

Students of the progressive student society were injured in an attack from activists of Chhatra League and Jubo League of Rajshahi University

Fact finding Report

Odhikar

On 10 September 2011, members of the general student of Rajshahi University along with the Progressive Student Society formed a committee named 'Students Against Increased Fees' for the hike of the 1st year admission fees of the 2011-2012 academic session and the increasing rate of residential hall fees. Under the same banner, all leftist student organisations and the general students planned different programmes to be undertaken to demand for withdrawal of price hike.

On 14 September 2011, as part of the programme, all students took a procession to the administrative building. They continued a sit-in programme after surrounding the building. Then in the presence of the police, the Vice Chancellor arrived with members of the Awami League supported Chhatra League¹ and some Jubo League² members to deliver a speech. Later on, supporters of Chhatra League and Jubo League vandalised buses and in front of the police, attacked the students involved in the movement. In this incidence about 15 students were injured.

Odhikar conducted a fact-finding mission in to the matter. During this, Odhikar interviewed:

- Injured students
- Eye-witnesses
- Rajshahi University administration
- Doctors of the injured students
- Members of Law enforcement agencies



Pictures (From right to left): 1) Chhatra League beating Iqbal in front of the police, 2) Injured Iqbal, 3) Attack at the gathering

SM Iftekharul Islam Shiplu, Coordinator, 'Students Against Increased Fees' committee, Rajshahi University

SM Iftekharul Islam Shiplu informed Odhikar that around 10 in the morning on 10 September 2011, students gathered in front of the Mass Communication and Journalism Department at Shahid Tapan Chottor (a portico). They discussed the increased fees of the University. The students told him that they talked to the Vice Chancellor regarding the cancellation of the increased fees repeatedly but did not get any response. That is why they made Shiplu coordinator and formed a committee under the

¹ Student wing of Awami League

² Youth wing of Awami League

banner of 'Students Against Increased Fees' for a movement. They undertook regular programmes to demand reduction of fees. He said that students participated in processions, sit in programmes, protests and blockage of the administrative buildings as part of the programme. On 14 September 2011, at around 12.15 in the afternoon, the procession moved from Shahid Tapan Chottor and reached the front of the administrative building at around 12.35 pm. The students delivered speeches by turns for realization of their demand. Under police guard, the Vice Chancellor (VC) Prof. Dr. M Abdus Sobhan came there with the members of Chhatra League and Jubo League and delivered a speech addressing the students. At around 12.45 the VC entered his office and then Chhatra League member, Mohammad Masud Rana came with his supporters and started vandalising the cars, and put the blame on the shoulders of the students involved in the movement. Besides, the members of Chhatra League and Jubo League attacked the students in the presence of the police. About 15 students were injured in this incidence.

Shipon Ahmed, General Secretary, Bangladesh Chhatra Union, Rajshahi University Parliament, Rajshahi

Shipon Ahmed informed Odhikar that he is the 4th year student of the Department of Fine Arts. He said that the University administration increases the fees each year showing different causes but the standard of education is not improving. Whenever students protest against the increased fees, a group of police and political thugs under the political shelter of the Awami League fall upon the students in different ways. He requested the Proctor and the Vice Chancellor to reduce the fees repeatedly. There was no response and again the Proctor informed them that the University was not for those students, who cannot afford to buy the admission forms.

For this reason, the general students gathered at Shahid Tapan Chottor on 10 September 2011. They formed a committee named 'Student Against Increased Fees' and made S M Iftekharul Islam Shiplu, a 3rd year student of Information and Communication Engineering, the coordinator. Around 12.15 in the afternoon of 14 September 2011, they formed a procession to the main gate of the administration building in the presence of all the students and started gathering there. The Vice Chancellor, M Abdus Sobhan came with Chhatra League member, Mohammad Masud Rana; local Jubo League leaders Habib, Kamal, Tuhin; and 20/25 other supporters and said that 'Higher education was not for the poor people but for a selective few'. The VC also said that the leaders of progressive student organisations do worse politics than Jamaat-Shibir and now they were creating anarchy under the shade of this politics that would not be allowed. The VC said that students' demands would not be granted and then left for his office with the Chhatra League and Jubo League members. The students then moved to the University field and organised a demonstration. At around 12.45 in the afternoon, the Chhatra League member of Rajshahi University branch, Mohammad Masud Rana along with local Jubo League leaders Habib, Kamal, Tuhin and 20/25 other people came and surrounded them. The Jubo League members threw stones and broke the windows of a bus. Members of the Chhatra League and Jubo League vandalised the buses, putting the blame on the general students involved in movement, and attacked them too.

In this incident, 15 students were injured including him. The others were identified as, Shiplu, coordinator of admission price hike protest committee; Rafi Ahmed Chanchal, secretary of Chhatra Union; Pollob Bhottacharjo, secretary of Chhatra Federation; Ahsan Habib Rocky, RU unit general secretary of the Chhatra Federation, Rehan Mahmud, school secretary of the Somajtantrik Chhatra Front, SM Iqbal Kabir, RU unit convener of Chhatra Maitree; and Sumon, Soikot, Khademul Bashar, Bokhshi, Shirin, Foisal.

All the injured students were treated at the university medical centre. The condition of Iqbal was critical and the students admitted him into the Rajshahi Medical College Hospital and he was there for 4 days.

The Proctor called the protesters to his room and threatened to file cases against them. Akabor Hossain, officer-in-charge of Motihar Police Station called Shipon and told him to meet him. He also threatened him with arrest and torture.

About the increased fee, Shipon informed Odhikar that in the 2011-12 academic sessions all the fees have been increased. For example, in the 2008-09 /2009-10 academic sessions the admission fee was 100 taka, which had been increased to 500 taka for the 2011-12 academic sessions. He also gave a list of increased fees like late admission fee 50-100 taka; library (as security) 6-100 taka, University sports subscription 30-50 taka; health care fee 75-100 taka; student help fund 10-20 taka; identity card fee 25-50 taka; transport cost fee 200-300 taka, students welfare fee 15-30 taka; rover/ranger fee 10-20 taka; medical card fee 25-50 taka,; cultural activities fee 10-20 taka; BNCC fee 20-30 taka; and TSCC fee 20- 30 taka. Some fees that had not increased were laboratory fees, magazine subscriptions, sports welfare fund, university registration fees, hall session fees, celebration fees and national day's celebration fees.

Furthermore, the seat rents of residential halls have been increased to 100-125 taka.

SM Iqbal Kabir(22), convenor of Chhatra Maitree³

SM Iqbal Kabir informed Odhikar that on 14 September 2011 there was a pre-scheduled programme of the 'Student Against Increased Fees' committee. According to the schedule, at 12 noon around 250 general students gathered at the Shahid Tapan Chottor, in front of the Mass Communication and Journalism Department.

Rafi Ahmed Chonchol, The president of the Chhatra Union led a procession of the general students. Arriving in front of the main gate of the administration building, they organised demonstrations. After some time, Professor DR. M Abdus Sobhan, the Vice Chancellor came and asked the students to calm down. He also told the students to assemble somewhere else other than the administration building. He claimed that the movement was illogical and students were enjoying more privileges than before and with the increased price of products, they had to increase fees a little. He left for his office saying that their demands would not be fulfilled.

Iqbal Kabir said that then the students started leaving the administration building. At that moment, Mohammad Masud Rana alias Bhagne Masud the Chhatra League activist of RU (Rajshahi University) and an MBA student of the Management Department, came with a procession of 20/25 outsiders and the procession was led by Habib a local Jubo League leader. They were shouting slogans. Moreover, the people in the procession suddenly attacked the protesters. He said that Masud and Habib pushed him and he fell on a motorcycle that was standing on the field. Then everyone started to punch and kick him and threw him back on the motorcycle by pulling his hair. He shouted and tried to run away but failed. He lost strength after being beaten and finally fainted. He regained consciousness at 3 pm in ward no 6 of the Rajshahi Medical College Hospital. He was under treatment from 15-18 September 2011 in Rajshahi Medical College and then returned home. He said that the attackers hit him on his shoulder, elbow, back, waist, abdomen, chest, cheek, forehead, knees, and ankle. Doctor suggested him to take rest for one month.

³ Student wing of the Workers' Party of Bangladesh

Rafi Ahmed Chanchal, eyewitness

Rafi Ahmed Chanchal informed Odhikar that at around 12.15 in the afternoon, students started a procession. They reached the administration building at around 12.45 pm and delivered speeches after gathering there. Then the Vice Chancellor came and delivered a speech to the students. Mohammad Masud Rana, a Chhatra League activist came there with 20/25 supporters and attacked the students involved in the movement. At first, they pushed Iqbal and he fell on a motorcycle. Then a few people started beating him holding his hair and punching and kicking him. Iqbal fainted as a result.

The students who were Awami League supporters also injured around 15 students by punching and kicking them. He complained that Chhatra League supporters attacked with the support of police because during the incident the police officers present were silent.

Mohammad Masud Rana (25), Chhatra League activist, Rajshahi University Branch

Mohammad Masud Rana told Odhikar that he is a MBA student of the Department of management. On 14 September 2011, he went to the VC's room for some important work. At that time the VC went to the main gate of the administration building where the students had organised demonstration. There the VC delivered a speech to the students involved in the movement. After his speech, students started vandalising buses. With the help of Chhatra League and Jubo League workers Rana helped to stop the students. He claimed he saw some young people beating Iqbal, who was known to him. He told Odhikar that he tried to save Iqbal.

Masud Rana also said that the VC told him that with the increased price of all products they increased all fees by a small percentage. He said that the aim of the movement of the Progressive Student Society was to show that they still do politics in the University. He said that the Awami Chhatra League was a powerful party; and if they wished, they could stop the leftist movement at any time.

Professor Dr. M Abdus Sobhan, Vice Chancellor, Rajshahi University

Professor Dr. M Abdus Sobhan informed Odhikar that the University had increased both the fees and the facilities for the students. He said the student organisations did not have any ground for a movement. Earlier students had to buy different admission forms for each subjects. Now all the subjects have been divided into 17 clusters and forms can be filled up in online. Through this cluster system, a student is capable of giving examinations on different subjects of the same unit. This system may cost little more but it lessens the harassment, he argued. The fees have been increased by a very small percentage and by considering students and the price rising of essentials. He said that the caretaker government (January 2007-December 2008) fixed the seat rent at 100 taka. Now the price of everything has increased and that is why the seat rent has been increased to 125 taka, which is reasonable for the general students. He commented that the university authority should have filed cases against the students for the vandalising buses. However, he did not file any case nor threatened the students.

Akber Hossain, Officer-in-charge, Motihar Police Station, Rajshahi Mohanogor Police

Akber Hossain informed Odhikar that on 14 September 2011, according to routine, the police were on duty at the gate of the administration building of Rajshahi University. At around 12.15 pm, the students of the 'Student Against Increased Fees' committee came in a procession and locked the main door. Confining all the people in the administration building they delivered speeches one by one. Using microphones was forbidden on the campus, but students used one that day. After few

moments, the Vice Chancellor came and talked to the students. After the VC's speech, some students started vandalising buses. At that moment a few Chhatra League supporters attacked the students but police controlled the situation. He claimed that the police did not support Chhatra League activists. Chowdhury Mohammad Zakaria, the University Proctor, informed him that he would file a case in his Police Station against 7 students for vandalising buses. However, he did not file any case. He said that on Proctors orders he called Shipon Ahmed to advise him to stop the protests. He said that he did not threaten any student.

Dr. Mohammad Monirujjaman, Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, Rajshahi

Dr. Mohammad Monirujjaman informed Odhikar that at around 2.30 pm on 14 September 2011 few people brought in a patient named Iqbal Hossain. They got him admitted in ward No 5, under his care. Iqbal's patient registration number was 2843/33. He gave Iqbal treatment. He informed that Iqbal had injuries on his body. There were signs of injuries on his chest, back and shoulders. Iqbal recovered after treatment and went home at 8 pm. He told Iqbal to come back to the hospital again if he felt unwell.

On 15 September 2011, Iqbal became ill again and went to the hospital. He was admitted to ward no 6, his patient registration number was 2340/04. At that time, the doctors of surgery team gave him treatment. At around 2.30 in the afternoon, on 18 September 2011, Iqbal went home.

Odhikar's Comment:

Attacks on the general students by the government party backed Chhatra League and Jubo League workers in the presence of police, hinders a democratic environment.

Odhikar demands the criminals be brought to justice after fair investigation.