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Teachers' unrest at public univs raises concerns

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THE ongoing teachers' movement at a number of public universities across the country is badly affecting the academic activities, raising concerns among many, including students.

Teachers have waged movement accusing the incumbent vice-chancellors of being engaged in corruption, irregularities and nepotism at Jahangirnagar University, Comilla University, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology and Khulna University, causing disruption of academic activities.

At Dhaka University, a section of teachers are also in movement over election to the vice-chancellor panel.

University Grants Commission members said conflicts between the teachers and vice-chancellors at some public universities had led to the crisis.

The UGC chairman AK Azad Chowdhury told New Age that a section of teachers had resentment and dislike for the incumbent vice-chancellors which led to the teachers' movement.

'Some teachers are using the movement in their fight for power,' he said.

Academic activities at Jahangirnagar University are being seriously hampered by the protracted siege of the university administrative building by the teachers' association since June 20 to press for resignation of vice-chancellor Anwar Hossain for alleged irregularities in the university and his 'reluctance' to punish a Chhatra League leader who had assaulted a teacher.

The JUTA accused the vice-chancellor of making objectionable comments on the teachers, destroying the academic atmosphere, being

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involved in the 'irregularities' in the admission process and insulting syndicate members and others.

The association president Ajit Kumar Majumder said that Anwar had lost the moral right to continue in the vice-chancellor's office. 'We no longer want him in the university.'

The teachers' association raised its voice against the vice-chancellor as he tried to save the university unit Chhatra League general secretary Rajib Ahmed Russell who had assaulted economics department teacher Nurul Haque.

The JUTA at a general meeting on June 19 had declared Anwar Hossain persona non grata for alleged irregularities.

Since then classes of many departments have not been held, said a numbers of students.

Manjur Moyeen, a philosophy student of the JU, said he feared a prolonged academic life due to the teachers' movement.

Anwar Hossain termed the teachers' movement 'illogical'.

Ajit defended their cause saying that whatever they were doing was for the betterment of the university and the students. He denies there was suspension of classes during the movement.

Jahangirnagar University experienced several rounds of movement over last three years which caused disruption of academic activities. Anwar Hossain took charge of the university after his predecessor Sharif Enamul Kabir resigned in the face of protests by students and teachers over 'irregularities' and 'nepotism' in the appointment of teachers.

At Comilla University, the teachers boycotted classes and examinations on Wednesday and also started a one-hour work abstention every day for a indefinite period to press its demands, including promotion and regularising the jobs of the probationer teachers. They brought the charge of irregularities against vice-chancellor Amir Hossain Khan.

Teachers' association president Ahsan Ullah said they had been pressing the demands for the last four months without any positive response from the authorities.

Amir Hossain Khan could not be reached over phone for comments. The university registrar Tawhidul Islam said they were trying to find out a solution of the stalemate.

At Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, acting vice-chancellor Ilias Uddin Biswas, was facing agitation over allegation of irregularities.

Teachers under the banner of 'Sachetan Shikkhakbrinda were campaigning for 'resignation' of vice-chancellor Professor Fayequzzaman over allegation of irregularities and corruption.

M Rezaul Karim, former president of Khulna University Teachers' Association, alleged that irregularities and corruption had led to a 'deadlock' in the university.

Last week, students staged a hunger strike at Khulna University demanding holding of the examinations.

On Sunday, a section of Dhaka University teachers staged demonstrations for election to the vice-chancellor panel to select a panel for appointment of a regular vice-chancellor. Dhaka University has been running without an elected VC for last nine years.

A section of Rajshahi and Chittagong University teachers are also demanding VC panel elections at their universities which are being run by non-elected and government-nominated vice-chancellors.

No election to the vice-chancellor panel at Chittagong University has been held in the last 21 years, at Rajshahi University in 13 years and Dhaka University in nine years.

The laws, under which the Dhaka, Jahangirnagar, Chittagong and Rajshahi universities are running, have identical provisions: 'The vice-chancellor shall be appointed by the chancellor for a period of four years from a panel of three persons to be nominated by the senate on such terms and conditions as may be determined by the chancellor, and shall be eligible for re-appointment for a further period of four years.'

Earlier, teachers' movement disrupted academic activities in some other public universities, including Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology and Begum Rokeya University in Rangpur. In most of the cases, teachers campaigned for removal of the vice-chancellors of the universities.

'Teachers are so politically motivated that teachers with links to the opposition often wage movement against incumbents for political gains,' a UGC member told New Age.

'Some teachers have negative or positive attitude towards a vice-chancellor which sometimes prompts movement,' said the UGC chairman AK Azad Chowdhury.

Azad Chowdhury termed the situation 'unfortunate'. It is a paradigm shift. In the past students used to wage movement and now teachers have taken their place. Teachers should keep in mind that they should not do anything that can harm students' interests'.

He said they would send teams to these universities to investigate the matters and recommend actions to settle things as soon as possible.