

Many private univs not playing by rules

UGC to warn 21 such institutions, alert admission seekers

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Many private universities are flouting laws as they are running programmes without any approval and carrying out educational activities on "unauthorised" campuses.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) is set to alert students who are intending to get admitted to the universities that are flouting The Private University Act 2010.

The commission will warn at least 21 universities for flouting the laws.

"We will ask these universities to abide by the law properly, otherwise they will face the music," UGC member Prof Muhammed Alamgir told The Daily Star.

He said they would take action while keeping in mind the students now studying at the universities.

"We do not want to take stern actions like closing the universities as future of students are tied to them. We will [rather] ask them to stop the unapproved programmes. Otherwise we will put an end to those."

Regarding other problems, Alamgir said they would sit with all private university authorities to find out possible solutions.

"We will discuss a timeline with them to implement the changes," he added.

For example, UGC found out that North South University (NSU) is running unapproved BBA programmes.

The university got approval for running Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) but they are running General BBA, Finance BBA, BBA in Human Resource Management, BBA in International Business, BBA in



ISSUES

- > 21 private universities flouting rules
- > Running programmes without approval
- > Carrying out activities on unauthorised campuses

UGC STEPS

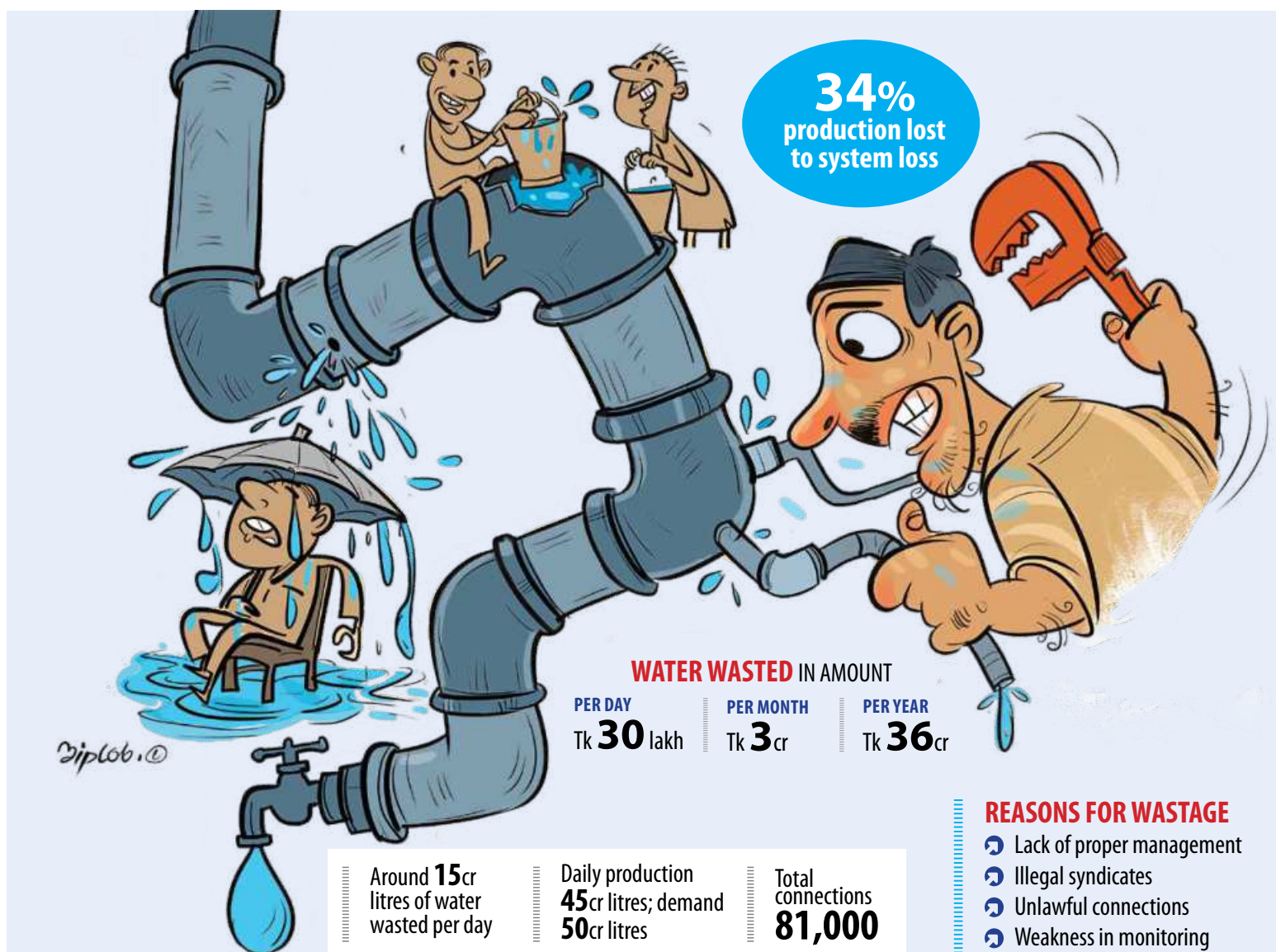
- > To warn the universities
- > Alert admission-seekers

Total private universities 107; number of students 350,000

Marketing, BBA in Management, BBA in Management Information Systems, BBA in Accounting, BBA in Economics, BBA in Entrepreneurship and BBA Supply Chain Management, according to UGC.

Contacted, NSU Vice Chancellor (VC) Prof Atiqul Islam said they are in discussion with UGC regarding the matter. "We have already applied for the approval of the

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What a waste of water!

34pc production of Ctg Wasa lost to system loss

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Chattogram

A whopping 34 percent of annual revenue of Chattogram Wasa simply drips into thin air.

Over the last few years, Chattogram Wasa has lost between 30 percent and 34 percent of its revenue to "system loss", according to sources inside the institution.

System loss is the difference between the amount of water produced and the amount of water billed or consumed.

"Thirty four percent system loss is a huge waste of production and it is alarming for any institution," said SM Nazer Hossain, central vice president of Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB). "Lack of proper management, illegal syndicate comprising a section of Wasa officials and meter readers, and weaknesses in monitoring are mainly responsible for this wastage."

The government incurs losses amounting to crores every year due to system loss, while consumers are compelled to pay more to make up a portion of the system loss, said Nazer.

According to Chattogram Wasa officials, the daily production of water is 45 crore litres against the daily demand of 50 crore litres.

The institution has over 81,000 connections in total, including the residential and commercial ones.

A residential user has to pay Tk 12.40 while a commercial user Tk 30.30 for every 1,000 litres of water.

If 34 percent of production is lost to system loss, around 15 crore litres of water is wasted in a day. If we calculate the average rate of both residential and commercial connections, price for every 1,000-litre water stands at above Tk 20.

That means, water worth over

Tk 30 lakh is being wasted every day which translates to Tk 3 crore a month and Tk 36 crore a year.

The users are the biggest victims of this system loss as a major portion of the deficit are allegedly being imposed on them in the name of "average bill".

Many of them have to pay five to ten times the amount of their monthly use.

In many areas, meters have been out of order for years but

WASA PLANS

- >> Digitising billing system
- >> Replacing old pipelines
- >> More manpower
- >> Strengthening monitoring
- >> Terminating illegal connections

FALLOUT

- >> Consumers biggest victims of system loss
- >> Major chunk of deficit imposed on them as "average bill"
- >> Many pay 5-10 times the amount of monthly use
- >> Meters out of order in several areas
- >> No initiative to replace those
- >> Many not paying bills due to overbilling
- >> Due bill in 2016 was Tk 43cr; due bill this year Tk 105cr

the Wasa authorities have not taken steps to replace them with new ones.

Instead, the meters readers insist on issuing "average bill", said many users, adding that the readers issue arbitrarily high bills taking advantage of the situation.

"The Wasa officials are not interested to replace the meters that have gone out of order," said

Nazer.

"Failing to get a new meter after repeated attempts, many users come to us. They get meters when we pursue the issue on their behalf."

"Getting a meter is the right of a client. Why would they be deprived of it? There are hundreds of illegal connections in the city. A section of Wasa officials in connivance with meter readers sell water illegally and impose the bill on the legal clients," he said, adding, "They are making crores and government is losing revenue."

Shamsul Alam, a resident of Katalganj area, said he used to pay Tk 2,000 to Tk 2,500 a month in bills to Chattogram Wasa but now pays over Tk 5,000 since 2019 after Wasa started imposing average billing.

"The meter readers bill us arbitrarily in the name of average billing although I have a meter," he said.

Expressing his resentment over the huge system loss of Chattogram Wasa, Helaluddin Ahmed, senior secretary of the ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, in a programme at Chattogram Wasa on December 13 last year asked the officials to take steps to reduce the wastage.

Against this backdrop, a high-level investigation body of Chattogram Wasa recently conducted a probe in this regard. The report was submitted to the 62nd external board meeting of Chattogram Wasa held last month.

Contacted, Mohsin Kazi, a board member of Chattogram Wasa and head of the probe body, said, "Over the last two years, the board members in every meeting expressed their resentment over the huge system loss of the institution and asked the management to take step to address the issue but it still remains a major problem."

Average billing system is being imposed on general clients to make up system loss, as a result of which many clients have lost their interest to pay bills, he said. Hundreds of complaints regarding overbilling have been lodged with Wasa, he added.

In 2016, the amount of due bill was Tk 43 crore while it stands at Tk 105 crore this year, informed Mohsin.

"During the investigation, we came to know that many meter readers are working illegally in collusion with a section of officials. They are responsible for illegal connections," he added.

"We have given nine recommendations to decrease system loss and stop harassment of clients in the name of average billing system, including introducing identity cards for meter readers, fixing a perimeter of 1,000 metres for a reader, replacing the meters that have gone out of order immediately with new ones and ensuring that a client is not compelled to pay average bill for more than three months," he said.

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SUCCESS STORY COMES TO A GRINDING HALT

Workshop run by women with disabilities faces financial woe as demand slows amid pandemic



PHOTO: STAR

MD AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

Before the pandemic hit, a group of women with disabilities were living a respectable life, working for a handloom workshop in Mymensingh's Kanchijuly area.

They produced various items, including wall mats, carpets, and floor mats, which were in high demand both locally and abroad.

But as business slowed since early last year due to the pandemic, the group is finding it hard to bounce back, even as the world slowly inches towards normalcy.

Hailing from Durgapur upazila in Netrokona, 35-year-old Nopali Chambugong, who uses a wheelchair, said she has been supporting her family from the income generated from

the workshop for the last 15 years. "But the pandemic has left us in dire straits," she said.

The workshop was started in 1997 by the women-only "Protibandhi Community Centre" at Mymensingh city, with only five workers.

Over the years, the centre has trained 500-odd workers, most of whom can now provide for themselves.

The workshop currently has around 20 artisans, who are paid on a production basis, earning an average of Tk 8,000 to Tk 9,000 per month.

Shefali Aktar, assistant director of the workshop, said Brother Eric initiated the workshop for betterment of people with disabilities. Shefali herself joined it in 2004, and was later made the supervisor.

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The duration of class hours have changed after schools reopened. After just one or two periods, these students from the capital's Kamrangirchar come back home and have a whole day to look forward to. So, they freshen up, change clothes, and get down to a nearby school field to spend a couple of hours playing football under the sun. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

GOODS TRANSPORT

Another group sticks to their call for strike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of owners and workers of goods-carrying vehicles yesterday vowed to go for a 48-hour work abstention from September 27 if the government does not meet their 10-point demand within September 26.

Bangladesh Truck-Covered Van, Tank Lorry, Prime Mover Owners and Workers' Coordination Council made the announcement at a press conference in Dhaka's Jatiya Press Club.

Osman Ali, general secretary of Bangladesh Road Transport Worker's Federation, which is backing the platform, read out the written statement.

"We want a written treaty over our demands. We will not retreat from our demands based on verbal assurance," Osman Ali said.

On August 21, the platform called a 48-hour work abstention from September 27 to press home their demands.

Their demands include investigation into the death of two transport workers, withdrawing murder cases against drivers under section 302 of the penal code for road accidents, solving driving licence-related complexities, withdrawing the "additional" advance income tax and allowing them to update their vehicle documents without having to pay any fine amid the pandemic.

The council came up with the announcement, a day after another group of owners and workers of goods transport, who have been enforcing a 72-hour strike from Tuesday, withdrew their programme on Wednesday.

Demands of the both platforms are almost similar.

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254 more hospitalised with dengue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 254 patients were hospitalised with dengue in the last 24 hours till 8am yesterday of which 57 are from outside Dhaka.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), a total of 6,349 people were diagnosed during the running month out of a total 16,705 infected. Of the total infected, 1,987 are from outside Dhaka.

At least 7,698 were diagnosed in August, 2,286 in July, 272 in June while 43 were infected in May.

According to the DGHS, 59 people have died of dengue this year. Twelve people have died in July, 34 in August and 13 in September so far.