

Crisis at JU deepening

Teachers, students defy ban to press on with demo for VC's resignation

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Students and teachers of Jahangirnagar University demonstrate in front of the official residence of the VC yesterday evening, defying the authorities' decision to close the university and the order to vacate dormitories. The protesters have been demanding the VC's resignation over allegations of corruption. Photo: Rashed Shumon

JU Correspondent

The crisis at Jahangirnagar University seems far from over as the teachers and students agitating for the vice-chancellor's resignation defied a university ban and staged protests on the campus yesterday.

They also vowed to go on with the demonstrations until the VC steps down.

The JU authorities on Tuesday shut down the university for an indefinite period and banned processions and rallies on the campus until further notice.

The move came hours after Chhatra League men assaulted the demonstrators who had kept VC Prof Farzana Islam confined to her residence, demanding her resignation over corruption allegations.

After the assault, which left 35, including nine teachers and four journalists, injured, Prof Farzana came out under BCL protection.

Following an emergency meeting the same day, the university authorities asked the students to vacate the dormitories by 5:30pm, but most of the hall residents stayed back.

Later, the authorities extended the deadline until 3:30pm yesterday, warning of action if anyone violates the order.

The move apparently failed to quell the demo. The agitating students and teachers took a fresh vow to press home their demand. They brought out processions and held a rally on the campus yesterday. Around 5:00pm, they took position in front of the VC's residence and left around 9:00pm.

Nazir Amin Chowdhury Joy, one of the organisers of the protest, said students rejected the university order to vacate the dorms.

He said they would stay put if the university authorities, with the help of police, tried to force students to leave.

“We will stay on the campus and its adjacent areas at night and continue our demo tomorrow morning,” he told The Daily Star yesterday afternoon.

Prof Rayhan Rhyne of philosophy department, a spokesperson for “Jahangirnagar Against Corruption”, the platform that steered the agitation, said, “We will continue our protests until the VC resigns.”

He said they would hold a rally and render songs reiterating their demand at another protest programme in front of the VC's residence today.

Meanwhile, Deputy Education Minister Mohibul Hassan Chowdhury yesterday asked all the groups linked to the crisis to have patience and not to take law in their own hands.

“We will launch an investigation if we get any specific allegations against the Jahangirnagar University administration. We will take actions if the allegations are found to be true,” he told reporters at a press conference at the International Mother Language Institute in the capital.

“If we find that the allegations are wrong, we will take action against the complainants,” he said.

On the BCL assault, he said they would take measures against Chhatra League leaders if their involvement in attacking students and teachers was found.

Mohibul then called on all to remain alert so that no “third party” could take advantage of the situation.

Earlier in the day around 10:00am, the protesters started gathering at Murad Chattar on the JU campus.

Around half-an-hour later, more than a hundred students brought out a procession, demanding the VC's resignation. They chanted slogans, criticising the university decision to close the halls after the BCL assault.

Later, they held a solidarity rally in front of the old administrative building where over 300 students and teachers of different departments along with some student leaders expressed solidarity with the protesters.

Speaking there, Prof Mohammad Kamrul Ahsan of philosophy department said, "We had waited for three months for a solution. The VC had enough time to prove her commitment to transparency, but she didn't initiate any investigation whatsoever."

Instead, she labelled the protesters as Jamaat-Shibir activists, he said.

Prof Anu Muhammad of economics department said, "The vice-chancellor had to order vacating the dormitories to avoid an 'upsurge' of general students. This is not the solution. The removal of the vice-chancellor is the only solution."

Joining the programme, Prof Tanzim Uddin Khan of Dhaka University, said, "This movement is not only against corruption, it is to save Jahangirnagar University."

Prof Sharmind Neelormi of JU's economics department said, "We want the expulsion of the corrupt VC. Although the central unit BCL president and secretary were removed, the VC is still in her post."

Talking to The Daily Star, VC Prof Farzana blamed the agitating students and teachers for the current crisis.

"They must take the responsibility. We did not close down the university, rather we were forced to do so," she said, adding that they hoped the university would reopen soon.

JU plunged into a crisis in the wake of the student protests in August demanding a judicial enquiry into the reported involvement of the vice-chancellor in corruption and mismanagement of a Tk 1,445-crore campus development project.

The two top leaders of central BCL -- the president and the general secretary -- were removed from the posts after allegations surfaced that they demanded their “fair share” from the financial allocation for the development work.

The VC has always claimed she is not involved in any corruption or irregularities.

Last night, the situation on the campus was tense. Additional police members were deployed around the VC’s residence and at other places to avert any untoward situation.