

DOERS TODAY, NATION BUILDERS TOMORROW

DHAKA FRIDAY
FEBRUARY 16, 2018
FALGUN 4, 1424 BS

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An Integrated Admission Test in Public Universities of Bangladesh

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PART I:

My batch and I sat for the HSC exam three decades ago in 1987. Our results came out at the end of that year. Like everybody else, I was faced with the question: which university, and what subject? I had no aspiration to study engineering or medical science. My choice was a general university. The only option open in those days was public universities. To our generation, private universities were unheard of.

Since a general university was my target, my choice was fixed. I had to decide from a chronological set: Dhaka (1921), Rajshahi (1953), Chittagong (1966), Jahangirnagar (1970) and Kushtia (1979). Even then, different universities held admission tests on different dates. Since there were only five general universities,



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there was no pressure on the university administrations to coordinate dates to avoid clashes. It was possible to attend admission tests of all five universities. Preparation was mainly done at home and consultation between friends solving guides. Coaching centres did exist, but they were mainly for engineering and medical admission tests. Student wings in universities would offer free coaching just before the exam in their universities.

The university admission test was different from today. SSC and HSC marks were given a weight in the total calculation. This weight differed from university to university. The next two components included a written test and an oral viva voce. Both these components were marked. Oral evaluation through a viva voce has almost

disappeared today. Different universities had different rules for the written evaluation. Jahangirnagar took separate department-wise written and viva voce. Dhaka University written and viva voce was administered by the faculty (Units: A, B, C & D).

Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) machines were not available. Thus, the scope for setting MCQs to save time was limited. Teachers had to check scripts manually. The scripts were then scrutinized by another committee for cross-checking before results were published. The internet and mobile technology had not arrived in 1988. We found out about our results through national newspapers or from the notice board in the department or faculty of the university we applied to.

The admission process from the publication of the HSC results to the starting of classes was time consuming. At Jahangirnagar, the 1987 HSC batch started classes on November 12, 1988. This was more than one year after publication of the HSC results. The other general universities started classes of the same batch at around similar dates. Before university students started classes, they were subject to a one-year session-jam. Technological improvement via OMR for evaluation and publication of results via the internet and SMS has reduced the time-lag. Yet, a significant lag of up to five months or more exists after HSC results and class starting.

PART II:

The 1990s was a watershed. Bangladesh re-embarked on parliamentary democracy in this decade. Whether that was the cause or not, since the 1990s, Bangladesh has also been experiencing economic growth. This has created a launching pad to become a middle-income nation. An emerging economy needs a youthful and educated population. Bangladesh needed time to overcome the devastations of the liberation war to make a 'take off' to quote a Rostowjargon. The stage was set for a proliferation of universities. The first private university started in 1992. Since then, the number of universities in the public and private sectors has been growing due to the demand for higher education by an ever-growing youth population in Bangladesh.

Today, in total, there are 120 universities in Bangladesh. Of these, 40 are in the public sector, and 80 (approved 92) in the private sector. Excluding the National University and the Bangladesh Open University

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