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Star's chief lensman punched in face as students go on rampage

Tension at Wits erupts

WHO IS THIS MAN?



MENACING: This student attacked The Star's chief photographer yesterday, hitting him on the jaw. If you know him, let us know by calling 011 633 2410 or email us at starnews@inl.co.za

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AFTER being hailed for their peaceful protests, a group of Wits University students yesterday pelted security guards with stones, burnt vehicles and attacked fellow students returning to classes.

A trail of litter lined parts of the campus after bins were overturned, while several attempts were made to torch a bookstore.

As the violence escalated, police officers in full riot gear arrived and fired stun grenades at protesting students blockading one of the entrances. One student was later arrested.

Earlier, The Star's chief photographer, Chris Collingridge, was manhandled and punched in the face while trying to take pictures of the group of students blockading one of the entrances.

This came after the university announced on Monday that an agreement had been reached between the Wits council and the student representative council (SRC)

for a resumption of academic programmes and other activities yesterday.

It follows President Jacob Zuma's announcement of a zero percent fee increase next year. However, some students are apparently unhappy that the issue of the outsourcing of university workers remains unresolved.

Yesterday's violent protests marked a radical change from the leadership's original peaceful approach.



The violence also highlighted the simmering tension and the fragility of the relations between some of the Wits protesters and the SRC, following accusations of bribery and secret meetings levelled at the SRC.

The refusal to end the protests at Wits and several other universities has caused consternation among the university and government authorities.

Higher Education and Training Minister Blade Nzimande appealed to students to return to classes.

Wits University vice-chancellor Professor Adam Habib seemed to be at the end of his tether yesterday as he made an impassioned plea to the protesting students to return to class. He approached them at the



THWARTED: A group of students prevented vehicles from entering Wits University at the Yale Street entrance yesterday. Members of a private security company forcefully removed them from the security checkpoint.

Yale Street entrance, where they had marched, and asked to address them at Senate House.

But the students refused and he was forced to address them right there, where they had formed a circle around him.

Habib explained that he had considered closing the university for longer, but had received a petition signed by 5 000 students and memorandums from four other student bodies – including postgraduate students, international students and the SRC – asking for Wits to reopen and exams to be written.

His mention of the SRC seemed to anger the protesters. Leigh-Ann Naidoo, a PhD student, responded that the SRC and the university's management were not trusted.

Other students shouted that they were not represented by the SRC.

Of the main leaders who started the #FeesMustFall campaign, only one, Wits EFF leader Vuyani Pambo, was present at yesterday's protest.

He openly expressed his distrust for the outgoing and incoming SRC presidents, Sheera Kalla and Nompendulo Mkhathswa, respectively.

Before Habib arrived, Mkhathswa was seen standing a distance away from the protest itself and didn't join in, nor did she address Habib.

Pambo told the vice-chancellor: "You disrespected us by calling the police. You failed us as a leader."

Then he suggested that Habib close Wits until Monday while they all came up with a solution to the

outsourcing issue, but Habib refused. He asked them to work together for a month to see if "the numbers work".

The crowd collectively said no to meeting with him.

"We don't want any private meetings with you," said Pambo, referring to private meetings that were allegedly held by the SRC.

Some of the workers then spoke to Habib, sharing the fact that they get paid a pittance, and asked him to promise to secure their jobs.

"I will call all the service providers and tell them not to suspend or dismiss anyone," he said.

At the heart of the conflict seems to be the university-released SRC statement that the Wits campus would reopen yesterday morning.

Earlier, a student explained that the group wanting to continue the protest didn't feel the SRC was listening to them adequately.

Kalla questioned the origin of the statement.

"I want to know what agreement the SRC has reached with management because I am not aware of such. Aluta Continua," she tweeted.

She and Mkhathswa have also denied that they had negotiated with the university. "Disunity among students is what will kill the movement for Free Education," Kalla tweeted yesterday.

Kalla and Mkhathswa have denied the rumour that a R40 000 bribe was allegedly given to them to stop the protests.

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SUBJECT OF INQUIRY: The scene after a bridge gave way on to the M1 near Grayston Drive.

Bridge collapse: focus on system

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THE SCAFFOLDING that suddenly collapsed on the M1 two weeks ago was put up before the design for the pedestrian bridge was finished.

This is what the Department of Labour said yesterday in a preliminary report on the incident. But they wouldn't say whether this or any other identified problem caused the collapse.

Officials said a formal inquiry could take six months.

The scaffolding fell on the highway at 3.25pm on October 14, smashing into vehicles below. Two people died and 19 were injured. Three of the injured are still in a critical condition, and five are stable.

The project is a pedestrian and cyclist bridge connecting Alexandra and Sandton.

Aggy Moliso, the department's deputy director-general of inspection of enforcement services, said the client is the City of Joburg and the Joburg Development Agency, who hired an agent, Royal Haskoning DHV, to oversee the project. Murray & Roberts is the principal contractor, and the material for the construction was provided by Formscaff.

Work on the bridge started in January and was still under way when it collapsed.

"The construction of the temporary bridge was done by Murray & Roberts using design drawings by Formscaff. At the time of the collapse, it transpired that the installation of the Kwikstage design was not yet complete," Moliso said.

Kwikstage is a modular scaffolding system.

"We are gathering information around this particular issue," said Tibor Szana, the department's chief inspector.

The formal inquiry will look into the responsibility of the clients, the clients' agent, the principal contractor, the materials supplier and the structure's design.

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