

BCL men swoop on JU protesters

35 teachers, students injured in BCL bid to end confinement of VC by the agitators; university closed for indefinite period

232

Shares



Chhatra League men pounce on a protester near the VC's residence on Jahangirnagar University campus in Savar yesterday. Photo: Star/Collected

JU Correspondent

Chhatra League men yesterday assaulted teachers and students who had kept Jahangirnagar University Vice-chancellor Prof Farzana Islam confined to her residence demanding her resignation over corruption allegations.

Later in the day, the authorities shut down the university for an indefinite period. They also banned processions and rallies on the campus until further notice.



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JU VC PROF FARZANA ISLAM AFTER BCL MEN ASSAULTED STUDENTS AND TEACHERS WHO HAD KEPT HER CONFINED TO HER RESIDENCE

Students were asked to vacate halls by 5:30pm, but most of the male students did not leave.

Four teachers resigned from the Jahangirnagar University Teachers Association protesting the assault. The teachers include the general secretary of the association, Mohammad Sohel Rana.



A journalist rescues an injured protester. Photo: Star/Collected

Earlier around noon, some 150 BCL leaders and activists, led by JU unit President Jewel Rana, swooped on the protesters, driving them away from in front of the VC's residence.

The assault left at least 35, including nine teachers and four journalists, injured. Two female teachers and at least four female students were among those hurt. Some 12 students took treatment at a hospital in Savar.

Many policemen were present during the assault, but they did nothing, according to witnesses.

After the assault, Prof Farzana came out of her residence under BCL protection. Later, she attended an emergency university syndicate meeting, which decided to close the university sine die.

Talking to reporters after the meeting at the administrative building, Prof Farzana Islam described the agitating students as Islami Chhatra Shibir activists and thanked the BCL men for “dispersing” them.

“It’s a joyous day for me... I am very grateful to students, especially to Chhatra League [members]. They took the responsibility upon themselves and did it,” she said. “I have said it’s a mass upsurge. But, they did not do it at my directive.

“I was confined to my house along with my other family members, including a child. We’ve faced verbal abuse.”



Some pro-VC teachers and BCL men try to intercept a procession. Photo: Star/Collected



Demonstrators chant slogans during a procession on Jahangirnagar University campus in Savar yesterday, demanding resignation of the vice chancellor. Photo: Star/ Collected

After the university authorities announced the closure, many panic-stricken students, mainly the female ones, started leaving the dormitories.

The situation at the male halls, however, was different. Most of them stayed.

In the evening, a large number of female students broke out of their halls and joined the protesters, who had been dispersed in front of the VC's residence.

The students again gathered in front of the VC's residence and chanted slogans demanding punishment of the attackers and removal of the VC. They were there till late at night and before leaving declared to come back again this morning.

Contacted, the JU BCL chief, Jewel, too alleged that the protesters were Shibir activists. “That’s why we stepped in to disperse them. We want a Shibir-free campus.”

The agitators rejected the allegation and said branding protesters as Shibir men was an old strategy for thwarting peaceful demonstrations.

“Buet’s Abrar [Fahad] was killed in a similar manner. Here, the attackers are using the same excuse,” said philosophy department Prof Raihan Rhyne, a spokesperson for the platform staging the protest.

Prof Raihan, who was also hurt in the assault, said many of the injured were known faces of left-leaning political organisations.



Protesters take care of Prof Sayeed Ferdous after he fell on the ground during the demonstration. Photo: Star/ Collected



Students leave the campus after the university was closed indefinitely. Photo: Star/ Collected

The other injured teachers included Prof Sayeed Ferdous and Prof Mirza Taslima Sultana, teachers of anthropology department; Prof Abdur Razzak of zoology department; Assistant Professor Khandakar Hasan Mahmud of geography and environment department; and Prof Shamima Sultana of Bangla department.

Talking to The Daily Star, Hasan Mahmud said, “The BCL men kicked in my abdomen.”

Prof Khabir Uddin of environmental sciences department, described the assault on the teachers as a nasty incident. He said the BCL men carried out the attack with support from the VC and the teachers backed by her.

“The VC-backed teachers were clapping when we were being assaulted.”

Mahathir Mohammad, a spokesperson for the agitating students, said the students did not follow the university's order to vacate halls, protesting the attack.

The university plunged into a crisis in the wake of the student protests in August demanding a judicial enquiry into the reported involvement of the vice-chancellor in corruption and mismanagement of Tk 1,445-crore campus development project.

Allegations were raised that the VC managed the JU BCL unit leaders with Tk 1 crore as "Eid Salami" for not standing in the way of the ongoing mega project.

The two top leaders of central BCL -- the president and the general secretary -- were removed from the posts after allegation surfaced that they demanded their "share" from the financial allocation for the development work.

A JU BCL faction publicly claimed it had received Tk 25 lakh as per a settlement reached at an August 9 meeting at the VC's residence. However, there has been no investigation into the allegations yet.

The VC has always claimed she is not involved in any corruption or irregularities.

After a brief pause, the students under the banner of "Jahangirnagar Against Corruption" resumed their agitation on October 27.

As part of the protests, over 100 students took position in front of the VC's residence around 7:00pm on Monday, demanding her resignation. About 25 teachers and more students joined the demo yesterday morning.

Witnesses said VC-backed teachers and officials came to the residence around 11:00am to bring her out. Heated exchanges took place between the protesters and the teachers at that time.

The assault was carried out an hour later.

A BCL man was seen brandishing a firearm, according to a witness.

University correspondents of four media outlets -- the daily Prothom Alo, barta24.com, barta bazar and banglalive24 -- were injured while covering the incident.

Acting proctor of the university ASM Firoz Ul Hasan said, "A mob appeared at the place of the protests, we were unable to bring them under control."

Tension gripped the campus last night as the demonstration seeking the VC's removal is to roll on today.