

AIIMS medicos on strike, medical services affected

New Delhi - Medical services at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) here were paralysed following the flash strike of resident doctors protesting the move to sack director P. Venugopal who moved the Delhi High Court challenging his sacking.

At least two patients at the country's premier medical institute died Thursday, though AIIMS spokesperson Shakti Kumar Gupta said they were being attended to by doctors at the time of their death, and the strike was in no way to be blamed for it.

Four doctors also sat on a hunger strike to protest the AIIMS governing body's resolution of Wednesday to recommend the government to sack the director for 'violating the code of conduct' applicable to the employees.

The faculty association, which launched a flash strike Wednesday, decided Thursday to continue it for 24 hours more, Gupta said.

Venugopal, India's best-known heart specialist, marked his 64th birthday Thursday by filing in the court a petition seeking a stay on his removal saying he had not flouted any code of conduct of AIIMS as alleged by Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss Wednesday.

The petition, which was listed for hearing Thursday was adjourned by the court till Friday.

'Director saab kisi se milna nahin chahte (the director does not wish to meet anyone),' said a guard outside Venugopal's residence.

'We went to wish him this morning but he was in no mood to either celebrate or meet anyone,' Patra told IANS.

Patra said resident doctors and students from three Delhi-based institutes, the Maulana Azad Medical College, Lady Harding Medical College and University College of Medical Sciences, would soon join them in their protest.

'We just want Venugopal back in his position,' he said.

Healthcare services at the institute were badly affected, with emergency and out patient department services derailed, causing inconvenience to thousands of patients.

On Thursday, Harbhajan Kaur, a heart patient died in the intensive care unit (ICU) where she was admitted June 30. Another patient, Ramjeet Prasad, 48, died in the ICU of the Neuro Sciences Centre on the same day.

However, the AIIMS spokesperson said: 'The fact that the two patients were in ICU shows that they were in critical condition. They were being attended to by doctors at the time of death. It has nothing to do with the ongoing strike.'

On Wednesday night, a seriously ill patient died allegedly after being denied admission at the AIIMS.

'We have no idea of what is happening at AIIMS but no one is attending to me,' said Gomti, a patient suffering from acute chest pain.

'I came to the hospital at 5 a.m. but no one is around to listen to me. They are busy fighting for their own interests and have no care for thousands of patients like me,' said the 60-year-old woman.

Angry relatives of seriously ill patients pounded the doors of the emergency wards.

However, Gupta said the casualty and emergency services would be suspended for the time being. 'The doctors are looking after t

he in patients,' the spokesperson said.

'Today, over 700 patients were attended to at various OPDs. Twenty-seven operations were carried out. Right now the situation is under control and registry of patients is being done on a restricted basis.

'The OPD would function tomorrow and number of patients to be attended would be decided as per the availability of doctors,' Gupta added.

He said over 50 doctors are working and since 2,000 nurses of AIIMS are not on strike the in-patients are being looked after by them.

The current AIIMS imbroglio has its roots in Venugopal's public spat with Ramadoss last month after the institute had emerged as the epicentre of protests against the government decision to hike caste-based quotas in higher education.

While Ramadoss alleged that 'some people' had turned the country's leading medical institute into a 'political hub' and warned of action against them, the sacked chief accused the minister of curtailing its autonomy.

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