



Protesting students bring out a torch procession at Barishal University campus.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

A Vices' circle

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I don't know whether to call it luck that we get to witness the development of a brand-new English phrase right under our noses. The expression is "Vices' circle". Yes, it sounds like "vicious circle", but is slightly different and has a quite particular meaning. It means, "A circle of Vice Chancellors (of Bangladeshi universities) who are accused of countless 'vices' while performing their duties." Of course, the phrase exists only in my mind, not in dictionaries. At least, not yet.

Over the last two weeks, Bangladeshis have been bombarded with a series of stories of 'vices' conducted by the VCs of some of our public universities. Now, let's be honest—there have been countless mishaps in public universities for decades, spanning from the killing of students or teachers to extortion and other petty crimes, often committed by students loyal to ruling par-

ties. Politicisation of these institutions have also stoked debates in the recent past and university authorities have been censured for being too inclined to serve the 'rulers'.

But setting aside political or ideological biases, Vice Chancellors, the topmost executives in institutions of higher education, have—until a few years ago—not been called 'criminal offenders'. However, recent shocking developments are challenging this very notion—top bosses at higher educational institutes are now being accused of criminal offences.

The ongoing saga centering Farzana Islam, the incumbent Vice Chancellor of Jahangirnagar University, is essentially a story of embezzlement of public money and abuse of power. As per media reports, she gave Tk 1.60 crore as 'Eid Salami' to Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) leaders on campus (who have also confessed that they received that amount from her). Why has she been appealing the ruling party student wing with such a large sum? And where did she get this money? A mega "development" project worth Tk 1,445 crore is being undertaken in the JU campus and there are all indications that Farzana tried to strike a deal with BCL in an attempt to eliminate any barriers to the particular way in which she, along with her family members, wanted to "handle" the project.

Farzana was trying desperately to dispel the negative talk surrounding her by denying allegations and accusing central Chhatra League leaders of spreading "manufactured stories" against her. In the meantime, JU Chhatra League leader Saddam Hossain got threatening calls from unknown sources in wake of his disclosure of the VC's involvement in the Tk 1.60 crore settlement.

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Students of BSMRSTU protesting at Gopalganj.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

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