

Physiotherapy students want academic rights back

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Over 100 physiotherapy students of the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR) will be deprived of their academic rights following a decision made by Dhaka University (DU) syndicate to curtail the course and de-value the degree both at home and abroad.

The international standard of the course was de-valued as the dean of DU's medicine faculty relegated the course from five to four years.

In 1973, two years after the liberation war, Dr RJ Garst, director of Suhrawardy Hospital, started a physiotherapy course to treat disabled freedom fighters and general people with a few students. He brought in physiotherapists from abroad to assist him in his work and train these students.

But in 1978 the course had to be discontinued because of the dearth of teachers, students, and other staff and lack of job opportunities for this sector in the country.

Realising the importance physiotherapy plays, the government in 1993-94 re-started this course to assist the disabled under DU's medicine faculty.

The syllabus was designed for four academic years, but in 2001 it was revised to include a one-year internship making it a five-year course.

At the time the course was addressed as "BSc in Physiotherapy" but the syllabus identified the course as "Bachelor of Physiotherapy" (BPT) and classes were held at NITOR (popularly known as the Pongu Hospital).

In 1999, a private organisation - Centre for Rehabilitation and Paralysis (CRP) -- started a course on physiotherapy, under the DU given it the same title -- "B.Sc Honours in Physiotherapy".

The same course with two titles, under the same umbrella posed a problem.

To solve this, the DU syndicate, in a meeting on April 4, 2006 decided rename both batches as "Bachelor of Physiotherapy" with a revised and modified syllabus, including a few new subjects.

Four months later, on August 3, 2006, DU's medicine faculty, in another meeting proposed to condense the from five to four years, with three years of theory and one year of field work.

Once again, on August 7, 2006, the DU academy council in a meeting proposed to rename the title to "BSc in Physiotherapy" and make it a technical course under allied health science.

The proposal ignored the decision of the syndicate meeting on April 4, 2006 and was passed on August 10, 2006 at the DU syndicate meeting. But no teacher of the physiotherapy department was present at any of the three meetings.

"There is nothing called field work in medical science, and with the change in name and syllabus the value of the course is lost," said a second year 10th batch NITOR student.

"Before this decision the course was autonomous and equal to MBBS and BDS," he said.

"Under allied health science, we are equivalent to nurses, radiology assistants, BSc in dental or assistants to BDS and

technicians," said an 11th batch student.

"To do a post graduation degree abroad we require a four-year academic course and at least six months internship, but with the present situation we are going to lose an opportunity which is our academic right," he added.

According to the World Confederation of Physical Therapists (WCPT) declaration 1995, physiotherapy is a recognised autonomous health care profession that works in an open and equal professional partnership with medical practitioners.

According to that declaration physiotherapy has first contact status.

The admission requirement for Bachelor of Physiotherapy is grade point 7 in SSC and HSC in science group with biology,

physics and chemistry without any grace marks or improvement, which is the same requirement for MBBS and BDS admissions.

"Any four-year course from DU has first class status at job level, but the three-year has second-class status. Ours is a rising profession and there are some doctors who do not want us to be established.

We did not know that the meetings were going to take place. We were only informed of the decisions," said Hasan Hafizur Rahman, lecturer, Bangladesh Medical College.

Students alleged that Dr AZM Zahid Hossain, secretary general, Bangladesh Medical Association and dean, medicine faculty, DU, took this decision without contacting the teachers

of their department.

But Dr Zahid said: "Nothing has been changed. The four-year course remains four years and students are able to go abroad and become specialists."

When asked if nothing has been changed, what the reason was for three meetings a quick succession, he declined to comment.

According to the students, doctors who have completed

the FCPS in physical medicine feel that physiotherapists are a threat, and fear losing their patients.

There are four institutes in Dhaka, that teaches physio-therapy apart from NITOR and CRP. They are Bangladesh Medical College, Gono Bishwa-biddalaya, Peoples University of Bangladesh and the State University of Bangladesh.

'People made victims of ill-planned dev projects'

Says participants at a 'People's Tribunal'

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Participants of a 'People's Tribunal' session accused the government and some international organisations of causing sufferings to common people while implementing development projects across the country.

They cited the examples of Phulbari coalmine movement, waterlogging in the southwestern region, consequences of the proposed Tipaimukh Dam in India and plundering of forest resources of the Sundarbans.

They said people of these regions are facing the fallout of some development projects that also result in environmental hazards.

The participants pointed out that lack of people's participation in the development planning, short-sighted policy and poorly planned implementation of the projects are major reasons behind this situation.

They also discussed the sufferings and problems of farmers, garment and jute industry workers and tea garden labourers of the country, calling for an end to the repression of the working class.

The People's Tribunal session was part of a programme titled "International Forum on Global Economic Justice" held in the city last week. It was jointly organised by ActionAid Bangladesh, Asia Pacific Network for Food Sovereignty (APNFS), South Asia Network on Food, Ecology and Culture (SANFEC) and Department of Development Studies, Dhaka University.

In the tribunal, there was a panel of juries comprised of development activists -- Farida Akhter from Ubinig, Advocate Adilur Rahman, Chittoranjon Mondal of ActionAid (India),

Ahmed Swapan from VOICE and Rekha Begum, leader of *Naya Krishi Andolon*.

About 20 individuals, who actively participated in various social campaigns for bringing about changes in the society and protecting environment, shared their experiences at the tribunal session.

The speakers included Dr Anu Muhammad of Phulbari coalmine movement, Hialuddin of Angikar Bangladesh -- Campaign on Tipaimukh Dam/River Linking Project), Ashrafal Alam Tutu of Coastal Development Partnership, Pavel Partha of Bangladesh Centre for Indigenous Community and leaders of garment and jute industry workers' associations.

The speakers appreciated people's active involvement in these movements to make them a success. They stressed the need for taking lessons from these campaigns for standing against any future move against people's interests.

At the end of the programme, the jury panel gave the verdict "in favour of the mass people" and held the state responsible for undermining the dignity of the people and depriving them of their rights.

They said the international organisations pressurise the government in taking extreme measures in the name of development. At the same time they suggested that people themselves should work for regaining their rights.

"They are depriving people of their rights, their properties. We, the people, should stand against these organisations and against the people who are serving the their interests," said Advocate Adilur Rahman.

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