

# Uncharted territories, uncertain futures

## HSC 2020 students face tough ask

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On March 22, 2020, the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) exam was announced as postponed due to Covid-19. This ensued a series of more delays and taxing uncertainty on the students' part. Many resumed preparing for their HSC exams and started preparing for admission tests simultaneously, many could only find it within themselves to handle the stress that comes with the former.

After almost 10 months, on January 30, 2021, the students finally received their results based on their academic records. A total of 161,807 students, 11.83 percent of the HSC examinees, received the top score. Due to the number having tripled from the preceding year, students were jeered at and rebuked despite many of them, who had achieved GPA 5 in their JSC and SSC, having failed to get the top score this time. Whilst such an announcement had brought around long-awaited relief, it also raised concerns about university admissions. Now, most of these students have either already gotten into a private university so as not to further delay their education or to prepare for the admissions tests.

"For a while, I could avoid worrying about university. Whilst the good grade made me feel better, I also started feeling extremely worried about university," states Upoma Biswas\*, a student from Bir Shreshtha Noor Mohammad Public College. She noted that it was extremely stressful, and she really thought no other solution but that of getting into a private university could help. Now, she is majoring in Anthropology in Brac University, a subject she was always interested in.

Mariya Marjanah of Independent

University, Bangladesh (IUB) had similar concerns. "The uncertainty for eight long months led me to depression and anxiety. I just wanted to be occupied with things. Truth be told, I was not looking to get into a public university anyway, so when I got the opportunity, I got into IUB," she says.

Whilst many wanted to rid themselves of the unreasonable anxiety, students like Tahmina Khan\*, a student at Brac University majoring in economics, were more concerned about graduating in time, stating that in the midst of the pandemic she felt like it would be better to graduate earlier. Others felt private universities can be just as good as public universities and decided to not waste their time in an uncertain quest.

Were parents supportive of their decision of going to a private university? Zubaida Zahid Runee, first-year Computer Science and Engineering student at North South University responds, "They were supportive after a bit of convincing. The idea of studying at a private university is not very welcome to the older generation of our country. I was able to convince my parents saying that in the long run being in a private university will actually be advantageous to me."

Given it is their first online semester, some of them noted apprehension in handling the pressure. Tahmina says, "Longer hours on the screen cause intense headache and you don't really get to know your peers. Teachers have been helpful but I still feel extremely overwhelmed. There really is no alternative to in-class learning."

However, students like Zubaida feel education in the current format is a bit more organised despite there being a lack of human interactions.

Mariya comments, "Even though I am



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missing out on a lot, I am still enjoying my university lessons." She also noted that the teachers should responsibly hold regular online classes and pay close attention to their students. Another student noted that viva voce examinations were not helpful and mentioned it would further enrich their knowledge if they were given assignments instead.

While the students who have gotten enrolled have been coping with a very new format of education, those who await admission tests to get into public university are struggling to make things work for an examination that is very often dubbed as the "most important of all".

Asif Rahman\* completed his HSC from Cantonment English School and College, Chattogram. About the need to prepare for admission tests, he says, "Well, family opinions and their expectations sure did matter in this decision. But it wasn't too much of a pressure as the degree would help me to either land a good job or to do my post-graduation abroad."

Naima Rahim\*, from Mohammadpur Preparatory School and College, says that despite her parents having played a role in her decision, she also dreams of attending a public university, "I suppose it is something I grew up with. Other than one or two specific ones, I really won't mind majoring in any subject, as long as it's the University of Dhaka. Although, studying online is really taxing, I think it will be worth it!"

Tasnim Ferdousi Mim finished her HSC from Adamjee Cantonment College. She noted similar apprehension in regards to preparing online, "Yes absolutely, ours is a cursed admission batch. Sitting at home for a year has taken away from my mental zeal toward education. I hate online classes; I feel like I can't absorb what's being taught. I can't seek help from my peers or teachers with an academic problem at hand. It's all a disaster."

The students preparing for admission tests were split when asked if they thought parents and instructors could help in this hour of crisis. Whilst some of them had already been unconditionally supported by their parents, others felt like this situation could be tended to by nothing, regarding which, Naima said, "Only reverting to normalcy can help us, nothing else!"

When asked if they had any words of encouragement for their peers, Nazneen Islam\* of Cantonment English School and College, Chattogram said, "It's okay if you can't fulfill your parents' expectations. You are your own person so think about your happiness first. It's also okay if you don't get into a public university, life doesn't end here. Best of luck!"

\*Names have been changed for privacy.



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