

International Art Biennale sets off

ZAHANGIR ALOM

The first edition of International Art Biennale Cox's Bazar-2015, a new platform for international art, was inaugurated at Cox's Bazar Institute and Public Library yesterday.

The four long art fiesta features a panoramic survey of work by artists from Bangladesh, India and Korea and presents major projects alongside emerging names from the region.

The event is a group initiative by artists, curators, university teachers and writers; it's a non-profit platform collaboration with 54 participating artists, curator, critics and media experts from Bangladesh and abroad.

Eminent academic and critic Salimullah Khan inaugurated the event yesterday with Amirul Rajiv, curator of the biennale, elaborating on the initiative.

The Biennale exhibits solo projects, photography, photo montage, watercolours and other forms of artworks including drawing, calligraphy, paper collage, print, installation, a children's art project, a series of talks on art, performance art, screening of experimental films and presentations by local puppeteers.

"Ah Sundarban" a major project on the environmental concern surrounding Sundarbans have their photo-

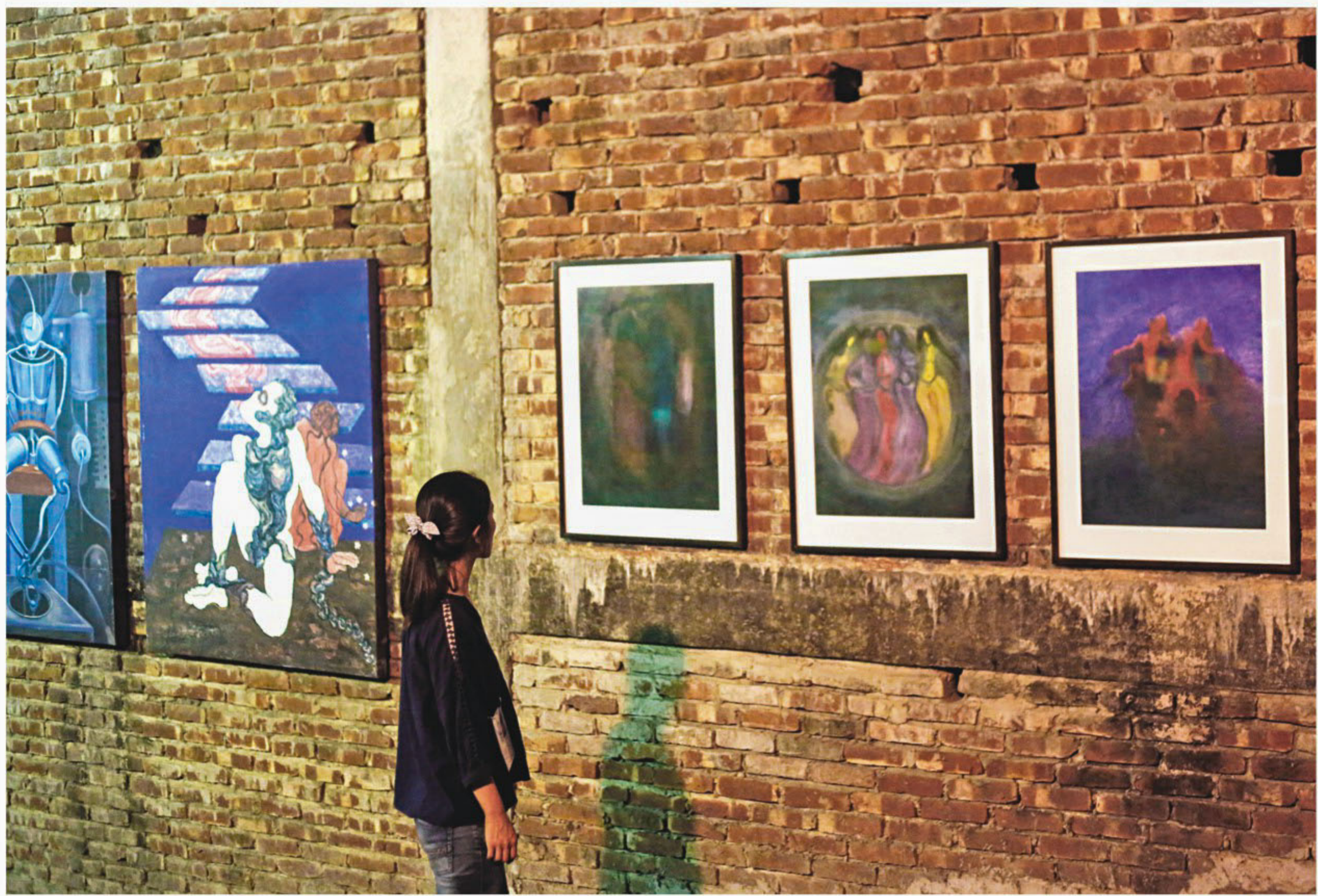
graphs on display at the event alongside promising Indian photographer Nirvirai Singh Rai's work on images of Rohingyas from Myanmar. There is also an Origami exhibition by Hyelyoung Lee and works by Sangmi Shin.

On display are etching prints by Ashit Mitra, surrealist drawings by Sharafat Hossain Pasha, Shimul Saha's experimental new media art work titled "We All are the Dust of the Air", Harun-ar-Rashid's photographs and watercolours by four artists - Dr Malay Bala, Gopal Saha, Amit Nandi and Zahangir Alom of "Oriental Painting Study Group". Paintings by Bipasha Hayat, speak of her childhood and adulthood experience of ancient architectures and sculptures.

Pavel Partha and Syed Nizar Alam will deliver a series of lectures on art and ecology.

Other notable works on display are from Ashim Halder Sagor, Apu Dhar, Abinash Chakma, Jahar Sinha, Kiamoul Haque Sam and Samanta Shermin and installations by Jublee Dewan, Suchayan Paul, Jionto Raju, Razib Datta Mumit Mahub and Sayeed Sumon.

A workshop on puppetry by Jolpori Puppet Studio with Cox's Bazar school children will also be held in the four day proceedings that end Sept 13.



A visitor looks at artworks on the first day of the International Art Biennale Cox's Bazar-2015 yesterday. The four-day fiesta is being held at Cox's Bazar Institute and Public Library.

PHOTO: STAR

Students' demo stops Dhaka

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universities in the current budget. The decision drew widespread criticism from students and guardians.

Yesterday, students of several universities, including East West, North South, Brac, Independent, State University, United International University (UIU), Stamford and Daffodil, began their demonstration around 10:00am.

Holding banners and placards, they were seen peacefully chanting and writing slogans on the streets such as "No VAT on Education," "Education is not a product" and "Why firing on students?"

Students of Brac University, American International University of Bangladesh and South East University

would eventually fall on the students as the authorities would use some or other pretext to increase the fees to adjust their expenses.

Students of East West University continued their demonstration from around 11:10am, chanted anti-VAT slogans taking position near Rampura Bridge for a second straight day. They left the place for the day around 6:00pm.

During the demonstration throughout the day, vehicles stood bumper-to-bumper in a massive traffic tangle. As a result, hundreds of commuters suffered being stranded for hours on the road amid the sweltering heat.

Traffic situation went out of control by 2:00pm, with the entire stretch of the

minister.

They also demanded immediate actions against the police officials who attacked the students of East West University on Wednesday.

They later staged another protest rally in front of Chittagong Press Club.

In Sylhet, students of Sylhet Metropolitan University, Leading University, International University and South East University blocked streets at Court Point, Chourasta, Surma Point and Taltola areas around 10:30am.

Several hundred commuters were stranded on roads, reports our Moulvibazar correspondent.

Meanwhile, left-leaning student body Bangladesh Chhatra Federation in a press release yesterday expressed solidarity



Students of East West University stop a bus on the Rampura-Badda road near Aftabnagar. As on Wednesday, they blocked the road for hours yesterday as well, protesting a 7.5 percent VAT on 'tuition fees' at private universities. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

marched on the streets of Mohakhali and Gulshan while hundreds from North South and Independent universities staged a sit-in on Progoti Sarani at Bashundhara.

Students of Stamford University blockaded Dhanmondi's Satmasjid road and those from Daffodil university blockaded Mirpur Road in Sukrabad area.

Sudipto, a sixth-semester student of Computer Science and Engineering at UIU, said after the police action on East West University students, they communicated with students from different universities on social media overnight and decided on the demonstration programmes.

"The public universities could not accommodate us. So we are studying in the private varsities, spending huge money. Imposing VAT is nothing but an additional burden on us," said Monwarul Alam, a student of Brac University.

Kakon Biswas, a student of East West University, said it was not that only the children from well-off families study in private universities. A huge number of students come from the limited income families.

"Many guardians have already sold out their land to pay the tuition fees. And if the tuition fees are increased further, they won't be able to continue funding their children's education," he said.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith said the universities would have to pay the VAT, not the students.

But Kakon Biswas argued that even if the universities were to pay, the burden

road from Mohakhali to airport got jam-packed with vehicles. Other areas saw a similar situation.

School-going children and patients were among those who suffered the most. A five-minute drive took Zahed Khan two hours as he was taking a patient from Tejgaon to a hospital in Mohakhali.

While caught in the jam, he saw another ailing woman being taken out of an ambulance and carried to a nearby hospital since her already critical condition worsened further.

Hundreds were seen walking to and from their destinations, in some cases for several kilometres.

Saif Al Din Abdullah, a mechanical engineer, said he could not attend an important meeting at Gulshan as he was stuck on Progoti Sarani for nearly two hours.

However, the former Buet student added, "I can understand why the students are agitating. VAT on education is not acceptable."

There are 83 private universities in the country where about four lakh students study.

DEMO IN CHITTAGONG, SYLHET Several hundred students from different private universities of the port city demonstrated at the GEC intersection blocking the busy CDA Avenue for an hour till noon, reports our Chittagong correspondent.

The demo created a two-kilometre gridlock from GEC intersection to Lalkhan bazaar and GEC to Muradpur.

The students chanted slogans protesting the government decision to impose VAT and also against the finance

with the private university students.

15th edition

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members of the business community to achieve greater heights of productivity, efficiency, financial discipline and modern management.

Over the years, the awards shaped up into the most prestigious event in Bangladesh's business community.

The entries for the awards are judged by a community of juries comprising regulators from the central bank and the National Board of Revenue as well as leading lawyers, entrepreneurs, accountants, bankers and economists, making it the true accolades of distinction.

In the last 14 editions, the organisers awarded 58 organisations and individuals. The main four categories are: Business Person of the Year; Outstanding Woman in Business; Enterprise of the Year; and Best Financial Institution of the Year.

The past winners include business leaders Samson H Chowdhury of Square Group and Amjad Khan Chowdhury of Pran-RFL Group; and enterprises such as ACI, BSRM, MM Ispahani and Bengal Plastic Industries.

Financial institutions such as EBL, Pubali Bank, Brac Bank and IDLC were also lauded.

Lifetime achievement awards were also bestowed on those who have made a difference through their service. The past winners include the country's first finance secretary M Matuil Islam, the late MA Samad of Bangladesh General Insurance Company and Laila Rahman Kabir of Kedarpur Tea Company.

ZIA CHARITABLE TRUST CASE 3 more witnesses

cross-examined Khaleda appears at hearing

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Counsels for BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday completed cross-examination of three witnesses in connection with Zia Charitable Trust corruption case.

With this, cross-examination of seven out of 23 witnesses in the case has been done.

Khaleda appeared before the make-shift court at Bakshibazar to attend the hearing of Zia Charitable Trust and Zia Orphanage Trust graft cases. Earlier, she was absent from appearing before the court for three consecutive days, showing health problems.

On completion of cross-examination, Judge Abu Ahmed Jomadar of the Special Judge Court-3 of Dhaka yesterday recorded statement of another Zia Charitable Trust corruption case witness Hafizur Rahman, a deputy general manager of Sonali Bank Ltd head office.

Later, the court adjourned till September 17 hearing on the graft cases. Lawyers for Khaleda will cross-examine Hafizur's statement on the day.

During yesterday's hearing, advocate Abdur Rezak Khan, one of Khaleda's lawyer, cross-examined three bank officials -- HM Ismail, Mokbul Ahmed and Fahmida Rahman -- for over two hours.

According to the charge sheet of Zia Charitable Trust graft case, Khaleda and three others abused their power to collect Tk 6.19 crore for the trust during the BNP-led government's tenure between 1991 and 1996.

As per the statement of Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case, the BNP chief, her son Tarique Rahman and four others embezzled Tk 2.1 crore by forming the charity that exists only on paper.

ARSON CASE

MK Anwar, 33 others charged

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Wari police have pressed charges against 34 BNP men, including MK Anwar, Amanullah Aman and Barkatullah Bulu, in an arson case.

Sub-inspector of Wari Police Station Shah Alam, also investigating officer of the case (IO), on Wednesday submitted the charge sheet against them to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka, showing 35 people as prosecution witnesses.

BNP leaders Habib-Un-Nabi Khan Sohel, former BNP lawmaker Salauddin Ahmed, Shamsur Rahman Shimul Biswas, Maruf Kamal Khan Sohel, Shirin Sultana and Khairul Kabir Khokon are also among the accused.

Of the 34 accused, 18 are now on bail and Aman is in jail. MK Anwar, Maruf Kamal, Shimul Biswas, Shirin and 11 others were shown fugitives in the charge sheet, and the IO appealed to the court to issue arrest warrants for them.

The IO included names of seven people in the charge sheet after their involvement in the incident was found. Their names were not in the first information report (FIR) of the case, according to the charge sheet.

According to the case statement, a group of BNP-led 20-party alliance leaders and activists torched a bus by throwing petrol bombs on Dhaka-Adamjee highway near Mayor Mohammad Hanif Flyover on January

Muhith explains

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government decisions that were to be taken in this regard," the minister explained.

On Tuesday, replying to a query about the teachers' movement, Muhith said, "I am extremely surprised that the most educated section [of our population] has gone for such a movement due to their lack of knowledge."

"I should have said their movement resulted from their being uninformed," he clarified yesterday. "The way I spoke must have hurt them as there is a huge gulf between 'lack of knowledge' and 'being uninformed'."

"I am very sorry about my comment. However, I am surprised that they [university teachers] went for a movement before knowing the government's decisions," he said.

University teachers held several demonstrations at different universities in the week before the new scale was approved on Monday. They have intensified the agitation programme since Tuesday.

Muhith also said yesterday that the pay commission formed by the government had teachers' representation as well.

He said the new structure has 20 scales and professors, like in the past, are given the same status as secretaries who under grade 1 get a monthly salary of Tk 78,000.

The minister said out of 11,202 teachers in 36 universities there are 2,952 professors, 1,994 associate professors, 3,391 assistant professors and 2,865 lecturers.

He said the pyramid usually applicable to other professions does not apply to

university teachers and the number of university teachers is higher in the upper ranks than in the lower ones.

About the issue of a separate pay structure for teachers, Muhith said a universal pay scale was declared in the face of teachers' movement in 1973. Since then the teachers have received salaries and allowances under a unified pay scale.

TEACHERS THANK MUHITH, ANNOUNCE NEW PROGRAMMES Federation of Bangladesh University Teachers' Association (FBUTA) yesterday thanked the finance minister for retracting his comment on its ongoing agitation programmes within the 24-hour deadline.

In a statement issued yesterday evening, the FBUTA also criticised the minister for "making a negative comment" about their demand for an independent pay scale.

The statement was jointly signed by FBUTA President Prof Farid Uddin Ahmed and member secretary Prof ASM Maksud Kamal.

Earlier in the day, FBUTA announced that teachers of all 37 public universities in the country will observe daylong stoppages on September 13 and 17, demanding a separate pay scale for them.

The decision came at an FBUTA meeting at the provost's office of Surya Sen Hall on Dhaka University campus around 11:30am yesterday.

However, the meeting decided that exams would remain beyond the purview of the protest programmes.

Meanwhile, teachers of Jahangirnagar University, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University and Bangladesh Agriculture

The VAT confusion

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the private university authorities, not the students, who would pay the VAT.

"The VAT has been imposed not to be collected from the students. The VAT is included within the existing tuition fees. The responsibility of paying the VAT is solely on the university authorities, never on the students," the NBR said in a press release yesterday.

It, however, did not clarify why the government made a fresh announcement of the VAT imposition if it's already included in the tuition fees.

The government slapped 7.5 percent VAT on private universities, and medical and engineering colleges in the current budget, sparking widespread criticisms.

Revenue officials said it's usually the businesses and service providers who collect VAT from consumers. The private universities were exempted from it.

But they could not say whether the universities used to fix fees including the VAT in the past.

Contacted for clarification, NBR Member (VAT Policy) Jahangir Hossain claimed there is no ambiguity the statement. "It is the explanation of the NBR," he said, declining to comment further.

Students, however, wouldn't buy the government's argument, saying even if the universities pay the VAT, they would realise the money from the students on some pretext. So, it's the students who eventually will have to bear the brunt of the government move.

Experts too believe so. "Ultimately, the students will have to pay the VAT. Generally, VAT is an indirect tax paid by end consumers," said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute.

If the NBR argues that the VAT is already included in the tuition fees, the

fees shouldn't be increased now, he said. "The private university authorities should prepare their prospectus saying the tuition fees are inclusive of the VAT."

Research Fellow Towfiqul Islam Khan of the Centre for Policy Dialogue said the NBR explanation implies that the private universities will now pay the VAT from their own pockets, which will cut their revenue by 7.5 percent.

"The universities may ultimately raise the tuition fees in future (to cover the VAT expenses).

"To restrain such fee hike, the government will need to regulate and fix the fees charged by the private universities, which may not be possible in reality," he added.

Sheikh Kabir Hossain, president of the Association of Private Universities of Bangladesh, said the NBR's explanation was "confusing and incorrect".

"We are not business organisations. The private universities are non-profit institutions and run by trustee boards. We do not get any subsidy or whatsoever from the government. So why should we pay the VAT?"

All expenses including teacher's salaries are paid from the students' fees, and if the government imposes VAT, the burden will automatically fall on the students' shoulders, he told The Daily Star.

"We surely won't pay the money from our own pockets," Kabir added.

Dr Mohammed Farashuddin, chairperson of the trustee board of East West University, said, "We may pay the VAT from the existing tuition fees of the students so that their families don't face any additional financial hardship."

"We should keep in mind that many of our students come from households with limited income," added the former Bangladesh Bank governor.

Registrar of Brac University Md Sohul Afzal said they too were considering this.