

Thursday, November 07, 2019



JU halls locked, students to continue protests defying ban

Ersghad Kamol and Saiful Islam | Updated at 12:58am on November 07, 2019



Jahangirnagar University students stage protest in front of old administrative building on the campus on Wednesday evening demanding removal of vice-chancellor Farzana Islam. — New Age photo

Protesting Jahangirnagar University students on Wednesday vowed to continue their protests until removal of vice-chancellor Farzana Islam defying a ban the university imposed on any procession and rally on the campus.

The university authorities locked the main gates of the of the students' halls of residence and closed all shops on the campus in the late afternoon.

The university public relations office issued a release Wednesday evening informing the decision.

The protesters, however, said that they would not abide by the ban and would continue their protests for resignation of vice-chancellor Farzana Islam on corruption allegations.

They would lock various offices that the university authorities have decided to keep open, said JU unit Samajtantrik Chhatra Front president Mahathir Mohammad, also an organiser of the protests.

He said that at 9:00am protesters would lock the offices and then would bring out a procession at noon.

They would also arrange a concert in front of the vice-chancellor's residence at 6:00pm.

Students left the campus after 10:00pm. Until then, the protesters continued their demonstrations on the campus.

Several hundred teachers, students and officials continued their sit-in in front of the vice-chancellor's residence despite deployment of a huge contingent of police to ward off any violence.

Angry protesters said the demonstration would continue until resignation of Farzana Islam even though the university authority locked the halls of residence and closed down all the nearby food-shops.

Immediately after expiration of deadline for vacating halls residence, deputy minister for education Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury said the government would help the autonomous university authorities to implement its decision of keeping it closed for infinite period.

Mohibul was talking to reporters at International Mother Language Institute in Dhaka. He urged both the JU conflicting groups to remain quiet and vowed to maintain law and order normal 'considering the safety of the students and teachers.'

Jahangirnagar University authorities decided to close the university for an indefinite period on Tuesday after the Chhatra League activists allegedly assaulted protesters leaving 36 teachers and students injured.

The authorities also asked the students to leave the halls by that evening.

Agitating teachers and students under the banner of 'Jahangirnagar against Corruption' had been demanding a judicial inquiry since August 23 into the corruption centring a Tk 1,445-crore development project after allegations surfaced that the vice-chancellor gave Tk 1.6 crore to Chhatra League leaders.

Protests rocked the campus on Wednesday as many former students of the university, teachers of other universities and activists joined the demonstrations to extend their solidarity with the protesters.

They criticised vice-chancellor Farzana for her corruption and using Bangladesh Chhatra League as her personal 'tool'.

They demanded her expulsion from the university and punishment of the Chhatra League activists as well as teachers and employees loyal to her for assaulting teachers and students on Tuesday morning during their attempt to free the vice-chancellor from 'confinement'.

'We not only demand her resignation from present post but also want her expulsion from the university like way the president and secretary of Bangladesh Chhatra League were removed for taking money from her form the university's development fund,' economics professor Sharmin Neelormi Dalia said.

Her colleague professor Anu Muhammad said vacating halls of residence would not solve the crisis.

Philosophy teacher Kamrul Hasan expressed concern over the vice-chancellor's attempt of branding the protesters as Jamat-Shibir.

Dhaka University professor Tanzim Uddin Khan said, 'The movement was for saving a university from the clutch of a vice-chancellor who finds Chhatra League's attack on the teachers as "mass uprising".'

The university's provosts' committee after a meeting in the afternoon asked the students to vacate halls of residence by 3:30pm. The committee chairman Bashir Ahmed in a circular also said CCTV would be installed at all the 16 halls and the footage would be monitored by a five-member committee.

The committee also asked all makeshift food shops in front of the halls to shut them down.

'The police will raid the halls if required,' Bashir told New Age.

The university proctor ASM Firoz said actions would be taken against anyone who violates the order.

Around 150 police personnel deployed on the campus, he said.

Deputy education minister Mohibul said the government would not voluntarily investigate the corruption charges against vice-chancellor as the university was an autonomous one. 'The University Grants Commission might investigate the allegations only after getting formal complaints,' he said.

Mahibul also smelt rat in arranging a sit-in in front of the vice chancellor's residence on Monday instead of lodging formal complaints by November 8 as per education minister's request when she met some teachers at her residence last week.

He also suggested Bangladesh Chhatra League activists to remain conscious for upholding its image.

'We have to investigate whether any third-party was trying to capitalise the situation or not,' he added.

The protesters' spokesperson Rayhan Rhyne said the Jahangirnagar University Act 1973 did not allow lodging complaint against the vice-chancellor with the education minister. Complaints should be lodged with the chancellor, the president of the republic, he said.

'Still, we accepted the minister's request and will inform her about the vice-chancellor's corruption by November 8,' Rayhan said. But, the movement would continue until her resignation, he said.

'We already officially informed president Abdul Hamid a month ago demanding removal of the corrupt vice-chancellor,' said Rayhan.

Students at many other universities across Bangladesh continued demonstrations for the second day expressing their solidarity with Jahangirnagar University protesters. Demonstrations were held Dhaka University, Jagannath University, Islamic University and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science and Technology University on the day.

Several political parties including Bangladesh Nationalists Party and Nagarik Oikya also criticised the university's vice-chancellor and Chhatra League for assaulting teachers.

Expressing his concern, BNP standing committee member Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain at a discussion at National Press Club in Dhaka alleged the fascist Awami League government had made its student wing, Chhatra League 'as monsters'.

At a separate meeting held at the same venue, Nagarik Oikya convener Mahmudur Rahman Manna said that the vice-chancellor Farzana would have to leave the campus wearing 'burqa'.

He criticised the Farzana for giving Tk 1.60 crore to Chhatra League leaders from the development project fund.



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