

RU authorities' role questioned

ANWAR ALI and MA SAYEED, Rajshahi

Students' demonstration against "commercialisation" of Rajshahi University was hurting the interest of the university authorities which prompted them to unleash armed Chhatra League cadres and police on the students Sunday, said a number of teachers and students.

The university authorities and police, however, claimed that "criminals of Islami Chhatra Shibir" had intruded into the demonstration, which "forced" the administration to launch the drive.

The university allowed the police to open fire on students while armed activists of pro-ruling party Chhatra League sporadically attacked the agitating students.

At least 100 students and seven journalists were injured on Sunday.

Students of university dorms left yesterday morning amid tight security after Rajshahi University was closed for an indefinite period Sunday.

A total of six cases were filed with Motihar Police Station in connection with the Sunday's violence. University Additional Registrar Saad Ahmed filed two cases against 60

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

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FROM PAGE 1

named and 150 unnamed students.

Tonmoyananda Ovi, vice-president of the university unit Chhatra League, filed two cases with the same police station against 12 named and 60 unnamed people. All the 12 accused are Shibir men, he told The Daily Star.

Police filed the other two cases.

None of the cases accused any Chhatra League activists even though several newspapers printed photos of Chhatra League activists brandishing fire arms and attacking the demonstrators.

The students, who have been staging the demonstration since January 16, said the university unit of Chhatra League had been with them until Saturday, when the authorities decided not to go ahead with the fee hike for the time being.

The students said they were demonstrating for cancellation of the fee hike, not its postponement, and against evening masters' courses plan.

The university syndicate on December 23 had decided on the fee increase and evening masters' courses in Social Science faculty.

The course development fee was increased to Tk 500 from Tk 100, fine for poor class attendance to Tk 1,000 from Tk 500, masters' examination fee to Tk 500 from Tk 200, emergency certificate withdrawal fee to Tk 1,000 from Tk 200, and certificate fee was increased to Tk 500 from Tk 200 among other fees that had been hiked.

Prof Salim Reza Newton said, "The fee-hike postponement was just a tactic to thwart the demonstrations."

He said all teachers were to get monetary benefits from the evening masters' courses and the fee hike. "The attacks on the students were deliberate and without any provocation," he added.

Assistant Prof Bakhtiar Ahmed said the "commercial" masters' courses would create disparity. Some students would be paying more than others to study the same course. "The teachers will be

more interested in the evening courses since they would get monetary benefits from those," he said.

"How can the teachers get involved in such courses when they cannot do their academic work regularly and release results on time?" he said.

A number of teachers and students said the authorities introduced the evening masters' courses with fees similar to that of private universities.

Abu Sufian Bakshi, a student, said the university would become a private university if the evening masters' courses were allowed.

Rajshahi University Vice-Chancellor Prof Mizan Uddin said the left-leaning students were leading the movement and they had failed to prevent intrusion of Shibir criminals, who exploded crude bombs on Saturday night and early Sunday.

"How can students buy crude bombs when they cannot pay the increased fees? They must be terrorists," he said.

About police firing, Prof Mizan said police fired rubber bullets which does not do too much harm and that it was used for dispersing the demonstrators.

Three among the 27 bullet-hit students admitted to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital are still undergoing treatment. The three include two Chhatra League men.

Próloy Chichim, deputy commissioner of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police, said they had intelligence reports that men of pro-Jamaat student body Islami Chhatra Shibir had intruded into the demonstration and exploded homemade bombs on campus.

"The police action was meant to avert an untoward situation," he said.

A teacher wishing not to be named said, "Footage [of the incident] show how the police and Chhatra League men attacked a peaceful protest."