

Buet crisis deepens

Teachers, students continue sit-in; VC declines to quit; PM asks syndicate to resolve standoff through discussion

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The Buet crisis has deepened with the vice-chancellor and his deputy unwilling to step down while teachers, students and staff remain firm in their agitation for their removal.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina asked the Buet VC to find a solution through talks with the agitating

teachers, after calling him over to Gono Bhaban yesterday evening.

However, the Buet Teachers' Association at a press briefing last night said the door was closed for talks.

The teachers, students and employees continued their sit-ins in front of the administrative building for the second day yesterday to press

home their 16-point demand that include resignation of the two top administration bosses.

They vowed to continue their agitation until the demands were met.

But Vice-Chancellor Prof Nazrul Islam said he would not bow down to such an "unethical demand" as there

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was no allegation of irregularities against him.

"Ethically, I should not resign as a strong ground or allegation is needed for my resignation and the allegation also has to be proved. But there is no allegation of irregularities against me. So, it is ethical that I will remain in my post," he told a news conference at his residence on the campus in the afternoon.

"If any of the allegations raised by teachers against me is proved, I will step down."

Talking to The Daily Star, Pro-VC Habibur Rahman echoed the view of Prof Nazrul. "First of all, I am a teacher and I didn't do anything unethical. So I will not give in to the unethical demand."

A movement spearheaded by the teachers' association began on Wednesday following a 44-day vacation announced by the authorities the previous night. It gained momentum when a large number of students joined them.

The mass resignation by the heads of all faculties, institutes and departments at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology added a new dimension to the movement. However, the vice-chancellor yesterday termed the resignation a farce.

The Buet Alumni Association also expressed solidarity with the agitation yesterday evening.

Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury, president of the association, addressing the demonstrators at Buet yesterday evening said he hoped the movement would bring about positive results.

About 300 to 400 anti-VC protesters have been staying at the administrative building by turns since Wednesday noon. Yesterday's rains could not deter them from continuing with their demonstrations.

The students burned a copy of the Bangla daily Janakantha for publishing a "false report" about their movement.

A number of them, talking to The Daily Star, expressed unhappiness at the sudden closure of the university for such a long period.

Ariq, a fourth year student of mechanical department, said the students had come there spontaneously and had not been incited by the teachers' association. "Nobody told us to come and join. We came here to save our university."

Hilol Hasan, a student of the civil engineering department, said the VC and his

deputy should quit right now as they had failed to run the university properly. Their removal is a must to bring back the glory of Buet.

Prof Nazrul said they were already lagging behind by one year and if the situation continued, they would be caught in a severe session jam.

Prof Mujibur Rahman, president of the teachers' association, said the VC clung to the position despite losing the trust of all the teachers and students.

"We will continue our sit-ins until a change comes," he said.

VC'S PRESS CONFERENCE
Describing the movement as illogical, undemocratic and unethical, the vice-chancellor alleged that some teachers had engaged the students in the movement.

He said he had sent a proposal to the chancellor on Sunday to form a judicial committee to look into the allegations of irregularities in the Buet administration.

Asked whether he was allowed to do so without the consent of the university syndicate, Prof Nazrul said the VC could take such a decision and then place it to the syndicate for endorsement. "Once endorsed, it becomes the syndicate's decision."

On announcing the vacation so early, Prof Nazrul said he had done so to avoid conflict and, as the VC, he could take such a decision when the situation was of an emergency nature.

"Whenever any crisis emerges, the vice chancellor can take decision... Had I not declared the vacation earlier, there would have been no classes since the teachers had announced a class boycott by then. Where would my 10,000 students go if there were no classes?"

"Moreover, a group of students joined the teachers' demonstration while another group opposed it. Unrest could have flared up," he added.

Prof Nazrul said that today he would meet the chancellor and discuss the issues with senior teachers.

However, the leaders of the teachers' association said the VC and Pro-VC would have to resign before the formation of the judicial inquiry committee.

"If any question of forming a judicial inquiry committee arises, they [VC and Pro-VC] have to step down from their posts first," said Prof Ashrafur Islam, general secretary of the association.

MEETING WITH PM

After the prime minister had

summoned them to Gono Bhaban, the VC and eight other syndicate members briefed her about the latest situation at Buet.

"We have informed the premier about the developments. She [PM] told us to continue talks with the agitating teachers at any cost to find a proper solution to the crisis," Prof Nazrul told The Daily Star after the meeting.

Asked whether the PM had told him to resign, he replied in the negative.

One of the syndicate members, however, quoted the PM as saying she would take the next step after discussions with the education minister.