

MONITORING RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM ON CAMPUSES

UGC forms committee

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THE University Grants Commission on Sunday formed a three-member committee to monitor extremist activities at the universities and colleges while incumbent and former top commission officials observed that the commission lacked enough capacity for such monitoring.

The supervisory body asked all universities and colleges affiliated with universities to form an hour-long human chain from 11:00am on the campuses today against religious extremism to mark the one month of extremist attack on

a Gulshan café on July 1 that killed 22 people including 17 foreigners and two police officials.

The commission came up with the move as referring to the police investigators media reports revealed involvement of former and current private university teachers and students in the attack on the Gulshan cafe on July 1 and a police checkpoint near the country's biggest Eid congregation at Sholakia in Kishoreganj on July 7.

Commission member Md Akhter Hossain will lead the committee that includes commission officials

Continued on page 2 Col. 5

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Continued from page 1
Jesmine Parveen and Md Shaheen Siraj.

Former and current top commission officials observed that in the absence of proper monitoring by the commission, activities of religious, extremism were getting stronger in private universities. They added that some faculty and board members of private universities were helping to breed such dangerous activities using students.

Former commission chairman AK Azad Chowdhury and current chairman Abdul Mannan admitted that the commission did not have capacity for monitoring 'subversive, anti state and militant activities' at the private universities.

'UGC does not have enough manpower and expertise to monitor such activities,' Abdul Mannan said at a press conference on Sunday.

He, however, said that

the commission had no negligence in monitoring academic and administrative activities of the private universities.

Mannan warned that the commission would recommend stern actions against private and public universities if existence of any religious extremism on the campuses was found.

The commission chairman said that they had no official data of how many students and teachers of how many private universities had link to religious extremism.

According to media report, 33 students of universities, 18 from four public universities and 15 from five private universities had been identified as extremists.

He, however, did not name the students and universities.

Two of the five attackers who were killed in a military operation at the Gulshan cafe were students

of private universities. One of the attackers in Kishoreganj was also a private university student.

According to Dhaka Metropolitan Police, three of the nine suspected Islamist extremists killed in 'Operation Storm-26' at a Kalyanpur house in Dhaka early July 26 were private university students.

Police suspect at least two private university teachers for recent attacks and one of them was arrested and the other was missing.

Seven of the eight people convicted of the February 2013 murder of blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider were private university students.

There are 94 private universities having about over 4 lakh students.

Sections 6(10), 48 and 49 of the Private University Act 2010 empower the commission to take actions against universities if the universities are found involved in activities against

independence of Bangladesh, its sovereignty, national interest, direct or indirect involvement in terrorist and extremist activities.

'The commission usually monitors academic and administrative activities of private universities...I am not aware of any monitoring of subversive, anti-state and extremist activities at the universities,' former commission member Atful Hye Shibly said.

He said that they had recommended actions against several private universities on law and order issues.

AK Azad Chowdhury said that the commission had no capacity for proper monitoring of subversive, anti-state and extremist activities as it was not given enough power.

Abdul Mannan said that they were trying for an overall restructuring of the commission for its empowerment.