

MATS students demonstrate at Shahbagh

20 injured as police disperse protesters charging batons



Photo: Prabir Das/Star

Medical Assistant Trainee Students (MATS) staged a sit-in at Shahbagh yesterday for over five hours with four-point demand, including recruitment to vacant 10th-grade positions and the creation of more employment opportunities.

Later, around 4:45pm, police dispersed them with baton charges and sound grenades as they reached in front of Shikkha Bhaban while attempting to march towards the Secretariat. At least 20 students were injured, eyewitnesses said.



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At the time of the incident, a five-member MATS delegation was in a meeting at the Secretariat.

Md Faruk, in charge (inspector) of the police camp at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said several injured students were brought to the hospital and were receiving treatment in the emergency department. So far, 20 have been admitted.

The students' other demands include abolishing the Health Professionals Board and forming a new regulatory body named the Medical Education Board of Bangladesh, ensuring higher education opportunities in clinical subjects aligned with the MATS curriculum, and renaming MATS to Medical Institute.

Earlier in the day, around 11:00am, nearly 300 students gathered in front of the National Museum under the banner of the General MATS Students' Unity Council for a long march towards the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS). However, instead of marching, they took position on the road.

They blocked the road from Shahbagh towards Dhaka University, but traffic movement on the main Shahbagh road remained uninterrupted, said Shahbagh Police Station Officer-in-Charge Khaled Monsur.

Md Sakib Mahmud, coordinator of the General MATS Students' Unity Council, said, "Even after the July Revolution against discrimination, MATS students continue to face discrimination. On January 22, the health ministry promised in writing to meet our demands within seven working days. Since no sincere action has been taken, we had no choice but to march."

Around 3:00pm, Tuhin Farabi, personal officer to the health adviser, escorted a five-member MATS delegation to the Secretariat for discussions with health ministry officials.

Earlier, Tuhin Farabi had arrived at Shahbagh to speak with the protesters, assuring them that a circular on the recruitment of Sub-Assistant Community Medical Officers would be issued soon. However, the students refused to leave.

Meanwhile, the MATS students have announced to continue their protest.

They will stage a sit-in at the Central Shaheed Minar until 12:00pm today. If their demands are not met by then, they will begin an indefinite hunger strike.

The announcement was made by Mujahidul Islam, central coordinator of the General MATS Students' Unity Council, at a press conference last night at the Raju Memorial Sculpture in the Dhaka University area.

Mujahidul said the ministry has once again assured them of fulfilling their demands and requested three days to publish the recruitment circular. However, no resolution or specific timeline has been given for the other three demands.

As a result, the students have decided to continue their protest, he added.

Over 15,000 students are currently enrolled in 17 government and over 200 private MATS institutions nationwide.