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Jahangirnagar University protesters frustrated over govt stance

Ershad Kamol and Saiful Islam | Updated at 02:03am on November 10, 2019

Agitating Jahangirnagar University teachers on Saturday termed deputy education minister Mohibul Hassan Choudhury's interpretations on their movement demanding resignation of 'corrupt' vice-chancellor Farzana Islam frustrating.

They said the deputy education minister's comments on the motive and logic of protests against the vice-chancellor at the university that he made at a press conference on Saturday noon in Dhaka hurt them.

'How could the deputy minister say that we are creating disturbance on the campus when we are rather attacked by Chhatra League activists?' said Rayhan Rhyne, a professor of philosophy and spokesperson of the protesters.

Rayhan claimed they were holding peaceful programmes demanding resignation or removal of the 'corrupt' vice-chancellor in accordance with their constitutional right to protest against injustice.

Again, he said, the deputy minister had said that the fund for the development works on the campus had not been disbursed, so, no corruption could take place.

Rayhan Rhyne claimed development works of two new halls of residence had been going on and many trees had already been fallen for violating the master plan.

'In news reports, the Chhatra League leaders also admitted that they took Tk 1 crore from the vice-chancellor and in another newspaper the vice-chancellor also admitted that she gave them money,' Rayhan said.

He also claimed the teachers handed over documents as evidences of corruption and misconducts by Farzana Islam to the education minister's personal secretary on Friday before the deadline set by the minister ended on November 8.

He said the government would get proof of the vice-chancellor's corruption if any neutral probe was done.

He said they did not take money from others to hold concert. 'Some students just sang with a guitar and some instruments. Does it need additional fund? Rayhan asked.

And the students, he said, were living at residences of their friends and teachers after the university was closed on November 5 for an indefinite period following Chhatra League activists assaulted protesters.

He said they organised a sit-in in front of Farzana's residence on November 4 as per previous decision and were not in position to change it after their meeting with education minister Dipu Moni on November 3.

The protesters on Saturday also brought out a procession on the campus ignoring ban on any such programme imposed from November 6 protesting at comments made by the deputy minister for education.

It was the straight fifth day the students, teachers and employees of the university were continuing with demonstrations on the campus in presence of huge police, and braving inclement weather.

They also postponed the agitation programmes for two days for the cyclone Bulbul and it would resume Tuesday.

Mohibul Hassan Choudhury while briefing the press at International Mother Language Institute in Dhaka requested the protesters to stop creating any disorder at Jahangirnagar University and threatened of taking action, otherwise.

He said the government had information that some political parties and groups were trying to use the public universities to wage anti-government movements.

'Thanks to the latest technological surveillances, we have concrete evidences that some people were funding while others were consulting with the Jahangirnagar University agitators,' Mohibul claimed.

'We know who gives money whom for ensuring students' stay at the closed university and organising concert,' he said.

Without mentioning names, he also said recognised leaders of a student organisation also admitted that they were providing funds for creating anarchy at universities.

Actions would also be taken against those behind the scene actors, he said.

'Law of the land has provision for punishing those who creates public disturbance based on false accusations made with intent to injure,' Mohibul said.

He said no probe committee was formed to investigate allegations against vice-chancellor Farzana Islam as the ministry was yet to receive anything officially.

'They handed over some documents to the education minister's personal secretary at his residence on Friday night,' he said.

After getting it, he said, the University Grants Commission would initiate investigation and whoever would be found guilty would be punished. If the allegations were not proved, those who brought it would face action, he added.

He also said he found no logic on the agitators' allegation against Farzana.

'Telephone conversation between two Chhatra League leaders does not prove that the vice-chancellor gave them money from the development fund when no fund was disbursed,' Mohibul said.

He questioned the intention of the agitating teachers saying that the trend of movements at the university showed some teachers created troubles for their personal gains.

'In such cases, they come up with various corruption charges against the vice-chancellors. Not only at Jahangirnagar but also at other public universities, we saw that the prime goals for movements were removing the vice-chancellors, not corruption', he said.

Rayhan Rhyne said teachers and students were participating in the movement demanding Farzana's removal.

'Being progressive force, we are also concerned at the activities of a student organisation', he said.

Meanwhile, 638 alumni of the university in a statement on Saturday also demanded Farzana's resignation.

The protesters had been demanding an inquiry since August 23 into corruption by the vice-chancellor over a Tk 1,445-crore university development project.

The agitators under the banner of 'Jahangirnagar against Corruption' came up with their demand after allegations surfaced that the vice-chancellor gave Tk 1.6 crore to Chhatra League leaders.



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