

Police attack private university students protesting at VAT

Staff Correspondent

AT LEAST five private university students were injured in a police attack on Tuesday as they tried to stage protest in front of parliament demanding scrapping of the proposed VAT on private universities.

Police arrested four students from the spot when they reached Manik Miah Avenue in front of parliament with a procession and released them after about one hour, said Sher-e-Bangla Nagar police station sub-inspector Narendranath Biswas. He, however, denied allegation of attacking the students.

Witnesses said that students under the banner 'Private University Education Rights Movement' brought out a procession from Dhanmondi Road No 32 intersection.

Akramuzzaman Shubho, a student who joined the procession, said that police

attacked on peaceful procession of students that left five of them injured while four students were picked up by police.

Finance minister AMA Muhith in his budget speech on June 4 proposed 10 per cent VAT on private universities. Students, guardians and owners of the private universities opposing the move said that VAT will eventually have to be borne by students and guardians.

The proposal for 10 per cent value added tax on tuition fees for the students was later lowered to 7.5 per cent following demand on Monday when parliament adopted the finance bill for the new fiscal year.

'We want scrapping of VAT, not only reduction' said Akramuzzaman Shubho.

Private University Education Rights Movement leaders said that the government had taken a contradictory

stand by declaring private universities as non-profit organisations and at the same time imposing VAT on them.

There are over four lakh students at 84 private universities, according to the University Grants Commission. A private university student needs to spend Tk 3 to 7 lakh to complete a four-year graduation course. Nowadays, a large number of students from middle class background go to private universities because there is a shortage of seats in public universities.

Besides, session jams and unhealthy political atmosphere on campuses also kept students away from public universities.

The Awami League-led government in 2010 had imposed a 4.5 per cent VAT on private universities but was forced to backtrack from the decision within a month following demonstration by students.