



November 20, 2023

Awami League's Arson Attacks and Atrocities

As the main opposition party in Bangladesh, driving strength from the support of the pro-democracy citizens, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) vehemently denounces the reprehensible arson attacks and violent acts of sabotage orchestrated by the Sheikh Hasina regime. We demand an impartial and meticulous investigation, and vigorously oppose the collaborative efforts of the politicized members of the law enforcement agencies and the ruling Awami League (AL) activists, who manipulate and exploit this situation to brutally suppress the opposition through nationwide crackdown.

1. Fabricated Charges and the Threads of Fascism

BNP believes that politics is meant to serve the people, and we are appalled by fascist Hasina's ruthless pursuit of power, manifested in the murder of individuals from different backgrounds, planned destruction of public and private properties, and methodical instillation of fear through arson attacks. It is alarming how Hasina seeks to legitimize and intensify her oppressive tactics to cling to power at the cost of human lives and the violations of human rights. Unfortunately, AL has an appalling history of arson attacks for political advantages, as evident in numerous incidents.

Following BNP's grand rally on October 28, as part of the regime's strategic blueprint, police filed numerous cases against thousands of BNP leaders and activists, and have so far arrested around 14,000 people. The outrageous accusations include: killing policeman, exploding crude bombs, vandalizing Chief Justice's house, conducting arson attacks, snatching away police weapons, obstructing government activities, etc. This way, the regime makes farcical claim that senior BNP leaders, dedicated to reinstating democracy and safeguarding voting rights in Bangladesh through a series of nonviolent and peaceful programs, have committed organized crime to engage in such acts of violence.

2. AL's State-Sponsored Arson Attacks

All the legal charges made as above, including arson attacks on each passing day, are integral part of the regime's state-sponsored master plan. The torching of public transports and the reported role of the law enforcement agencies as mere silent spectators have raised concerns, as most criminals fled the scenes without much trouble. New Age newspaper reports that many of the arson attacks, according to witnesses, take place in the law enforcers' presence or near major police deployments.¹ A few instances from the New Age article expose this conspiracy of the state apparatus.

On November 6, some unidentified men set fire to a bus parked near the traffic police box of Chatri Choumhani Bazaar in Chattogram. Earlier, on October 31, despite heavy police deployment in nearby places, a bus was torched near the National Press Club in Dhaka. A photograph showed that a public bus was burning in front of the police box at the Bangla Motor intersection in Dhaka, while many police were standing on the curb. On October 28, in Dhaka's Kakrail, another bus was set on fire by two unidentified individuals on a motorcycle, who were wearing police vests as per the driver.² However, police denied any responsibility for the perpetrators.

In Feni, an AL leader named Nurul Uddin Tipu, was caught red-handed on November 6, in a case filed over torching a truck from a sugar factory in Chattogram.³ In Natore, Tashreek Zaman Rifat, an AL activist, was briefly held by the police with a torch and mask, as well as 6 torches, 3 masks and 1

¹ <https://www.newagebd.net/print/article/217073>

² <https://images.thedailystar.net/special-events/october-28-rallies/news/youths-wearing-police-vest-set-bus-fire-kakrail-3455251>

³ <https://www.newagebd.net/article/217069/index.php>



motorcycle in his abandoned room.⁴ Police initially suspected him with BNP affiliation, but later discovered he was an AL activist and released immediately.

Such incidents of arson attacks and deliberate inaction of the law enforcers to stop these incidents or arrest actual perpetrators prove the prevalent claim that arson attacks are carried out by the ruling AL, with police complicity. In fact, we have every reason to believe, AL goons and politicized members of the police are purposefully setting multiple vehicles and buses ablaze. Several video footages circulated in social media depict drivers or their assistants stressing how police or ruling activists are responsible for igniting their vehicles.

Hundreds of patrol teams of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and hundreds of platoons of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) have been deployed across Bangladesh, in addition to the full-fledged mobilization and operation of police, armed with substantial weaponry, resembling a war zone.⁵ Given this extensive security setup, it is implausible that BNP would engage in acts of violence or arson. Instead, the heightened security measures appear to be aimed at intensifying suppression and sheltering the ruling AL activists for anarchy, rather than addressing any credible threat.

As mentioned earlier, AL has a long history of orchestrating bus torching for political gains. In 2014, three members of AL's student wing, Chhatro League, were detained while torching buses.⁶ On February 22, 2015, two Chhatro League members were captured with Molotov cocktails and petrol-bombs.⁷ On February 6, 2015, police set free two Juba League activists a few hours after they were arrested with petrol bombs in Comilla.⁸

In another instance, AL set fire to trains and buses, attacked transport workers, leaving one man dead in November 2006.⁹ In 2014, AL's Member of Parliament Pankaj Debnath instructed to set fire on his own bus line, Bihanga Paribahan, with petrol. The fire killed eleven people.¹⁰ These are only a few among many instances where AL used violence for their malicious agenda to foster discord and manipulate circumstances for political gain.

3. Questioning Fabricated Charges, Media Trial, and the Assault on Democracy

Law enforcement agencies detain active BNP leaders, particularly affiliated with our student and youth wings by assembling a roster, arresting in locations distant from the incidents police claim, and deceptively charging them in relation to those occurrences. As Human Rights Watch recently documented, tortures of opposition activists in police custody underscore the pervasiveness and the culture of impunity for security forces, as such acts include beatings; electric shocks; waterboarding; deliberately shooting to maim, including knee-capping; mock executions; and forced nudity.

Through torture and blackmail in custody, police continue subjecting BNP activists and extract coerced confessions, which subsequently lead to an orchestrated media trial and in itself is a criminal offense. Senior officials from the law enforcement agencies regularly appear in the media, propagating stories that BNP is engaged in arson attacks. Unfortunately, they spread disinformation by publicly claiming

⁴ <https://bangla.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/politics/news-533026>

⁵ <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/law-order/235-bgb-platoons-deployed-across-country-amid-bnp-jamaat-hartal-742146?amp>

⁶ <https://www.prothomalo.com>

⁷ <https://tinyurl.com/55vye3sb>

⁸ <https://web.archive.org/web/20150919073210/http://newagebd.net:80/92758/juba-league-men-released-hours-after-arrest-with-petrol-bombs/>

⁹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2006/11/12/bangladesh-rocked-by-new-protests>

¹⁰ (see *The Daily Star*, 13 September, 2022 and *Manabzamin*, 24 May 2017)

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our supposed involvement in these incidents, despite the ongoing judicial process, showcasing their complete loyalty to the regime.

Understanding the fact that these fabricated allegations are part of the regime's broader strategy to suppress dissent and impede BNP's pursuit of restoring democracy and voting rights in Bangladesh, we raise several questions and seek for answers. What are the specific reasons behind the arrests of prominent BNP leaders, including our Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir? What role did these pro-democracy leaders play in incidents such as the murder of police, detonation of explosive devices, obstruction of government activities, vandalism of the Chief Justice's residence, and the seizure of police weapons?

How are numerous buses set ablaze despite substantial police presence right at the crime scene? Why is there no incident of BNP activist being caught red-handed in the act of an arson attack, but confessions are forcefully taken in police custody through torture? What justifies nationwide arrests and assaults of BNP activists, spanning from the grassroots to the national level? How is it plausible that the lists of accusations include opposition activists who are no longer alive, residing abroad, or physically unfit, but all of them at some point, were part of various BNP committees? Why are the non-political fathers, brothers or sons arrested, when BNP leaders and activists are not found at home during police and RAB raids?

4. BNP's Dedication to Democracy as the Way Forward

The answers to above questions essentially converge towards the Hasina regime's three-tier objective to derail BNP: firstly, to tarnish BNP's peaceful and nonviolent programs by orchestrating arson attacks and resorting to the blame game; secondly, to instill widespread fear among millions of BNP grassroots activists through harassment, assault, and intimidation; and thirdly, to entangle key leaders of BNP across all levels in fabricated and ghost cases, in a futile attempt to refrain from the ongoing movement for democracy.

Aligned with the aforementioned, it is evident to the democratic stakeholders of Bangladesh that the fascist regime employs vicious sabotage tactics to instigate disorder and violence, while attempting to deflect responsibility onto BNP. In the face of gross human rights violations, our party stands resolute, fueled by unyielding passion for justice and democracy. We will not be silenced. We will persist in revealing the regime's distorted narratives and premeditated atrocities, voicing our dissent against Sheikh Hasina's malevolent actions.

Our dedication to a democratic Bangladesh remains unwavering. We will continue the struggle for truth, justice, and return of the rightful power to the people, which has been seized by the illegitimate AL government. At this crossroads, BNP and the democratic citizens of Bangladesh greatly and gratefully appreciate the support and encouragement received from the international community in our endeavours and sacrifices.