repeat offenders, were also held accountable by the BCL or the CU administration, or even the criminal justice system, despite the gravity of their offences.

This is why we are doubtful whether the education minister's call for strict measures against those engaged in clashes will lead to any meaningful action. In his message to the CU vice-chancellor, he emphasised not sparing anyone responsible for the violence regardless of their political identity. If soon-to-be-withdrawn expulsion orders are all the university can do, more of such orders are nothing but a mockery of the disciplinary process. The fact is, these clashes, extortions and the various other crimes being committed by BCL cadres in CU, divided into about 11 camps, have little to do with the fact that it has no official committee there at the moment.

The fault, as always, lies with the carte blanche given to the BCL to do whatever they see fit to keep public universities under control. And for that, the ruling party, including influential figures controlling the BCL, must take responsibility. We urge the authorities to take meaningful action to stop its reign of terror in universities for the sake of general students.

Rivers being sectioned for fish farming?

How can the Pabna administration violate the law?

It is frustrating that the Pabna administration has decided to lease out as many as 31 sections of 10 local rivers for fish farming in what is a clear violation of the law. These areas, labelled "jalmahal", are government-owned waterbodies. According to the Jalmahal Management Policy 2009, authorities are forbidden to lease out any open waterbody like a river. One may also recall that all rivers in general have been declared "living entities" by the High Court, which assigned the National River Protection Commission (NRPC) as their legal guardian. Thus, the Pabna administration's actions are in contravention of both the law and High Court orders.

According to a report by this paper, the administration invited applications from fishermen in January offering leases for 63 waterbodies across nine upazilas of the district. How can those areas that cannot be used as "jalmahal" be included in the list? It seems here too, as in all other cases of river encroachment, the power of influential figures has trumped the administration's responsibility to abide by the law.

We have seen multiple examples of rivers being narrowed or encroached upon because the occupiers are connected to power. Despite the government declaring, from time to time, its commitment to protect the environment, in particular rivers, we have frequently seen such declarations lead to nothing with many of the rivers either dying or on the verge of death. Rivers are being choked by industrial and residential waste dumped into them indiscriminately; they are also being narrowed by encroachers. Sometimes, as in this case, it is the government's own institutions that are complicit.

This must be stopped. We urge the river commission to do the job they have been mandated to do, which is to protect rivers by ensuring that no individual or group, with or without the help of local administrations, can manipulate the system to occupy stretches of a river. We expect the government to hold local administrations accountable and make sure rivers are kept free from encroachment and accessible to all.

New Message

To: _____

Subject: _____

Facing issues in your area? Want your opinions about events around you to be published in *The Daily Star*? Send us a short letter with your name and city!

Write to us: letters@thedailystar.net



AN OPEN DIALOGUE

Dr Abdullah Shibli is an economist and works for Change Healthcare, Inc., an information technology company. He also serves as senior research fellow at the US-based International Sustainable Development Institute (ISDI).

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

Bangladesh is facing a potential crisis that affects our higher education system as well as the socioeconomic progress of the country. Every year, thousands of new graduates enter the job market with a certificate in hand, but they have no job offers. A few years ago, the case of a newly-minted college graduate who had posted signs on utility poles in Bogura, advertising that he was willing to "teach for food," made headlines. "Du bela bhaater binimoye porate chai" (Want to teach in exchange for two meals a day) said the flyer that went viral in January 2022. Now, this particular graduate's plight may have been overdramatised, and this may be an exceptional case. But we cannot avoid addressing the larger problem of a persistent mismatch between supply and demand of skills. We have an abundance of educated manpower with the skills that are underutilised, but, in sharp contrast, there is also a severe shortage of appropriate skills that industries and businesses need and are searching for.

What accounts for this mismatch between supply and demand? Actually, there are two separate job market segments in Bangladesh: 1) the market that new university graduates face (market A or M-A); and 2) the marketplace for entry-level positions in manufacturing and service industries (or M-B). Oftentimes, in everyday parlance, we mix M-A and M-B up, and for good reason. It is not uncommon for the families of new graduates (who are in M-A) to expect that they will find work at banks, government bureaucracy, commercial firms or in the service industry right after graduation, i.e. in M-B. Families feel they have invested a good deal of money to "buy" the certificate or diploma, and one cannot blame them if the diploma is considered a ticket to a vacancy in M-B. Unfortunately, the prospective employer in M-B will be reluctant to hand over an appointment letter to an applicant in M-A in exchange for a copy of the diploma.

Who is to blame? Many parties share the responsibility: students, their parents, universities, the University Grants Commission (UGC), the corporate sector, and the government.

Let me give a real-life example. Prof Faizul Huq of the Business School at Northeastern University in Boston, US was in Dhaka recently on an assignment. A family member

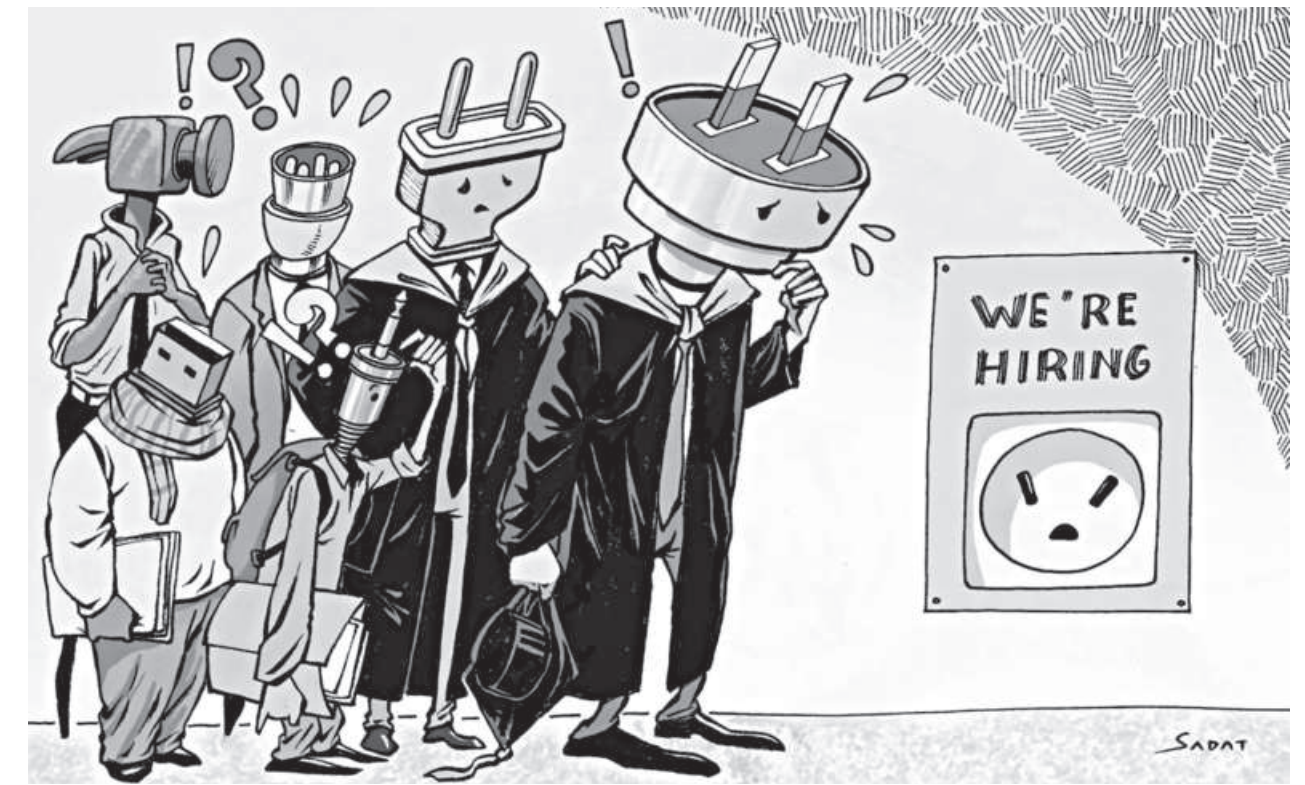


ILLUSTRATION: SADATUDDIN AHMED AMIL

requested him to help find a job for her son at Anglo-American Corporation, whose director Huq knew. The candidate, a newly-minted MBA from one of the top private universities, was invited for a job interview, where he failed to answer some basic questions on accounting.

The sorry state of affairs recounted by Prof Huq is not an isolated incident. Speaker after speaker at a recent international gathering of administrators, faculty, and representatives of the Bangladesh government (including the Prime Minister's Office and UGC) in Boston mentioned that graduates with a business degree had neither the soft skills nor the knowledge necessary for employability. The conference, titled "Private Universities in Bangladesh – Challenges, Opportunities, and Stakeholders Engagement," was organised by the International Sustainable Development Institute (ISDI) on October 6, 2023, at the University of Massachusetts Boston, US. The key themes of the daylong conference were the quality of education, accreditation, global engagement, the role of technology, and experiential learning. A member of the Board of Trustees of North South

bachelor's degree. However, millions of them either do not have a full-time job or are underemployed. They are stuck in low-end jobs that don't utilise their knowledge and skills. Many companies trying to hire skilled workers find a severe shortage of competent and experienced candidates with the required background.

Every year, public and private universities are minting out new graduates who enter the job market. Private education in Bangladesh is expensive, and the better-known universities are flourishing on exorbitant tuition fees. Parents and concerned family members are overwhelmed. They struggle with a lack of teachers, unfinished curriculum, grade inflation, etc. Research also reveals other major issues plaguing our higher education (tertiary) institutions.

This will have an effect on our SDG targets. If our goal, as declared in Sustainable Development Goal #4, is to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030, we are failing miserably. The tertiary education sector needs to recalibrate its mission and aim to provide graduates with quality

need for reforms within the higher education institutions (HEI). In a cutting op-ed on these pages, a former vice-chancellor called for sweeping changes in our "outdated, inefficient higher education institutions" (*The Daily Star*, December 19, 2023).

Third, the accreditation process must be strengthened with greater emphasis on curriculum, including STEM, in addition to "permanent campuses." The UGC needs to enforce periodic reviews of each university and programme and close flagging institutions if necessary. Fourth, all universities must incorporate experiential learning in their curriculum. Participants at the ISDI conference unanimously agreed on the need for greater collaboration between HEIs and the corporate sector to prepare graduates for jobs available in the market. Finally, the newly elected government could set up a commission to conduct a feasibility study of a National Service Corps to equip graduates transitioning into the job market with employability skills. This model is currently used by countries like Turkey, Switzerland, Singapore, Israel, South Korea, North Korea, Eritrea, Nigeria, Norway, Sweden, and Ghana.

Is social media encouraging impulse buying?



Fahmida Habib Nabila is a PhD fellow in Goto Kamuya Laboratory, Department of Applied Chemistry, Kyushu University.

FAHMIDA HABIB NABILA

Have you ever found yourself purchasing items from social media platforms that you didn't need? The emergence of social media-based e-commerce has brought about a substantial transformation, turning these platforms into virtual marketplaces. The ease and rapidity of these platforms can foster impulse buying. Users may make swift decisions without thoroughly assessing the products, resulting in regrettable purchases and misuse of financial resources. I believe everyone, including myself, has experienced being an impulse shopper at least once.

The convergence of social media and e-commerce, commonly known as social commerce, offers unparalleled convenience, enabling users to browse and purchase products seamlessly without leaving the platform. According to GWI research in 2023, the average global user spends two hours and 30 minutes on social media per day. This trend is growing exponentially without a discernible balance, presenting a significant opportunity for companies to strategically position their products and services in front of users, capitalising on the considerable

time spent on digital platforms. With a few clicks, consumers can explore a wide array of products, compare prices, and make purchases, all within the familiar interface of their favourite social media apps, where continuous scrolling already keeps them engaged.

According to Insider Intelligence's eMarketer statistics, US annual social commerce sales is expected to reach \$107.17 billion by 2025. These frightening statistics underline the potential of social commerce for businesses, offering an opportunity for intense competition and a race to significantly enhance their financial performances. Companies aggressively advertise and pursue customers with fervour, striving to outdo one another in capturing market share. Furthermore, studies show that the average transaction value on traditional e-commerce is decreasing compared to social commerce platforms, providing an appealing opportunity for marketers looking to maximise their returns on those platforms. Companies that resist integrating social commerce into their marketing strategies run the risk of falling behind and facing potential

disintegration.

Social media platforms are predominantly designed for consumers rather than businesses. Companies struggle with the challenge of maintaining a balance between promotional efforts for their products and ensuring a genuine and high-quality user experience. The spotlight is frequently on extensive advertising at the expense of the intrinsic quality of the product. Consequently, with the increasing number of advertisements, the products' quality drops. Moreover, personalised promotion offers and advertisements also have a psychological impact on customers. The predictive nature of these advertisements diminishes the likelihood of customers exploring innovative ideas in using a variety of products.

The most alarming fact in the present trend of discussions surrounding social commerce is the lack of attention on guiding consumers to navigate these platforms, contrasting the main focus on describing the strategies for companies to boost their traffic and attract more customers. The disproportionate discussion trends are contributing to the rising number of consumers lacking knowledge of how to behave within the dynamic landscape of social commerce. Consequently, they are becoming victims of frequent cycles of impulse buying, encounter security issues, and end up with a number of low-quality and unnecessary products.

Certainly, full escape from this challenging situation may be impossible, but we should try to

minimise the severity of the damage through simple yet effective steps. First, avoid shopping on social media during vulnerable HALT stages (H=hungry; A=angry; L=lone; T=Tired), as these psychological states are linked to making impulsive decisions on needless purchases. If restraining becomes challenging, you can always add the products to your waiting list, providing more than 24 hours to reconsider. Identify and address your weaknesses by cancelling subscriptions and unfollowing the pages, the exposure to which triggers stimuli in your mind. Establishing a budget is also crucial in dealing with impulse buying. It is ideal to start with daily limits and gradually expand to weekly, monthly, and yearly budgets. Strict adherence to these budgets is crucial for ensuring disciplined spending. Allocate a specific budget for entertainment shopping, allowing enjoyable purchases while maintaining financial mindfulness. Before clicking on a product link, practise critical thinking and observation to encourage a mindful approach.

Consistent adoption of these practices can result in the formation of a good habit of conscious shopping on social media, in a similar pattern as James Clear highlighted in his book *Atomic Habits*, where he clearly emphasises the importance of repetitive cycles in habit formation. Over time, focusing on the strategies can lead to the cultivation of a habit of conscious buying, leading to more deliberate and thoughtful purchasing decisions with a reduced tendency for impulse buying.