CCTVs, night ban on outsiders on Jadavpur University campus

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KOLKATA: Jadavpur University (JU) on Thursday decided to install CCTV cameras at "strategic" points and bar entry of outsiders between 8pm and 7am on campus. The decisions, enforced exactly a week after the death of a first-year student, were met with scepticism, with a large section of students saying they would oppose it.

The decision to install cameras was taken at an administrative meeting attended by pro-VC Amitava Datta, registrar Snehamanju Basu and other senior varsity functionaries. The students, who opposed this, said they were not consulted. The authorities could not unilaterally impose such measures on students, said members of various students' organisations.

As for campus entry, only those with valid identity cards, issued by the university, would be allowed during the restricted hours.

The absence of CCTVs at the hostel has proved a challenge for police and university authorities, who are probing the student's death.

Earlier attempts to set up similar security and surveillance measures on campus had met with stiff resistance from students and a section of teachers.

"We are unable to convene a meeting of the executive council, as there is no vice-chancellor in place," said Basu.

"However, considering the recent developments and the pressing need to act, we have decided to install CCTV cameras at strategic locations on campus and at entry/exit points of hostels," she added. All vehicles will also be

monitored. Only vehicles with stickers issued by JU would be allowed in. For other visitors, details of each vehicle and occupants would be noted down.

Jadavpur campus divided over installation of CCTV cameras

A section of JU officials feared protests over increased security and surveillance measures. Most students that TOI spoke to seemed to echo the view that the authorities had no right to "impose such measures". Most of them also felt that the university should take responsibility for the incident, specifically on why anti-ragging sensitisation programmes were not held as a matter of routine.

"Ragging is an act of expressing power over the weak," said Barsha Baral, secretary of AISA, JU unit. "By doing this (installing CCTV cameras), the authorities and the government are trying to curb the democratic rights of students." She gave the example of the disappearance of JNU student Najeeb from campus in 2016, in spite of cameras.

Sayed Tahasinul Ahasan Rine, a BEd student and a member of Forum for Students with Disabilities (FSD), felt cameras and ID cards could restrict entry of outsiders, but could not stop ragging or harassment. "Ragging or similar crimes happen in intimate spaces, where there are no CCTV cameras," he said. Zulfikar Ahmed, an SFI member, said the union would take up the matter with the varsity.

Rajyeswar Sinha, a professor of Bengali department, said: "We are opposed to surveillance. But most of teachers want CCTV cameras at strategic points and at entry and exit points for security reasons for the greater interest of all stakeholders." JUTA general secretary Partha Pratim Ray also welcomed the decision.

CCTV has been a major cause of conflict between students' bodies and university authorities. In 2010, then VC Pradip Narayan Ghosh was gheraoed for 52 hours after he decided to install 16 cameras at strategic points. Though cameras were subsequently installed in some places, they had to be removed after students' agitation. In

2013, V-C Souvik Bhattacharya had to resign following protests. Abhijit Chakraborty, who took over as V-C, installed CCTVs at the V-C's office and corridor on first floor of Aurobindo Bhaban, leading to his chamber, in 2014. He was forced to resign after the 'Hok Kolorob' movement. Suranjan Das, who followed him in July 2015, had to remove the cameras.