



Students file into the central library of Jahangirnagar University in a recent morning, but a close look will reveal that it is a long queue extending as far as the Central Shaheed Minar of the campus. This has been a common scenario for quite a while as the library faces a crisis of seats with the number of visitors often becoming almost double its capacity.

PHOTO: SR

A new trend breeds seat crisis at JU library

A CORRESPONDENT, JU

The long queue of students with their bags waiting for the door of the central library to open so that they can grab a seat before anyone else is a common scenario between 6:30am and 7:30am at Jahangirnagar University.

Sometimes students who are tired of standing for a long time put their bags on the ground in a queue and come back later to reclaim the spot just before the gate opens.

The early rush of the students to the library to occupy a seat speaks volumes of the dearth of space.

The university was founded in 1970, but the library opened for students in 1986. Currently, it can accommodate only 436 whereas students triple of its capacity go there every day to study with their examinations ahead. As a result most students have to come back after failing to get a seat.

"We have to keep our bags in line by 6:30am if we are to ensure a seat in the library... Standing in the queue for a long time is exhausting," said Salekul Islam, a master's student of economics.

"Former students and outsiders who take preparations for examinations like Bangladesh Civil Services (BCS) or other jobs often occupy seats deepening the crisis and depriving the regular students," said Saiful Islam Saif, a fourth-year student of geography and environment.

"Some students come here along with their friends and younger brothers of other institutions who will take the upcoming admission tests or job examinations," he said.

Sometimes students get locked into altercations over grabbing seats which often turn into scuffles.

Students, mostly of first and second years, who live in packed dormitories, are

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the worst sufferers as they neither have enough space for study in their dormitory nor in the library.

Faisal Ahmed, a first year student of government and politics, said the dormitory he lives in does not have a suitable atmosphere for study. Moreover, the seating arrangement in the reading room of the dormitory is limited.

"I along with 25 students live in the common room where freshers have to stay before they get a seat and it is almost impossible to study there. We have to suffer a lot during our examinations, as it is hard to get a seat in the library and take preparations," he added.

Although the number of students has increased to more than 14,000, the authorities did not expand the library space. However, the university administration plans to build an extension and the foundation stone for the building has already been laid.

According to library officials, the authorities increased around 200 seats on the first floor for new students.

Visiting the library, this correspondent found that most of the students were studying books related to job examinations, which they had brought with them. Besides, many guide books were kept on the vacant seats so that others cannot sit on them.

According to library officials, in the last six months from January to June, 184 books on average have been issued to the students every day while 1,000 students visit the library daily.

Khaledun Ratul, a student of government and politics, said, "Some rooms on the second and third floors are only for teachers to do research works. However, teachers are rarely seen using the rooms." "If the authorities let students use the rooms, the space crisis in the library will be mitigated," he added.

Admitting the fact and wishing anonymity, a library official said, "We are not asked to check whether students keep their library cards with them or not. We just search their bags so that they cannot take out any library book when they leave."

Besides, the library authority does not keep any entry list of students, he said, adding, "If we can stop outsiders from entering the library, the crisis will be reduced," he added.

Denying the seat crisis for regular students, Librarian Prof Ajit Kumar Mazumdar said the presence of former students in the library creates an "artificial" seat crisis and the number of outsiders in the library is very small.

"At least 200 new seats have been added to the library last year and 200 more seats and 3,500 books will be added this year. We will not face any crisis once the construction work of the extended part of the library completes."

"We will install closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras and create an online library so that students can read books by logging into our website from anywhere," he added.

JU Pro-Vice Chancellor Prof Abul Hossain said, "We have already submitted a project to build the extended part of the library and it needs a lot of money." However, he could not say when the project will be implemented.