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CCTV, checks at gates among plans JU had to drop in face of 2014 HokKolorob protests

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KOLKATA: Most of the measures that the JU campus is now seeing are steps the university management had tried to implement in 2014 but had to withdraw after the HokKolorob protests.

JU on Thursday decided to install CCTV cameras at "strategic" points, bar entry of outsiders between 8pm and 7am on campus, allow only those with valid ID cards during these restricted hours and prohibit use of narcotics and alcohol on the premises. Several of these steps were also discussed in 2014 during the tenure of VC Avijit Chakroborty, but they could not be implemented due to resistance from a students' union.

The students and alumni feel that CCTV cameras and ID cards do not go with the ethos of JU, which is an independent learning space. But they do not have the moral authority to oppose the installation at "strategic points" after the ragging incident.

Arumita Mitra, founder of Sudhamta Foundation India and a former leader of the HokKolorob movement said, "Ten years ago, when surveillance measures were proposed by the authorities, it was as a solution to a case of molestation. We protested against it as surveillance can't stop sexual violence. Exemplary punishment and sensitisation can."

Avishek De Biswas, who started the hashtag HokKolorob and rescued the girl who was molested, feels that JU

has always been an open and liberal space, where one gets to learn beyond books. "All these measures will curb the free space. The mindset of people needs to change." MPhil research scholar Bidu Chanda and film studies student Jaydeep Sahu agreed.

Former VC Chakroborty said the HokKolorob movement was a conspiracy to remove a strict administrator from JU so that antisocial activities could continue on campus. "CCTV cameras were installed in some parts of the campus and I was working in collaboration with Kolkata Police. I used to conduct surprise visits to hostels and sent officials to visit from time to time. I had a plan to install CCTV cameras to cover girls' hostels for safety reasons. A section on the campus and outside had problems with these arrangements," he said.

Another former VC of JU, Suranjan Das, said he had removed CCTV from the VC's office as a confidence-building measure between the students and the administration after he took charge in 2015. "During my tenure, CCTV cameras were installed in the library and some departments. In 2013, the EC was forced by a section of students to withdraw the punishment proposed for offenders of ragging. The then EC members should not have submitted to pressure. An example could have been set," he said.