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3 top universities run without elected VCs

No VC panel polls at Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi universities for years

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The country's three top public universities have long been running with non-elected and ruling party-nominated vice-chancellors.

Appointed temporarily, the incumbent vice-chancellors of Dhaka, Rajshahi and Chittagong universities have refrained from holding the VC panel polls apparently out of fear of not getting a second term.

They might not secure a victory in the

elections due to rifts among teachers and senate members. Even if their panels win, the government might not appoint them as VCs.

None of the three is taking the "risk".

These universities are run under the 1973 university act, which stipulates that the VC will be appointed by the chancellor for four years from a panel of three elected by the senate.

The last elected VC of Dhaka University was SMA Fayeze, the predecessor of

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3 top universities

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incumbent AAMS Arefin Siddique. Fayeze was in office in 2002-09.

The situation is worse in Chittagong and Rajshahi. At Chittagong and Rajshahi universities, senate elections to the VC panel have not been held for the last 20 and 12 years.

The only public university that called a VC election during this Awami League government's tenure is Jahangirnagar University.

Prof Shariff Enamul Kabir on May 17 stepped down as the JU vice-chancellor, following a months-long standoff and unrest on the campus.

President and JU Chancellor Zillur Rahman appointed Prof Anwar Hossain, a senior teacher of Dhaka University, to replace Kabir.

As Prof Anwar fixed the date for the polls, a section of teachers launched an agitation demanding the senate election first.

Nevertheless, the polls were held on July 20 as per schedule. The High Court had directed the government to ensure a peaceful atmosphere at the first-ever election to the highest position of the university in the last eight years.

On July 24, the president appointed Prof Anwar as the JU vice-chancellor for the next four years, choosing him from an elected three-member panel.

Teachers say the practice over the last few decades of VCs getting appointed and dismissed with the change of government conflicts with the democratic process of public universities.

After the JU VC panel election, teachers of the three public universities expected the same in their respective universities.

The tenure of a number of senate members in these universities has already expired. If the authorities

call for senate elections, many teachers might protest demanding elections to the senate bodies first, leading to a chaotic situation, sources said.

Moreover, the incumbent VCs personally do not want any such move to provoke troubles.

Prof Arefin Siddique arranged elections of registered graduates' representatives and teachers' representatives -- the main bodies of the Senate -- soon after taking charge of DU in January 2009.

Senate members said they had expected the university authorities to hold the VC panel election. No initiative was taken to that end although the tenure of these two bodies expired in June this year.

The issue reached the High Court recently after Prof Wahiduzzaman Chan, general secretary of DU Teachers Association, filed a writ petition with the court seeking an order for holding a senate session immediately to select a VC panel.

Contacted, Prof Arefin Siddique said since the matter was sub-judice, it would not be proper to make a comment on it.

At Rajshahi University, the last election to the VC panel was held in 1998. Prof Sayedur Rahman Khan was the last elected VC. His tenure expired in 2001.

Incumbent RU VC Prof Abdus Sobhan, who took charge in February 2009, did not call for the VC panel election. Most teachers are sceptical about the holding of the polls soon.

Prof Moyo Kumar Bhoumick, one of the progressive teachers of RU, said, "The terms of most of the senate members expired many years ago. So, there should be elections of different categories to the senate first and then to the VC panel."

He told The Daily Star

the VCs had not held the polls as they did not expect to win in the old senate structure.

The RU VC hung up the phone immediately after this correspondent wanted to know whether he would hold the elections soon.

Among the three universities, the situation at Chittagong University is the worst as the last VC panel election was held in 1988.

The university is being run by an unelected senate for long; elections to other bodies also were held a long time ago.

The last election to the registered graduate representatives took place in 1986 and its term ended in 1989. On the other hand, the election for teachers' representatives was last held in 2001.

Prof Dr ANM Munir Ahmed, chairman of the CU political science department, said the senate was so old that some of its members were already dead. Most of the VCs do not take the initiative to hold the VC panel election for fear of not being appointed again.

CU VC Prof Anwarul Azim said there was no guarantee that an elected VC would remain in office with the change in power as there were instances of elected VCs being removed and unelected ones being appointed.

The situation and nature of JU and CU are not the same, he told The Daily Star. He admitted that it would definitely be good if elections were held. "But why didn't people say anything when there was no elected VC for around 25 years?"

"The government has appointed me for a four-year term and I will take the initiatives at the right time," he said.