

BCL, cops attack RU students

More than 100 hurt as students protest fee hike, demand cancellation of evening shift; university closed for indefinite period

ANWAR ALI and MA SAYEED, Rajshahi

Around 100 students of Rajshahi University and eight journalists were wounded yesterday, as armed Chhatra League men backed by police attacked the students protesting fee hikes and evening shift master's courses.

The authorities last night closed the university for an indefinite period and ordered the resident students to vacate halls by 8:00am today.

Of the injured, 27 were hit by bullets during sporadic clashes that turned the campus into a battlefield. All the injured, some of them female students, were admitted to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

The wounded journalists are Najim Mridha of New Age, Golam Rabbani of Maasranga TV, Ali Ramjan of daily Janakantha, Zakir Hossain of Shirsha News, Sajib Uddin of Flash News, Bulbul Ahmed

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

BCL, cops attack RU students

FROM PAGE 1

of Manab Kantha and photojournalists Shams Rumi of Sonar Desh and Gulbar Ali Jewel of Nattin Probhat.

The demonstrators alleged the RU authorities hired the BCL men to thwart the movement by general students, which continued for the third consecutive day yesterday.

It was the first campus violence since the AL-led government took office for a second term in a row following the January 5 election.

The general students first began their protests on January 16, after the RU authorities in December decided to increase various fees from this month.

They also demand the authorities stop the seven evening shift master's courses introduced last month and two other similar programmes introduced in 2010. They allege that such programmes are rife with irregularities, and teachers sometimes suspend the regular classes to attend the evening shifts.

The protest gained momentum on Thursday as the students enforced a strike. This prompted the authorities

to put on hold on Saturday the decision to hike fees, but this failed to calm the students who continued their agitation, demanding cancellation of the decisions altogether.

Around 12:00noon yesterday, leaders and activists of the BCL, a pro-AL student body, swooped on the students agitating in front of the administrative building to press home their demands.

Earlier around 7:30am, the students put all the seven academic buildings under lock and key and brought out processions on the campus. Around 10:00am, some 2,500 students locked the administrative building and began a sit-in there.

Meantime, the RU unit BCL brought out a procession on the campus around 11:30am, thanking the authorities for withholding the decision to increase fees. But within half an hour, the BCL men ran into the agitating students, said witnesses and victims.

The BCL activists then tried to unlock the administrative building, triggering an altercation with the demonstrators. Within minutes, some BCL

cadres blasted five cocktails and started brandishing firearms, with a large contingent of police standing by them, the witnesses added.

As the students ran for life, police fired rubber bullets and teargas shells, leaving around 30 wounded.

Police also shot at the Shaheed Suhrawardy and Madar Bukhsh halls as some students took shelter there.

"Some attackers [BCL men] fired bullets in the air," alleged Rajib, one of the injured students.

Dispersed, a group of demonstrators tried to regroup near the Science Building and another group near the Central Library around 1:00pm, but the BCL men attacked both the groups, leaving 20 other injured.

About half an hour later, the cops again fired rubber bullets and teargas shells on another group of students who tried to regroup behind the Central Library, leaving about 50 more injured.

Mizanur Rahman Rana, BCL RU unit president, was present during the attacks. BCL activists from Rajshahi University of Engineering and

fire on journalists near the administrative building when they questioned the law enforcers' role.

The trio could not be contacted for comments.

Later around 2:00pm, the angry students damaged windowpanes of Juberi Bhaban and vandalised a teacher's car there. Police fired blank shots to scatter them as they were heading for the vice-chancellor's residence.

Asked why police fired indiscriminately, Proloy Chichim, deputy commissioner of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police, said: "There were chances of bloodshed if police did not disperse the clashing groups by opening fire."

On BCL men brandishing firearms, he said he saw none.

In the past five years, the RU BCL factions clashed more than 70 times among themselves and with Shibir men, killing four people.