

BUET CRISIS Protesters hold token hunger strike today

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BANGLADESH University of Engineering and Technology teachers, students and employees observed token hunger strike on the campus today to push for their demand for the removal of the vice-chancellor and the pro-vice-chancellor.

The education minister, Nurul Islam Nahid, on Sunday called a meeting for today with BUET deans and department chairs to find a way to resolve the campus stalemate that has been continuing for five days now with a break after the earlier round from April 8 to May 5.

The minister invited former BUET vice-chancellors Abdul Matin Patwary and

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MH Khan, former BUET students Jamilur Reza Choudhury, Ainun Nishat, Mobasshar Ali, Abul Kashem and Nurul Huda, also Rajuk chairman, to the meeting scheduled to begin at noon at the ministry.

The BUET Teachers' Association general secretary, Ashrafu Islam, told New Age that the association had not been invited to the meeting.

Deans and department chairs, who resigned earlier in support of the ongoing movement (after the vice-chancellor had closed the university for 44 days) were invited and it is their individual decision whether they would attend,' he said.

In the evening, Asrafu Islam announced that they would observe token hunger strike between 11:00am and 1:00pm today in front of the council building where protesters have continued sit-in for the fifth straight day on Sunday.

The protesters, meanwhile, urged the president, Zillur Rahman, also the chancellor of the university, to remove the vice-chancellor, SM Nazrul Islam, and the pro-vice-chancellor, Habibur Rahman, in a memorandum their delegation submitted to the president in the afternoon.

Earlier in the morning, several thousand protest-

ers started walking towards Bangabhaban, the residence of the president, from the campus in a silent procession around 11:30am to submit the memorandum.

When the police obstructed them in Doyel Square, four of the teachers, including the teachers' association president, Mujibur Rahman, and the general secretary, submitted the memorandum to Abul Kalam Azad, the deputy press secretary to the president.

The memorandum says that a chaotic situation has been created in the university since the vice-chancellor assumed office and he appointed a pro-vice-chancellor for the first time in the history of the university.

'Since the assumption of office by the current vice-chancellor and the pro-vice-chancellor, irregularities have been taking place which are embarrassing the government and hindering the activities of the university,' the memorandum reads.

'We hope that you [the president] will resolve the crisis by relieving the vice-chancellor and the pro-vice-chancellor of their current responsibilities... and you will appoint only a vice-chancellor in keeping with BUET's tradition,' it adds.

The teachers, students and employees alleged that 'supporters' of the vice-

chancellor and the pro-vice-chancellor were threatening the students and employees not to join the movement.

Anti-movement campaigners, teamed up as BUET Shikkhak, Chhatra, Karmakarta and Karmachari Oikya Forum, allegedly backed by the the Chhatra League, the ruling Awami League's student wing, were rallying in support of the administration.

They held a rally where they urged the teachers and students rallying against the two top officials of the university to call off their protests and get back classrooms.

They also urged the teachers and students to sit with the administration to resolve the crisis.

Both the groups blamed each other for the stalemate in BUET, which has about 10,000 students.

Both the vice-chancellor and the pro-vice-chancellor termed the movement 'illogical' and they said that they would not resign their positions under duress.

Nazrul Islam said, 'Only about 400 to 500 students are holding rallies.'

Nazrul said that he would accept any advice of the president as he is the chancellor. 'I think that the president with his wisdom will evaluate the situation and make a decision.'

He said that the teachers'

association had provoked the students into joining the movement.

Nazrul brushed aside the allegations of students and employees being threatened and said that some members of the teachers' association were rather threatening students. He blamed the teachers for the stalemate and disruption in academic activities.

Forum of Engineers and Architects, Bangladesh leaders expressed grave concern about the stalemate in BUET. They urged all to find a peaceful way to resolve the crisis.

The teachers, students and employees began the sit-in on July 11 pushing for the removal of the vice-chancellor and the pro-vice-chancellor after the authorities on July 10 night closed the university for 44 days.

The same day, all the five deans and the 17 department heads and directors of three institutes under the university resigned as the vice-chancellor and the pro-vice-chancellor refused to quit.

They earlier levelled 16 allegations against the vice-chancellor and the pro-vice-chancellor including 'illegal appointment of the pro-vice-chancellor and a deputy registrar on political grounds and, corruption and irregularities.'