

DU opens male dorm for all faiths

MAHDI AL MUHTASIM

Breaking with tradition, Dhaka University has opened a newly built dormitory for all male students irrespective of their religions.

A syndicate meeting decided on July 13 that Bijoy Ekattor Hall, which can house 1,000 students, would not be restricted for members of any single faith.

The students of all communities who will get admitted in the upcoming 2015-16 session can apply for seats at the dormitory, said Prof AJM Shafitul Alam Bhuiyan, the provost.

After the hall was inaugurated by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on November 14, 2013, only Muslim students were residing in it following DU's traditional practice, wherein non-Muslim male students live in Jagannath Hall and Muslim males in the rest of the 14 halls.

"But this hall was named to commemorate the ideals of the martyrs of our Liberation War, which was fought by the people of all communities," said Prof Bhuiyan, mentioning he wrote a letter to the syndicate on July 9 requesting that the hall be opened for all faiths.

"We hope that such a step would help improve religious harmony in society," he said.

Asked why there are separate halls for different religious communities, Vice-Chancellor AAMS Arefin Siddique said there were no written rules about this. It has been there since the university's founding in the British era, he said.

The VC said all six female halls were open to all communities, and students were staying there in harmony.

Asked about any plan to open all the halls for everyone, he said this decision could not be taken hastily. "After considering the circumstances, we will think it over."

Asked about the other universities of Bangladesh where

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students of all communities share the same hall, he said they did not have separate halls for minority communities but DU did. Moreover, the family of Jagannath who donated the land of Jagannath hall wanted only the minority students to reside there, said the VC. While asked about complexities of co-existence, he said if any student of a minority community did not want to live in the hall, he would be shifted to Jagannath Hall. The administration may establish separate places of worship for other communities if required, he said.

Dipok Chandra Roy, a second-year student of mass communication and journalism, said, "We welcome the decision that the hall is now open for all, but the hall administration must take necessary steps to make it livable for all of us." Separate places of worships have to be set up, which was promised by the provost, he said. The dining rooms and canteens must be separated because of some religious barriers, he said.

Dr Muhammad Shahidullah Hall is also open to all since 1921.

Dr Md Azizur Rahman, the immediate past provost of Shahidullah hall, said, "I exactly don't know why the minorities don't prefer to live here."

"I would be happy if any minority student applied for a seat, but they did not. I would definitely take responsibilities about their facilities," he said.