

Clashes over VC appointment leave 23 hurt in DUET

JCD, Shibir trade blame

9 HOUR(S) AGO UPDATED 4 HOUR(S) AGO BANGLADESH

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Star Report



At least 23 students of Dhaka University of Engineering and Technology in Gazipur were injured yesterday in a clash between two groups over the appointment of a new vice-chancellor.

Supporters and opponents of the newly appointed VC engaged in chases, counter-chases, and hurling brick chunks on the campus around 11:00am. This continued for around four hours in phases, according to witnesses.



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“As far as we know, 23 of our students have been injured,” said Utpal Kumar Das, director of the university’s Students’ Welfare Office.

A total of 15 people, including nine students and six policemen, came to the hospital with injuries, said Aminul Islam, director of Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmad Medical College Hospital in Gazipur.

Ten of them were released after primary treatment, while five others were undergoing treatment at the hospital, he said.

According to university sources, the government on Thursday appointed Mohammad Iqbal of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology as the new vice-chancellor of DUET.

Since then, a section of the students has been protesting against the decision. The movement began around 9:30pm on Thursday and it continued on Friday and Saturday.

The protesting students said that DUET is a specialised engineering university with academic and administrative realities different from those of other institutions. They argued that the VC should have been appointed from among the university's experienced and senior internal faculty members.

Alongside the students, several teacher leaders also demanded that the VC be appointed from among DUET's senior faculty members.

Yesterday, the students gathered on campus from around 8:00am and staged demonstrations.

Tensions escalated further after they somehow got information that the newly appointed VC might arrive on campus to assume office. At one stage, protesting students locked the university's main gate, said witnesses.

Later, around 11:00am, a group of people supporting the new VC tried to enter the campus by breaking the main gate, which eventually turned into clashes.

During the confrontation, both sides reportedly hurled bricks at each other, said witnesses.

The attackers were outsiders and another one said they were activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the pro-BNP student body, said one of the students present during the clash.

Das, however, said the authorities could not identify the people who were outside the gate.

“We welcome the government’s decision on the appointment of the new VC. We went to the campus taking the new VC with us. But we found the gate locked and a group of students resisted us,” said Monirul Islam, publicity secretary of the university unit JCD.

At one stage, the students started hurling brick chunks from inside the campus at them, triggering the clash that left at least five of them injured, he told The Daily Star last night.

The JCD leader also alleged that activists of Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, led the student protest and the violence.

However, Shibir, in a statement, made a counter-allegation that the BNP men, including JCD and Jubo Dal, carried out the attack on general students and demanded immediate legal action against the attackers.

Talking to The Daily Star, Shibir’s university unit President Abdullah Ahad termed the student movement ‘logical’.

Contacted, Mohammad Aminul Islam, the officer-in-charge (OC) of Gazipur Sadar Police Station, said police rushed to the spot on information of the violence and brought the situation under control at around 3:00pm.

Additional law enforcers were deployed in the area to avoid further violence. No case was filed as of last night, he said.

The clash has put the spotlight back on how VCs are appointed to public universities.

Bangladesh has no uniform policy for such appointments. Only four public universities -- Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong and Jahangirnagar -- have a formal system under the 1973 University Ordinance, which says their senates must elect VC panels.

In other public universities, the president, as chancellor, appoints VCs with the prime minister’s consent.

Since assuming office in February, the BNP-led government has appointed VCs to at least 18 public universities.

In April, the education ministry reconstituted a six-member search committee to recommend names for such appointments.

Contacted, Md Faridul Islam, one of the committee members and the VC of Rajshahi University, said the committee reviewed candidates’ academic experience and leadership record before recommending names.

“While recommending an individual for a university, we considered the type of university and the needs of its students. That was the basic principle.”

Asked about appointing VCs to universities other than their own, he said a VC’s post is not meant to be confined to any particular institution.

“It is a matter of an individual’s capability, knowledge and foresight.”

Asked about the DUET protest, he said students should not have been involved in such demonstrations.

A similar search committee was formed under the previous interim government, but only after top posts at most public universities had already been filled.

[Our Gazipur correspondent contributed to the report]