

# Toying with Our Future: O/A Level Exam Cancellations

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We're all aware of the immense political unrest and turmoil gripping the nation. Somehow we, the students, had seemed to be getting on with our academic and personal lives even amongst all the chaos. That, however, took a huge hit on January 21 and 22 when the O/A Level Exams for January 2015 were cancelled due to the 48 hour hartal in Dhaka and Khulna divisions and the countrywide blockade.

January 21 saw the cancellation of the English Literature O Level Examination and the Physics Unit-3, Business Studies Unit-4 and Mechanics Unit-2 A Level Examinations. The British Council still considered the mere rescheduling of these exams if the hartal were withdrawn. With no signs of it being called back, however, 4 more exams scheduled for the following day got cancelled – namely Further Mathematics Paper-2 O Levels and Economics Unit-2, Statistics Unit-2 and Physics Unit-5 A Levels.

While we may nod in sympathy and stack this issue away as just another inconvenience brought on by the strikes, for the students and guardians involved, the exam cancellations are going to have implications unimaginably real and far-reaching.

Needless to say, the biggest impact on students has been in terms of the setback in time. O Level students who would have gone on to start on the next step of their studies are now set 6 months back in progress, which will eventually go on to delay the completion of their high school education.

***"When I heard the news, I was devastated since this was the second time I was giving Pure Mathematics and I had already spent an extra six months behind it. It's frustrating how we candidates have to suffer because of these political problems, with our future at stake and our time and money going to waste," said Sarah, a disgruntled private student who had been preparing for her O Levels.***

But the most immediate and significant predicament is being faced by the A Level students. For them, the completion of these exams would have meant progress towards completing high-school education. For A2 students in particular, the delay will go on to hamper their college applications. Most universities in the country and around the world start their sessions from the Fall semester. As these students are no longer able to qualify for college enrollment by September 2015, they will have to wait to apply for the

session after next, resulting in the loss of at least a few months if not an entire year.

***"I am worried about the effect of having finished A Levels in more than 2 years on my applications. Some of my friends have already applied. Some will miss their sessions," complained Kazi Ashfaqul Huq, a student from Maple Leaf International School.***

While it may not be as important as the loss of time in academic terms, the spread of demoralisation and stress over these students is nevertheless worth mentioning. As Kazi went on to explain, "There was no guarantee that exams were happening. You don't know whether to study. Ultimately you end up wasting time. And it didn't help when different information sources spoke differently. A few TV channels seemed to say exams were on. British Council's text said they were cancelled but there may be changes and we would be notified. At one point, we hoped for the exams to be cancelled. At least that would take away the uncertainty."

He further shed light on how this has gone on to affect other areas of the students' lives: "An international debate tournament – Asian Schools Debating Championship – is going to be held in June in Dhaka. I was supposed to participate, but if I am to sit for Physics unit 5 in May, I can't. This was such a big opportunity and I, along with many others, am now going to miss it. That is what saddens me the most at this point."

Sartaz Bin Mustafiz, another A Level student of Maple Leaf International School further added, "There is nothing more frustrating than getting to know that everything you've worked so hard for in the past year is a complete waste."

Teachers of these students are in equal dismay over the events. Sakeeb Rahman, a senior Physics teacher at Maple Leaf International School, talked about the hampering effects the exam cancellations have had on students. "Government shutdowns aren't cheap. It's costing the nation a lot of money and it's now costing the youth their education too. The entire O Levels and A Levels syllabus takes a specific time to finish. You have to work around the clock to meet the deadlines and be finished preparing the students for the upcoming exams. The people in UK won't stop giving their exams for you. A lot of students are giving their last repeats. As every year passes, the exams are getting tougher each session and many students are not able to pass their exams in a given time frame of two years, and resort to repeats. This means these students are more prone to being rejected by universities abroad

for not finishing their high school on time."

A further point of concern stands for students who have taken, for instance, the exam for one paper in a subject, with the other having been cancelled, leaving them confused as to whether they need to retake those subjects or have their grades averaged. Meanwhile, the financial aspect of the exam cancellations is an added burden to the parents.

***"The ongoing political crisis has limited our income to a minimum. And these exams getting cancelled just adds to our losses. At this moment, there's no way we can compensate for the losses," said Sabita Chakraborty, the parent of an A Level student.***

As of January 2015, the registration fees per unit of O Level and A Level exams are around Tk 9000 and Tk 6000, respectively. It may not be that great a financial loss for students who register for just one unit or subject per sitting. The more usual practice, however, is to take 6 subjects for O Levels and 9 units for A Levels. The total amount of money spent and lost, therefore, is staggering.

A considerable amount of time has passed since these exam cancellations, but an end to the hindrance in education seems to be nowhere in sight. While graduation of both high school and university students face delay and school days seem to have been lessened down to just the weekends, one wonders how many more ruined lives, livelihoods and futures it will take before this madness comes to an end.

#### Sources:

Shuprovo Arko

Shreyosi Endow

Sabita Chakraborty

Kazi Ashfaqul Huq

Sartaz Bin Mustafiz

Sakeeb Rahman

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