

Kuet students continue hunger strike despite adviser's assurance

Five hospitalised so far



Photo: Habibur Rahman

A section of students at Khulna University of Engineering and Technology (Kuet) continuing their hunger strike for the third consecutive day despite the education adviser visited and assured them.

The students started the hunger strike on Monday, demanding the resignation of Vice-Chancellor Professor Muhammad Masud.



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Around 9:45am today, Education Adviser CR Abrar visited the campus and spoke with the striking students, our correspondent reports from the spot.

As soon as he arrived, students began chanting slogans against the VC and criticising the role of the interim government in addressing their grievances.

During his visit, the adviser informed students that a committee had already been formed by the Ministry of Education to address their demands.

"The committee will talk to you very soon," he said.

"After hearing from you, we will take the necessary steps. However, no hasty legal decision can be made, as such actions may not hold up in court."

In response, students expressed frustration over the "prolonged inaction".

"We've been protesting for two months, yet our demands remain unmet," one of the protesters said. "You may continue with your procedures, but we will not break our hunger strike unless the vice-chancellor resigns—even if it costs us our lives."

Before leaving the Kuet campus around 10:30am, the adviser told media, "I came here after learning that several students on hunger strike were in poor health."

"The situation has become quite complex. Some students fell seriously ill yesterday in this intense heat, and I'm genuinely concerned for their health," he said.

"A three-member committee has been formed to assess the overall situation and submit recommendations, based on which we will decide our next course of action," he added.

He continued, "I've explained (to the students) that any decision must follow proper legal procedure. The university is governed by laws, and any action must adhere to them. We expect the committee to submit its report soon, and we will act on it without delay."

"I have assured them that any recommendations from the committee will be taken seriously and acted upon. I understand their scepticism—it is valid. But I hope they will judge me by my actions, not just my words."

Asked whether the students would end their hunger strike, the adviser said, "They clearly stated they would not. I asked those in critical condition to at least take a sip of water, but they refused. As a father figure and guardian, I said everything I could. I would have been glad had they listened. Still, I respect the strength of their convictions."

"Their protest is their right," he added.

Following his discussion with the students, the adviser met with KUET faculty and administrators near the Students' Welfare Centre and urged them not to take any measures that could escalate tensions.

"Make sure no unnecessary steps are taken. If the local police and administration have failed to act against those responsible for the initial violence, that needs to be reported. None of the accused have been arrested yet. If someone has broken the law, I do not understand why action hasn't been taken. I will raise this lapse with senior authorities."

Shortly after the adviser's departure, students launched a protest rally on campus, chanting slogans calling for the vice-chancellor's resignation.

Earlier in the morning, five of the striking students have been hospitalised so far, and the condition of 26 others is deteriorating.



Photo: Habibur Rahman

Saiful Islam, a student from the 2022 batch of the Mechanical Engineering department, was admitted to the Kuet Medical Centre last night. Four others had been hospitalised earlier.

A visit to the campus at 8:30am revealed several students lying weak with cold compresses on their foreheads, while others were being splashed with water. Three ambulances were stationed outside the Students' Welfare Centre, where a large number of female students had gathered. Protesters were seen using handheld microphones to coordinate activities.

Campus security has been tightened, with police deployed at all entrances to maintain order.

"We've enhanced security to ensure the safety of everyone under the current circumstances," said Kuet Security Officer Sadiq Hossain Paramanik.

On Monday, the hunger strike began at 4:00pm with 32 students gathering at the veranda of the Students' Welfare Centre to protest what they described as administrative inaction and complicity in an earlier campus attack.



Photo: Habibur Rahman

According to the protesters, on February 18, members of a student political group and other outsiders allegedly attacked students on campus.

Although a police case was filed, it lacked specific details, and no arrests have been made. Meanwhile, a counter-complaint filed by an outsider named 22 students with specific information—including names, departments, and roll numbers—that the protesters claim could only have been accessed through administrative support.

Following the incident, the university temporarily suspended 37 students, several of whom are now leading the protest.

On April 13, students demanded that dormitories be reopened. When their request was ignored, they spent two nights outdoors before forcibly entering the halls on April 15, only to find them lacking basic services such as food, water, and internet access.

University authorities have made several attempts to persuade students to end the strike and engage in dialogue.

Director of Student Welfare Professor Md Abdullah Ilias Akhtar, alongside other faculty members, approached the protesters multiple times.