

Admission battle on high pitch

Tensed parents, nervous children

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

Five-year-old Faria had no problem in going inside the school premises but she was adamant not to move a single step without her father.

"Papa I won't go without you. I don't know anyone there...please, papa please," cried Faria as she came to sit for the admission test at Viqarunnisa Noon School and College.

Like Faria, several thousand children along with their parents gathered in front of the school on Friday morning for the first day's

admission test.

When Faria's father told her that the teachers may not allow him to go inside the school she asked him to request the teachers. "If you tell the teachers they will let you go," she said.

Finally the father was able to make Faria understand that she must go alone and the teachers would help her during the exam.

Against 350 seats in class-I, more than 3,000 kids applied for admission in the leading private school in the city's Siddheswari area.

Thirty minutes after the admission test began; five-year-old Nusrat came out of the hall with tears in her eyes. When Nusrat was handed over to her parents they became depressed.

"We prepared her for the last one year at home and she was coached for six months. All our efforts have gone in vain," said Nusrat's mother.

Friday's chilly winter morn did not stop the children covered in warm clothes along with their parents, rushing to the school with pencil box, ruler and clipboard. Many

were not capable of carrying them.

"Mom said if I get admitted she will buy me a puppy," said Ashna, one of the competitors.

Many children were overjoyed to see many others of the same age group inside the exam hall with them, not knowing that they were going to compete with each other.

This year eight students are competing for a single seat in the school section of Viqarunnisa Noon School and College. Three branches of the school will enroll 1,050 students from around 8,400 applicants.

The children are sitting for a 100-mark admission test on three subjects -- Bangla, English and Mathematics.

Tensed parents shared their experiences with journalists as they were waiting in front of the school.

"I am confident if Dina pays attention she will be able to answer all the questions but I am afraid that she may start playing inside the classroom," said Khalil Uddin Ahmed, Dina's father.

Many parents suggested that the admission tests of all the A-grade schools should be held on one day

while others are against the idea.

"Most kids are sitting for admission tests in three or four schools and many of them get chance in more than one, depriving others. The school authorities fill these vacant seats by unfair means," said a parent.

"The admission criterion differs from school to school. My child might do well in one entrance exam and not so well in another. Therefore options must be open," said another parent.

However, all of them agreed that the number of good schools should be increased and only this can ensure better future for their children.

Parents' anxiety reached the peak when the test ended. The parents in long queues were waiting to receive their kids.

The scene of the kids returning after the test was completely different. All of them were happy to come back to their parents.

It was really tough for traffic police to maintain the numerous amounts of vehicles carrying the students and their guardians and because of this there was a terrible traffic jam in the area until 1:00pm; hours after the admission test.



Happy to be back: This little boy with smiles of relief rushes to his father's open arms.



Anxious children waiting to be reunited with their parents after the admission test.

Difficulties in enforcing security at DU

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University (DU) authorities are facing great difficulties in enforcing new security measures across the campus.

University officials said the syndicate has decided to beef up security on the campus but they cannot implement all the measures due to vastness of the area and lack of equipment.

Most students, worried about possible attacks, have demanded checking at entry points of the campus and restriction on vehicles during rush hour.

The Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) on several occasions threatened to blow up the Arts Building, Teachers-Students Centre (TSC), Curzon Hall and student dormitories of DU.

"On December 11, the syndicate took some decisions to tighten the security on the campus but the decisions have not been implemented yet," said Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, a leader of Dhaka University Teachers' Association.

As it is not possible to check so many students by using metal detectors, he said hi-tech security archways can be

installed at the entry points.

"We are trying to do our level best to ensure security on the campus," said SMA Faiz, the vice chancellor. "As the demand for metal detectors has increased, there is a supply crisis. However, we hope to manage everything soon," he assured.

Most teachers, students and officials of the university said security must be tightened to

check any possible attack by militants. "We are in fear while in the campus," said Rubaida Rahman, a student of Economics Department.

"Checking of students' ID cards is not enough to ensure security, all bags must be checked as well," said Habib Rahman, a student of Suryasen Hall.

The teachers said there must be an end to the bomb

blasts and the major political parties have a role to play in this regard. "The two major political parties must unite against this menace," said Tahmina Ahmed, associate professor, English Department.

During the last two years militants threatened to blow up DU Arts Building, the central library, Mukarram Bhaban science complex, TSC, Rokeya Hall, Shamsunnahar Hall and

Fazilatunnesa Mujib Hall on several occasions.

Four bombs near the TSC on August 17 2005.

The DU has around 400 security guards but university officials said the guards are not performing their duties properly. In 2003, DU authorities planned to provide them with special dresses but this decision is also yet to be implemented.

"It is very difficult to ensure security in the vast area," said Proctor Prof AK Feroze Ahmed referring to the lack of manpower and equipment.

He also said that it is duty of the dean of each building, along with the in charge officers and estate office to implement the security policies, adding that he had no idea whether they were being implemented or not.

Botanical Garden demands attention, care

SHARMIN MEHRIBAN

The National Botanical Garden is now plagued with antisocial activities, litter and negligence of the authorities to preserve the green in the city's Mirpur area, alleged visitors.

Sparse, worn-out and pest-infested vegetation, weeds, overgrown grass and dried-out ponds are failing to attract real nature-lovers to the garden.

The garden was developed in 1961 on 215 acres of land for collecting and preserving plants of various species and performing genetic engineering for the purpose of study and research.

Now 208 acres of land are covered in green vegetation and the remaining part is occupied by the air force's radar station. A single botanist studies and treats the plants.

Due to the worn-out condition the garden only appeals to couples looking for privacy and to people looking for any reason to get closer to nature,

because of the pollution in the city.

A swamp with some water lilies in mud and puddles strewn with dead stalks and leaves and a broken tree hanging horizontally at its front could easily be mistaken for a garbage dump unless one sees the signboard that reads "Shapla Pukur" (pond of water lily).

The "Golap Bagan" (rose garden) and "Shal Bon" (Shal forest) resemble a commercial nursery with plants grown in pots with hardly any roses in sight and an oasis-like garden in the barren lands of a desert. The place is littered with polythene and cigarette packets.

"This place was much better when I started working here as a gardener 30 years ago," said Md Yasin. "It was much cleaner and there were more trees," he added. He could not explain why there are lesser trees at present.

Asked about the way they take care of the plants, he said the fertilisers they use are dung mingled with mud and dried-



Nature lovers taking a stroll at the Botanical Garden.

out leaves. Dead trees are incinerated at remote corners.

Another gardener declined to say show reason for the pest-eaten plants, saying that they are not allowed to talk to the press. But he said pesticides are applied on the affected plants.

Although the entrance fee is Tk 5 a person, many enter the garden through a hole beneath a boundary wall at a certain corner. Some of them collect fallen leaves, which contributes to the garden's cleanliness.

But a section of outsiders tend to vandalise the garden by breaking branches off trees, plucking flowers and even by killing birds and butterflies.

"The number of visitors has decreased over the years," said a local resident who was born and bred in the staff quarters inside the garden. He pointed out the activities of antisocial elements and vendors bother visitors.

Some of the vendors are permitted by the garden

administration whereas the others are required to pay a monthly toll to the garden staff. "I have to pay Tk 50 every month to the staff," said Roksana, who earns her living by making henna imprints on the visitors' hands.

A rule that forbids visitors from staying in the garden after sunset is also a cause for the decreasing number of visitors. Most offices close after 5:00pm, which coincides with the time, the garden closes.

When asked about the dismal state of the garden, an official from the garden administration said they have staff shortage. "Gardeners and security personnel are few in numbers in contrast to a 208-acre area," he said on condition of anonymity.

He also said that there are no sweepers at present and that the dustbins in the garden had been broken by the visitors, although a visitor contradicted his view by saying: "It's sheer negligence."