

HSC 2024 EXAMINEES

call for a boycott of exams if candidates remain detained

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As people from all walks of life gradually continue to join in on the quota reform movements, feelings of helplessness have been permeating the air for HSC 2024 candidates. Multiple postponements have left them uncertain about their future, and an inability to attend protests in-person for a lack of security has instilled a sense of futility.

However, on July 31, a major shift took place. Following the arrests of hundreds of student, board examinees from colleges around the country took to social media to announce a firm, unified decision—examinees will boycott HSC entirely if even a single one of their batch-mates are still detained and not allowed to appear for the exams.

At the time of writing this article, students from more than twenty colleges have already announced solidarity with this decision, including, Notre Dame College, St Joseph Higher Secondary School and College, Rajuk Uttara Model College, Viqarunnisa Noon College, Ideal School and College, amongst others. This comes as a shock to most people given that the Higher Secondary Certificate exam is the final board exam in these students' lives, and arguably the most important in determining the trajectory of their futures.

In order to unearth the thought process behind such a bold decision, we talked to representatives from multiple colleges who have publicly sided with this decision.

Sadman Ishrak Arian, an examinee from Notre Dame College — which was the first institution to release a statement on this issue — says that the decision was taken purely from a humanitarian perspective. "How can we sit for the remaining exams knowing that some of us are detained and placed on remand," he asks.

He continues, "While we write exams, a few of our fellow batchmates might be on the jail cell floor, crying. Can we ever turn our backs on their tears?"

Arham Ahmed, a representative from St. Joseph Higher Secondary School & College, asserts that the motivation behind the potential boycott is the same motivation that has mobilised thousands of students to put their lives on the line: fairness for all.

"Our hearts go out to those who have been sacrificing their lives as well as going through insufferable pain to ensure equality for every student in Bangladesh. Thus, as students and responsible citizens, we have taken the united decision to refrain from going to any exams until all our peers are freed unconditionally," shared Arham.

Ridwanoor*, an HSC candidate of Dhaka College, shared similar insights into the decision-making process of the college's students, demanding justice for those who were persecuted.

He said, "It is absolutely unacceptable to think that

we would appear for the exams while our brothers and sisters who fought for us will rot in jail. Therefore, we decided to collectively forego the exams, pressuring the concerned authorities into releasing the detained examinees with immediate effect."

Now, when it comes to a major, life-altering decision like boycotting HSC, it is almost impossible to think that everyone would unanimously agree. To that end, we asked the respondents if their institutions' student bodies stood together on this matter.

According to Anan Abedin Khan Anan, all of his batchmates of Dhaka Residential Model College agreed unconditionally. He shares, "We have student-body group chats where polls were casted to learn of each

respective groups, the prefects came to a conclusion that we could not sit for the HSC examination considering the status quo. This decision has been shared in section groups as well. The consistent support from students on official online platforms, with no opposition, confirms that an overwhelming majority, if not all, are willing to boycott the HSC examination."

However, candidates from all institutions aren't as unanimously dedicated to the cause. Muneeha Mujib, a candidate from Viqarunnisa Noon College, shared how her classmates weren't particularly vocal at first about potentially boycotting the exams, but started coming together after some time.

Sharing her perspective, she says "Naturally, a sense of fear works in the examinees when the topic of boycotting exams comes up. Families of the candidates might not be onboard, some might call off their decision at the last moment. But despite the risks, we decided that it is important to set a strong precedent. That is why most of our fellow examinees voiced their decision online — to spark the change we want to see before things get out of hand."

Lastly, we asked the students about the involvement of their respective colleges' authorities behind the HSC boycott decision. Unsurprisingly, students from every institution we talked to, had the same thing to say: the decision was taken at the students' discretion without any influence by the college authorities.

Afifa Chowdhury, an HSC candidate of Dhaka City College, lamented over the lack of support they received from their institutional higher-ups since the beginning of the protests, and cited it as one of the reasons why they didn't feel the need to consult them before releasing a statement.

"It didn't particularly matter to us if the authorities took our side or not because they didn't move a finger even when our friends were being arrested or, worse," she said. "That's why we remain firm in our decision regardless of any interference from the college's administrative body."

However, Afifa mentioned that a number of their teachers were there for the students and were notified of the decision beforehand. According to her, "We are lucky to have some of our respected teachers take our side in light of this decision. Their solidarity goes a long way in boosting the candidates' confidence in their decision."

As it stands, more and more institutions are continuing to release similar statements with the same set of demands: an immediate release of all detained students, including HSC 24 examinees, or a complete boycott of the remaining HSC exams. They have made their positions "loud and clear". Now, only time will tell how authorities respond to the demands.

*Name has been changed upon request for privacy.

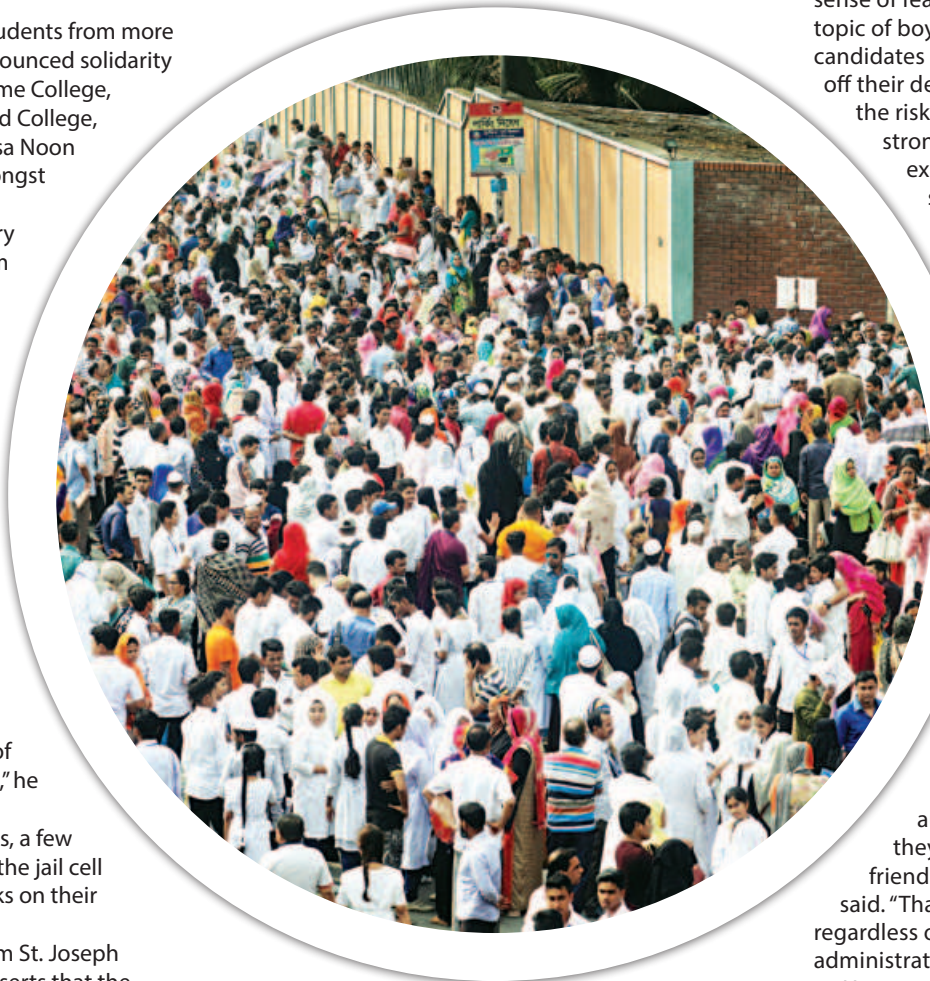


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and every member's stance on the boycott decision. Until now, the responses have been 100 percent affirmative."

Farzeen Fairouz, an examinee of Adamjee Cantonment College, shares how they carefully took the time to weigh in every factor, including their batchmates' individual stances, before making a decision.

"Our college has a student representation system that includes representatives from 27 clubs and 4 houses," she shares. "All the clubs and houses have two prefects, alongside three central prefects who hold the highest authority. After discussing with their