

Hunger strike enters 2nd day, Kuet students await action

One falls ill, two others receive primary treatment

At least 32 students of Khulna University of Engineering and Technology (Kuet) are observing hunger strike for the second consecutive day today, demanding the resignation of Vice-Chancellor Prof Mohammad Masud.

Prolonged exposure to the heat without food has left many students physically weakened, according to the protesters.



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One of them fell ill and is receiving medical treatment, the protesters claimed.

The in-charge of the media cell for the protesting students' group, requesting anonymity, confirmed the matter to The Daily Star.

He said, "If doctors advise, we will shift him to Khulna Medical College Hospital or another facility for his advanced care."

SM Arif Iftekhar, deputy chief medical officer at the Kuet Medical Center, said, "One of the students had a pre-existing liver disease. We reviewed a medical report from five months ago. While he was on hunger strike, we visited him and advised him not to take such a risk due to his liver issues."

He also said, "We provided him initial treatment but did not admit him here. He was taken to an outside hospital."

Two other students who were taken to the medical centre were provided primary treatment, the physician informed.

"They are now stable and ready to be discharged," he said.

Meanwhile, the protesters urged the government to intervene immediately saying they will not end the strike unless the VC steps down.

Two high officials are scheduled to visit the campus today to assess the situation.

The pre-announced hunger strike followed the expiration of a 24-hour ultimatum issued for the vice-chancellor's resignation, which ended at 3:00pm yesterday.

During a visit to the Student Welfare Centre's main gate this morning, several students on hunger strike were seen resting under a large mosquito net, while others read books. Pillows, blankets, and stand fans were arranged to offer some comfort. A white ambulance remained parked nearby.

The hunger strike began around 4:00pm yesterday, when the students gathered in front of Dr MA Rashid Hall and moved to the Student Welfare Centre. Teachers, including Student Welfare Director Prof Abdullah Ilias Akhtar, syndicate members, department heads, and senior faculty were present.

Faculty members spoke to the students and later held a press conference urging them to withdraw from the strike and sit for discussions, but after over two hours of dialogue, the students remained unmoved.

Prof Ilias said, "We've discussed a lot of things with students, but our core intention is to find a resolution. The incident of the (February) 18th has now become a much bigger issue."

"We want to continue the dialogue... My office door will always remain open. We'll return, and so will our faculty. We'll keep trying until you understand that our intentions are genuine," he said addressing the protesting students.

In response, one of the protesters said, "It's a matter of 32 lives versus one position. You decide, sir, where you want to stand... For 48 hours, we were left out under the open sky, like stray animals. We

begged for help... but no one came. When we opened our hall doors, we were called troublemakers. Then lawsuits followed."

Sheikh Tawfiq Ahmed, a leather engineering student from the 2019 batch, said, "There's no time left for discussion. We tried before... Maybe if our five-point demands had been met, we could have reached a solution. Now, there's no room for further dialogue."

Rahatul Islam, a civil engineering student from the 2020 batch, added, "We have one point, one demand — the resignation of the VC. This hunger strike will only end when that demand is fulfilled."

"We are looking to the interim government — but when will they look at us? We haven't blocked roads or railways. Even when we went to meet the chief adviser, we remained peaceful."

The protests began following a February 18 clash between student groups. One side, under the banner of general students, claimed they were attacked by outsiders aligned with Chhatra Dal during a demonstration against student politics. Chhatra Dal, in turn, accused students linked to the Students Against Discrimination and Chhatra Shibir of the attack.

On February 23, students submitted a six-point demand to the chief adviser. Two days later, the university syndicate suspended academic and administrative activities indefinitely, ordered students to vacate the halls, and formed a three-member probe committee.

The students accused the VC of failing to ensure their safety during the attack on February 18.