

## Rangamati Medical College set to commence Saturday despite indigenous resistance

### Students fear violence

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Students of the maiden academic session at Rangamati Medical College fear more than a year of session jam, with the classes withheld for about two months, since the local indigenous people fiercely opposed to the institution's founding and Awami League affiliated people clashed on the day of its inauguration on January 10, injuring over 30 people.

However, the authorities concerned are yet to take any plausible step to dispel uncertainty.

Principal of the college Prof Tipu Sultan said the health ministry decided at a meeting on March 18 to start the academic activities in Rangamati General Hospital on March 28. But amid prevailing tension, the 51 students of the college, 30 of them female, fear attending classes there.

Earlier, the principal said the students might have to take classes outside Rangamati for the time being.

Najmus Sahar Mahera, a student, said, "We haven't yet got any official announcement

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over the start of classes."

She said, "...we have already lagged more than two months behind. Any further delay would lead to a session jam of one-and-a-half years, as we would not be allowed to appear at the first professional examination of MBBS under Chittagong University, which is supposed to take place in May next year."

Classes were scheduled to begin on January 11, but Pahari Chhatra Parishad, which enforced a blockade to stop the inauguration, clashed with Bangladesh Chhatra League and Jubo League.

The indigenous people see the founding of the college as a step to push Bangalees into the Adivasi-populated district and demand full implementation of the 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord before starting its operation.

The students are reluctant to take classes in Rangamati, fearing violence.

Mahera said, "We witnessed the January 10 clash, and every one of us was terrified to see the extent of violence."

"I saw a man with one of his eyes gouged out in the clash," she said. "How terrible that was!"

Sharing the same fear, another student Shahrin Sultana Tani said. "The authorities can distribute the 51 students to four other government medical colleges under CU until a solution comes out."

She said, "We heard the representatives of the indigenous people did not accept the health ministry's decision of holding classes in Rangamati."

Snehashish Chakraborty, another student, said classes might be held at Chittagong Medical College or Chittagong General Hospital or Infectious Diseases' Hospital for now.

Principal Dr Tipu Sultan said, "We argued for holding the classes elsewhere except in Rangamati for the time being considering security, but we were instructed to hold those in Rangamati."

"I am worried about the students' safety," he said. "But what can I do? As a public official, I have to follow the government's decision."