



Wheelchair ramp to allow disabled to visit Memorial chorten

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YIDDD/BCMD: A ramp will be constructed to allow mobility-disabled individuals to circumambulate the Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Memorial chorten. Conceived by a youth, Dechen Rabgyel who is the leader of the social justice committee, the ramp will be constructed from the Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital (JDWNRH) to the chorten to allow wheelchair users and individuals using crutches to be able to easily and safely access the chorten for their spiritual needs.

The Youth Initiative for Debate, Deliberation and Development (YIDDD) organised the project, while the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD) is providing support.

BCMD assistant program officer, Phuntsho Namgay, said that the main motive of the project was to give the disabled minority of the country due respect, and also to sensitise the country on the need for places like hospitals, shopping malls, vegetable markets and recreational areas to be made accessible to people with special needs.

Bhutan does not have a concrete policy that safeguards the rights of disabled individuals currently. "Although we had disabled people all the way, we've never given them the respect they deserve. This is a very good project to address this issue. We've drafted a policy to enable equal rights and freedom for disabled individuals," Disabled Person's Association of Bhutan (DPAB) executive director, Sonam, said. DPAB is also a supporter of the project.

"It's high time that government had a policy or act to ensure accessibility in public buildings, and implementers like engineers and architects make the environment conducive and accessible for disabled people," JDWNRH physiotherapist Dr Sangha said. He added that the project must meet international standards to be efficient for the users.

However, there are concerns about the Memorial chorten getting congested, especially during auspicious days, given that wheelchairs occupy larger spaces.

"Those using wheelchairs must be allocated a particular time to use the ramp, so that they don't congest the traffic, otherwise it shouldn't be a problem, because they won't take much time circumambulating the chorten," lam Namgay, who manages activities within the chorten, said.

The project is still in its initial stage. The Thimphu City corporation will supervise the construction of the ramp. The project is estimated to cost around Nu 100,000.

The Draktsho Vocational Training Institute is also supporting the project.

By Kipchu