

Rajshahi Peace school under new name

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Without any approval, the Rajshahi city campus of the controversial Peace school chain has started operating under a new name, as the government prepares to close down the institutions all over the country because of their alleged links to the Jamaat-e-Islami.

Peace International School and College in Rajshahi city changed its name to Legend Academy, in late last month, said police and locals.

"We had picked the name [Peace] because of its popularity. Later we decided to drop it as controversy arose," M Alauddin, principal of the school, told The Daily Star yesterday. He admitted that they did not have any government approval and had applied for permission under the

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Rajshahi Peace school

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previous name. "Now we are preparing to get the new name approved."

The school started in Rajshahi in January 2015.

According to an intelligence report, around 27 Peace schools are being run in six districts by pro-Jamaat people, and a part of their income is spent on the party's organisational activities. The schools are owned by Invitos Peace Ltd, a private company, whose Chairman Abu Zafar Muhammad Obaidullah was a former president of the Islami Chhatra Shibir, said the report.

On Tuesday, the education ministry decided to shut the Peace schools because they do not have government approval.

Principal M Alauddin said, "We are confused over the government order because we do not know whether it is still applicable for us as we have changed the name. We did not also get any instruction from the local administration. So we are still continuing its operation."

He claimed that although they had started as a part of the Peace school chain, they later ran it in Rajshahi independently.

An assistant commissioner of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police, Iftekhair Alam, said police were keeping a close watch on the activities of the school.

During a visit recently, this correspondent saw the school was operating in two

neighbouring buildings including Gazi Bhaban of Terokhadia area.

Terokhadia is known as a Jamaat stronghold and many top leaders of the party live there.

With a workforce of 50 including 25 teachers, the school has over 250 students from playgroup to class V. The school follows strict religious norms in uniforms and teaching.

Local people said people associated with Jamaat and Islami Chhatra Shibir ran the school and they appointed only those belonging or being loyal to Jamaat, Shibir or Islami Chhatra Shangstha.

Morshed Jaman Mia, a haematologist of Islami Bank Medical College Hospital, who is widely known as a Jamaat patron, is chairman of the school's management committee, while the principal is its member-secretary.

Meanwhile, the authority is still running its Facebook page and using a street sign under the previous name.

When contacted, primary education officer in Rajshahi Abul Kashem said that besides the Peace school, a number of other schools were operating in Rajshahi without approval.

"We have talked to government high officials over the issue several times but got no instruction."