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Published by the Editor from
Transcraft Ltd, 229, Tejgaon
Industrial Area, Dhaka on
behalf of Mediaworld Ltd.,
52 Motijheel C.A.,
Dhaka-1000.



MIRED IN A STALEMATE

For more than a year, Jahangirnagar University (JU) has been a hotbed of conflicts and controversies, spurred on primarily by the reappointment of Professor Dr Farzana Islam as vice chancellor for a second term.

Infighting and agitation among senior professors, Bangladesh Chhatra League's (BCL) hooliganism, and the VC's alleged involvement in corruption and nepotism—as indicated by a leaked phone conversation between BCL leaders and the VC—have severely tainted the reputed university's image during this time. The biggest dispute on campus revolves around the Tk 1,445 crore development megaproject, which has been criticised from the beginning for its failure to take into factor environmental concerns. On top of that, following the leaked phone call, the media, including The Daily Star, uncovered clandestine dealings between the university administration and BCL leaders, with the latter claiming that they received Tk 1.6 crore from the fund pool of the development project. Students and teachers of the university have been protesting for months demanding Professor Islam's resignation due to these substantial allegations.

The VC, however, has failed to take any measures that would prove her intention of getting to the truth by initiating a credible investigation. Meanwhile, students are taking increasingly desperate measures to vocalise their demands, even as they are met with administration-sanctioned violence. Dr Islam has blatantly supported these assaults on teachers and students, going so far as to compare them to a popular uprising. The JU administration has now closed down the university sine die and ordered all the students to leave the campus immediately in what can only be seen as an attempt to muzzle the protests and dodge national accountability. Amidst all this commotion, this issue of the Star Weekend attempts to discern the trajectory of the disaster by sieving it through a chronological timeline, collated from reports published in The Daily Star and other major national newspapers. We start from the reappointment of the VC and take the reader through all that has happened till date, all that has brought this renowned academic institution to a standstill. This timeline is certainly not exhaustive. What it demands of the reader is discernment, analysis and conscious awareness of the ever-persistent, wider issues that these events represent. Where does it all begin, and where does it end? Why should a public university be in such a place to begin with?

Star Weekend Desk

SOURCE: THE DAILY STAR, KALER KANTHO, SAMAKAL, PROTHOM ALO.

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CRISIS

February 15, 2018

VC appointed for second term

After passing an uneventful tenure between 2014-2017, Professor Dr Farzana Islam is reappointed as the vice chancellor of Jahangirnagar University for another four years. Her reappointment stirs discontent among other teachers of the university. Pro-ruling party JU teachers divide into two groups: one supporting the vice

chancellor and the other contesting her. The anti-vice chancellor group led by Professor Dr Shariff Enamul Kabir—a former vice chancellor of JU—files a writ petition before the High Court challenging the reappointment. The agitation among teachers becomes more explicit as “Bangabandhur Adarsha O Muktijuddher Chetonay Bishwashi Progotishil Shikhsak Shamaj” (Progressive Teachers’ Association Loyal to Bangabandhu’s Ideals and the Essence of the Liberation War)”



—a platform for a faction of the pro-ruling party teachers—leaves the group and forms another called the “Bangabandhur Adarsher Shikhsak Parishad” (Association of Teachers Loyal to Bangabandhu’s Ideals). They are known for their support for the current vice chancellor.

“ We heard that the quota movement has been infiltrated by Shibir and Chhatra Dal, and so we were present on the spot to make sure the environment of the campus does not get destabilised by those miscreants.

Md Jewel Rana, former JU BCL president

April 9, 2018

Quota reformists assaulted, evicted, JU admin stayed silent

JU students block Dhaka-Aricha highway demanding reformation of the quota system in government jobs. Professor Dr Farzana initially supports the students’ demands. However, protesting students and their leaders are repeatedly assaulted by Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) cadres later on that day.

Two students of the university named Shakiluzzaman and Rasel Ahmed are flogged and evicted from campus. The university authority takes no steps to stop the oppression against the quota reformist student-leaders. Five BCL cadres even threaten to rape a female leader on July 26, 2018. Hundreds of teachers and students organise processions and human chains demanding punitive measures against those cadres, but no measure is taken by the authority.