

28 October, 2006: A case study of the violent politics of the Awami League

Background

At the end of BNP-Jamaat-led alliance government's tenure (2001-2006), the 13th Amendment to the Bangladesh Constitution required the president to offer the position of the Chief Adviser to the immediate past Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, who was to be Justice K.M. Hasan, soon after the tenure of the government expires on October 28, 2006. The then main opposite party Awami League (AL) opposed Justice Hasan, alleging that he belonged to the then ruling BNP. Awami League launched country-wide blockade and general strike to stop Mr. Justice K M Hasan taking the oath of the chief of the caretaker government.

Sheikh Hasina, the President of Awami League, called her party activists to march to Dhaka with oars and sticks to take control of the streets of the capital. From a rally held on 18th September 2006 at the Paltan ground in the the capital, Sheikh Hasina instructed her party activists to come to Dhaka with oars, logs, and sticks:

“you [the people] be ready and come to Dhaka from villages, upazilas and districts with oars, rowing poles and with whatever you have when I will call you,” Hasina instructed her coalition activists urging to build a resistance against the following caretaker government.¹ Following her call, her party activists gathered in the city sparking the violence of October 28.²

Chronology of events

On the eve of October 28, 2006, the then Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia addressed the nation on the evening of October 27th. On the following day, October 28th, a feeling of fear prevailed across the country as Awami league threatened to massive blockade if Justice K M Hasan was not offered for the post of the chief advisor to the caretaker government.

The activists of the then opposition alliance led by Awami League took to the streets, started setting fire in the markets, set vehicles ablaze and clashed with the BNP and Jamaat activists, and even with the law enforcers. Hundreds of Awami League activists carrying bamboo poles and oars paraded most city roads, chanting slogans against Khaleda Zia and Justice KM Hasan.³ The Awami League activists blocked almost all the city entry points in the morning and clashed with any procession of the BNP they saw.

The major violent incidents took place at the Paltan intersection, Shahbagh, Jatrabari and Mirpur in the capital.⁴ Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI) arranged a pre-declared program at 3.00pm at Baitul Mukarram North gate in the capital to observe the day of power handover of the government. Another political meeting was arranged by Bangladesh Awami League at Paltan ground which was quite far from the Jamaat's venue. At 11.00 am suddenly a procession started to throw bricks upon the activists of BJI and the students organisation Bangladesh Islami Chatrashibir (BICS). A rally led by AL leaders Hazi Selim and Dr. Iqbal passing by the Jamaat gathering, suddenly attacked the Jamaat meeting and started throwing bricks and sticks at the Jamaat workers.⁵ Even a number of big bombs were hurled by the AL men close to the stage as Jamaat Chief Matiur Rahman Nizami was at the tail end of his speech.⁶

Awami League activists used handmade bombs, arms, logs, oars and sticks in their indiscriminate attack on BJI and Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir (BICS). Due to this sudden attack, along with Jamat leaders Nurul Islam Bulbul, Josim Uddin, Mujahid and other activists were severely wounded and 5 of them died instantly. AL activists and cadres beat to death Jamaat activists with oars and sticks they were carrying.⁷

Electronic media showed how inhumanly the Awami league men killed Shibir activist Mujahid by beating with sticks and oars.⁸

The atmosphere at Dhaka Medical College Hospital was rendered heavy with the cries of the relatives of the injured and the dead activists of BJI and BICS. Hundreds of shocked relatives and party activists thronged to the hospital to see whether their relatives were among the dead and the injured. More than 400 of the injured were admitted to the hospital.⁹

The massacre of 28th October caused the tragic death of Shibir activist Mujahidul Islam, Golam Kibria Shipon, Jamaat activist from Lalbag, Habibur Rahman, Jamaat activist from Jurain, Jasimuddin, Jamaat activist Jasim (s/o Haji Anwarullah) and Abdullah Al Foysal from Siddhirganj. Later, on 5 November 2006, Saifullah Mahmud Masum died in hospital from severe wounds sustained on 28th October.

The violence of Awami League in 28th October 2006 was not limited to Dhaka only. On the same date Awami League men killed BJI activist Ruhul Amin in Gazipur, BJI activist Saber Hossain in Nilfamary, Arafat Hossain Sabuj in Magura, Abbas Ali in Meherpur and Jabid Ali in Satkhira.

At least 18 people were killed throughout the country by the “oars and logs” attack of Awami League and its allies.¹⁰ At least 1,000 were injured, many with bullets, in attacks by the activists of the AL led alliance.¹¹ In Kurigram, Islami Chhatra Shibir activist Rafiqul Islam, wounded in a clash with the Awami League activists, died in a clinic at about 5:00pm.¹²

In Narsingdi, Hajipur union council chairman Saiful Islam, 33, also a local BNP leader, and his younger brother, Ripon, 28, died in a brutal attack of Awami league cadres at about 2:30pm. His elder brother, Mah-e-Alam, 42, cousin Shamim, 35, and supporters Hannan Sarkar, 33, and Elen Hossain, 32, were injured when they tried to save Saiful from the Awami league attackers. More than two dozen offices of the BNP and its front organizations were vandalized in the attacks of Awami league. In Chittagong, a toll collector of Shah Amanat Bridge, Abul Kalam, wounded in an attack by Awami League on Saturday morning, died in Chittagong Medical College Hospital at about 4:00pm.

Kalam and three others were wounded when the Awami league men, during a road blockade, attacked state minister Zafrul Islam at 11:30am. Zafrul somehow managed to escape the scene unhurt.¹³

Road communications between Dhaka and other areas remained snapped due to massive blockade by Awami League. Shops and business establishments were closed. Streets in towns and cities were deserted. Railway communications were also disrupted in many areas.¹⁴

Martyrs

Mujahidul Islam:



Mujahidul Islam was a 3rd year student of BBA at Stamford University. He was the President of Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir, Mirpur 10 unit of Dhaka. On 28 October 2006, Awami League activists killed Mujahid by beating with sticks and oars.¹⁵ They severely tortured him by indiscriminately beating him with blunt and sharp weapons on his hands, nose, legs, head, mouth. 14 party alliance activists killed Mujahid so cruelly, it brought to shame barbaric practices of the Dark Ages of the Medieval period.¹⁶ After ensuring Mujahid's death, the killers danced on his dead body under broad day light.

Golam Kibria Shipon



Golam Kibira Shipon was a first year student of BSc in Physics in Dhaka College. He was a very brilliant student and a Hafez i.e. one who memorized the Holy Quran by heart. He had achieved distinction in his Higher secondary exam. Shipon was the president of 27 ward branch of Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir, Dhaka south unit. He was brutally killed in similar fashion as Mujahid.

Saifullah M Masum



Saifullah M Masum was the youngest child of retired government employee Mahtab Uddin Ahmed and Shamsunnahar Rubi. On 28 October 2006, Awami League cadres hammered his whole body with bricks and sticks. After 5 days of struggle with death he succumbed to the injury and died on 2nd November 2006.

List of persons murdered in the 28 October clash in Paltan:

	Name	Age	Identity	Address
1	Hossain Mohammad Mujahidul Islam	22	Student, Stamford University, President, BICS, Mirpur-10.	D-23, Lalkuthi, Mirpur-10
2	Golam Kibria Shipon	21	President, BICS, 27 Ward,	Baganbari,

			Dhaka South	Mothertake
3	Saifullah M. Masum	25	Secretary, BICS, Word 27, Dhaka	Baganbari, Mothertake
4	Md. Josim Uddin	34	BJI Activist	Bakshibazar, Dhaka
5	Md. Josim Uddin	34	BJI Activist	Chandpur
6	Md. Habibur Rahman	40	BJI Activist	Shah Alibag, Mirpur, Dhaka
7	Abdullah Al Foysal	24	BICS Activist	Narayangonj
8.	Md. Rasel	25	Chatra Maitree Activist	Dhaka

Those behind the massacre

Sheikh Hasina

Sheikh Hasina, the President of Awami League, called her party activists to march to Dhaka with oars and sticks to take control of the streets of the capital. From a rally held on 18th September 2006 at Paltan ground in the capital, Sheikh Hasina instructed her party members to come to Dhaka with oars, logs, and sticks:

“If our demands are not met, you [the people] be ready and come to Dhaka from villages, upazilas and districts with oars, rowing poles and with whatever you have when I will call you,” Hasina instructed her coalition activists urging to build resistance against the next caretaker government.¹⁷ Following her call, her party activists gathered in the city sparking the violence of October 28.¹⁸

Tofail Ahmed

“We will not only besiege the capital city but also the villages. Besides, we will also go for indefinite countrywide shutdown if our demands are no fulfilled,” Awami League presidium member Tofail Ahmed said on 19 October, a few days before the massacre of 28 October.¹⁹

Haji Selim and Dr. Iqbal

The violence of 28 October was started by two Awami League lawmakers Haji Selim and Dr. Iqbal. On 28 October at 11 a.m., a 14-party rally led by AL leaders Haji Selim and Dr. Iqbal passing by the Jamaat gathering, suddenly attacked the Jamaat meeting and started throwing bricks and attacked with sticks on the Jamaat supporters.²⁰

After that, a number of big bombs were hurled by the Awami League men close to the stage as Jamaat Chief Matiur Rahman Nizami was at the tail end of his speech.²¹

Role of Administration

The killing of 28 were staged under broad day light in front of Police and other law enforcing agencies but they failed to take necessary measures of stop such political violence. The attack on BJI and BICS activists was initiated by AL at 11 a.m. and it continued till 5 p.m. and yet the law enforcing agencies did not come forward to save the victims of the brutality in Paltan and other places. Jamaat leaders repeatedly asked for help to the Home Minister²² and Police authority for

saving their lives but the administration did not respond to their appeal. The law enforcing agencies did not perform their legal duty to maintain peace and law and order situation.

Subsequently, three cases were filed by the families of the murdered persons and Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI). Jamaat leader ATM Sirajul Haq filed the case no. 61(29/10/2006) at Paltan police station. The police submitted charge-sheet upon investigating the case filed by BJI accusing 46 persons on 11 April 2007. In an order of court given on 23 April 2007 the case was sent for further investigation. After the Awami League led alliance came into power, they formed a committee under supervision of the ministry of Law to withdraw cases on political ground. Referring to the barbarous Paltan killing, the state minister for law Advocate Kamrul Islam declared that the cases filed at Paltan Police Station had been lodged to harass prime minister Sheikh Hasina and the cases were withdrawn upon government directives without hearing the plaintiffs and depriving the victims of justice.

Picture Galley:



A Shaheed being beaten mercilessly with Awami oars and paddle



Shaheed Jashim



Awami League cadres dancing with their oars and sticks at Paltan in bloodthirsty mood



Warzone at Paltan on 28 Oct, 2006



Bappaditya Basu dances over dead body of a man just killed by Awami league terrorists at Paltan



Awami League terrorists using firearms to shoot in broad daylight at Jamaat shibir activists

The government should ensure the proper and immediate trial of the offences committed on 28 October 2006 in Dhaka and it must change its decision of withdrawal of the case filed by the victims in order to serve the people with proper administration of justice. The illegal practice of using violence and torture to suppress the political opponents must be stopped immediately by Awami League and all other political parties. The law enforcing agencies should not tolerate such violent political activities. Political leaders should not make any statement which may encourage the party activists to engage in any violent and illegal activity.

The civil society should raise their voice against the unacceptable attacks on the opponent political parties by Awami League and closely monitor whether any party is involved in any illegal practice to establish dominance and supremacy. The Civil society must make the people aware about the torture, violence and violation of human rights by any political party. Emphasis has to be put on building the culture of tolerance and the practice of participation in our national life.

International community must consider the issues of human rights violation and torture in the political arena while making any decision about their relation with Bangladesh.

Donor and rights agencies should ensure that no person is tortured or murdered only for political identity, and that all people get equal protection of law from the state.

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