



Students of Dhaka University demonstrating to cancel the affiliation of seven colleges.

PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

# To affiliate or not to affiliate

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Manira Akhter Mitu was a second-year student at the department of economics at Begum Badrunnesa Women's College, one of the seven graduate and post-graduate level colleges affiliated with Dhaka University (DU). According to her classmates and teachers, she was a studious, attentive, and friendly person. She used to help her classmates by sharing books and class-notes.

Manira was with her friends when they joined the demonstration to reform the academic process of the seven colleges affiliated with DU. One of their demands was the publication of exam results within 90 days of the exam. Manira had to wait almost eight months to know the result of her second-year final exam. However, when she learned after eight months that despite all her efforts, she had failed in three subjects, she was mentally shattered. She had already completed many third-year courses over the past eight months, but now she would have to re-admit with second-year students. Failing to bear the shock and the shame, Manira committed suicide on July 16 this year.

Her tragic death sparked outrage among more than 250,000 students of seven colleges who have been demand-

ing overhaul of the slow, ineffective, and faulty academic processes for more than two years. They blocked streets in different places of the Dhaka University campus several times in 2017, 2018, and twice this year on April 23 and on July 17 after Manira's death. According to the protesting students, Manira's death is not an isolated incident. Rate of failure in these colleges is 80-100 percent. For instance, 25 students of Begum Badrunnesa Women's College appeared before the 4th year final exam



DU students locked academic and administrative buildings of the university in protest of the authority's indifference to solve the crisis.

and all of them failed. Sabbirul Islam, a student of Dhaka College says, "How can such a large number of students fail? Our exam copies are assessed at the whim of the DU teachers. We have to wait for months for our results. When we take to the streets in protest, they hastily examine our copies and publish such a

bogus result. Every year we have to hold these protests to speed up our academic activities. Nothing happens according to the regular procedure if we don't demand classes, exams, and results."

To understand what Sabbir and his fellow protesters has been saying for two years, we need to go two years back. On February 16, 2017, seven renowned graduate and post-graduate level colleges of Dhaka city, namely, Dhaka College, Eden Women's College, Government Shahid Suhrawardi College, Kabi Nazrul College, Begum Badrunnesa Women's College, Government Bangla College, and Government Titumir College, all became affiliated with Dhaka University. The then vice chancellor of DU Professor Dr AAMS Arefin Siddique said at that time, "From now on, Dhaka University will manage the admission process and examinations of these colleges. Students of these colleges will study according to the curriculum of Dhaka University. This would improve the quality of their academic activities."

Ironically, this controversial step was taken in the name of improving the academic quality of the colleges. Before 2017, these institutions, along with 2,300 post-graduate colleges and professional institutions all over the country, used to be run by National University (NU). It was founded in 1992 to oversee the academic activities of the post-graduate colleges and other professional institutions. Before 1992, these colleges were run by Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong and Mymensingh Agricultural Universities.

However, NU, burdened with overseeing the academic activities of more than two million students of thousands of institutions, could not ensure quality education at all. As a result, students of these colleges had to suffer from three-year-long session jams.

Continued to page 4



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