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A long, hard look at our teachers

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For months, our public universities have been erupting in protests, with students demanding some very basic things: vice-chancellors who are not corrupt, teachers who cannot bribe their way into the university, student political wings who do not extort or oppress (or murder), effective sexual harassment policies, and freedom of expression.

The first victory for the students came when their protests led to the withdrawal of Bangladesh Chhatra League president Md Rezwanul Haque Chowdhury Shovon and general secretary Golam Rabbani for extorting Jahangirnagar University's vice-chancellor.

The second, and dare I say more

momentous, victory for the students came when the government ordered the resignation of the vice-chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science & Technology University at Gopalganj.

"The ministry had ordered us to look into the university and we found enough evidence to recommend his removal," says the chairman of the University Grants Commission (UGC), Professor Dr Kazi Md Shahidullah.

And then the biggest win. As students hold vigil on the streets on various issues, the UGC has quietly started to probe the vice-chancellors (VC) and former vice-chancellors of several universities.

The exact number is not being disclosed by the university supervisory body until all allegations have been investigated and charges finalised.

"This is a big step we are taking," states Professor Dr Shahidullah. The story doesn't end there either. Not all of these are new probes; some are actually old probes that got squashed and are now being revived with a renewed political will. The chairman attributes this new development to a nod by the concerned ministry.

"Around 8 to 10 of the probes are actually from the past. Those committees had been formed before I took the chair," adds Dr Shahidullah, who began his tenure in May of this year. The allegations being probed include corruption, sexual harassment, nepotism, and fund embezzlement.

According to a list released to *Star Weekend* by the UGC, the universities being probed are Khulna University, Sylhet Agricultural University, Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science and Technology University, Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, University of Barisal, University of Rajshahi, Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, Jahangirnagar University, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Islamic Arabic University and Noakhali Science and Technology University.

Some other universities are also under consideration, but they are not being disclosed until primary verification of evidence is completed. "We are not disclosing the names until we can ensure the validity of the claims," states Professor Dr Dil Afroza Begum, member in charge of public universities at UGC.

According to the document provided by the UGC, four current and three former VCs are being probed.

The current VCs being probed belong to Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science and Technology University, Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University and Islamic Arabic University.

The former vice chancellors being probed are Professor Dr Golam Shahi Alam of Sylhet Agricultural University and Professor Md Ohiduzzaman, from Noakhali Science and Technology University.

Alarmingly, almost all the VCs are being investigated for corruption and taking bribes during teacher recruitment. And the only two VCs not being probed for that reason—Professor Dr A H M Mustafizur Rahman of Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University and former vice-chancellor of Barisal University Professor Dr Harun-or-Rashid—are being investigated for corruption in development projects.

During the tenure of Dr Rashid (currently the VC of Bangladesh National University), a 'VC Trust Building' was constructed; there are allegations of fund embezzlement regarding that building, according to UGC documents. On the other hand, Dr Mustafizur Rahman is being investigated for allegations of corruption during the construction of a female student dormitory. A UGC list states that he allegedly received a bribe of 1 crore 50 lakh taka from contractors seeking the project.

Continued to page 5