

VIOLENCE, POLICE PRESENCE ON CAMPUS

RU students, teachers express dismay

RU CORRESPONDENT

Academic activities in Rajshahi University is not only being impeded by a politically volatile situation but also by the presence of over 500 policemen, deployed there round the clock since 2009.

Teachers and students expressed their fear and discomfort at the constant sight of law enforcers around them, stating that the ambiance of campus life had vanished and they were unable to concentrate on their works.

The authorities deployed over 500 policemen following bloody clashes between pro-Jamaat student organisation Islami Chhatra Shibir and pro-Awami League student organisation Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) that left Shibir secretary Sharifuzzaman Nomani dead on March 13, 2009.

Rabiq Ahmed, a first year student of mass communication and journalism department, said the constant sight of armed policemen everywhere made him anxious.

A residential student of Shaheed Shamsuzzoha Hall, Mazedur Rahman, said he felt embarrassed at being encircled round the clock by policemen.

"I can not even sing a song while walking on the campus after studies as I feel like an inmate inside a prison with policemen at every point of the campus," he said.

Over 26,000 students are enrolled in RU out of which 8,000 students reside in the university's halls.

Many teachers and students opined that such a huge deployment of law enforcers, however, had not deterred clashes while violence, extortion, snatching, beating and other illicit activities had continued unabated.

Since the deployment of police, over 100 violent clashes took place on the campus claiming the lives of three students and leaving over 600 injured, campus sources said.

The role of police came under stern criticism first after the February 9, 2010 violence on the campus.

That day, Shibir cadres hacked over 100 BCL men. BCL activist Faruq Hossain was hacked and his tendons were cut in front

of police and later his body was dumped into a manhole, campus sources said.

Shipon Ahmed, president of RU unit of Bangladesh Chhatra Union, said the university authorities chose to be silent spectators alongside the law enforcers, which in turn has been encouraging the perpetrators on the campus.

"The authorities have not taken any step against the perpetrators of BCL or Shibir who regularly create anarchy on the campus," he said.

Resident students are leaving their halls everyday and starting to live in rented houses outside the campus over a feeling of total insecurity following the recent incidents of violence, said Iqbal Ahmed, president of RU unit Bangladesh Chhatra Moitree.

Selim Reza Newton, an RU professor who was jailed following the August 2007 unrest on the campus during the then caretaker government, said police failed to ensure security of the students and teachers.

"The police presence is also spoiling the congenial academic mood on the campus," said the member of "Swadhin Shikkhak Network", a newly launched teachers' forum of RU.

"The authorities have turned the campus into a large prison which has totally eliminated the open intellectual practices," added Prof Newton.

The on-duty police on the campus deployed to avert unwanted situations were not inactive, claimed Deputy Commissioner of Police of Motihar zone (East) SM Mahmud.

Police have strengthened patrolling on the campus to ensure security. "It is difficult to take effective steps to avert untoward situations as criminals always commit crimes in a preplanned way," he said.

Denying all allegations, RU Proctor Chowdhury Muhammad Zakaria said they deployed policemen to ensure security of students. "Police presence is to bring a congenial atmosphere on the campus," he added.

RU Vice Chancellor Prof Abdus Sobhan and Pro-Vice Chancellor Prof Muhammad Nurullah were not available for comment.