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## PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES Admission woes deepen for students

10 institutions opt out of cluster-based entrance test system

ARAFAT RAHAMAN

Admission seekers are set to face increased hassle with at least 10 public universities no longer participating in the cluster-based admission test system. They are holding entrance exams on their own.

All three universities under the Engineering Cluster have already broken away.

The seven others are among the 24 institutions under the General and Science and Technology (GST) Cluster that expressed their intention to split.

Prof Anwarul Azim Akhand, vice chancellor of Maulana Bhashani Science and Technology University and convener of the GST Cluster admission test committee, revealed the seven universities' decision to The Daily Star.

"We are hopeful that the rest of the universities will stay with us so that we can hold the test under the cluster," he said.

- UGC says separate admission tests too expensive
- Univs that opted out cite poor planning, delayed result
- Students concerned over preparation complexities, expenditure
- They will hold 'Long March to UGC' today demanding authorities reform, retain cluster-based system

He said the University Grants Commission (UGC) held several meetings with all the university VCs, while the education ministry issued letters to hold the admission tests under the clusters.

In late November last year, the Secondary and Higher Education Division urged the VCs to ensure that their universities remain part of the cluster admission test system.

Amid growing concerns over the withdrawal of several universities from the clusters, a group of admission seekers announced a "Long March to UGC" at Agargaon in Dhaka at 10:30am today.

The students demand that the authorities retain the system for 24 universities under the GST Cluster by removing the complexities in the system and bringing reforms to it.

The cluster admission tests were designed to cut cost, time, and hassle for admission seekers, who had to travel to different parts of the country and prepare for different types of exams before the new system was introduced.

But major universities have been leaving the system, saying it created more complications like session jams. They cited issues like delayed result publication and poor planning.

Only the Agriculture Cluster, consisting of nine universities, remains intact, according to university officials.

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Hawkers occupy a lion's share of this street near the Dhaka Trade Centre building in the capital's Gulistan, leaving only a narrow strip for traffic. As a result, passing this 150-meter section can cost commuters up to 20 minutes. The photo was taken yesterday around 1:30pm.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Service delivery suffers in cities without councillors

HELEMUL ALAM

City dwellers are still experiencing poor civic services six months after the formation of the interim government.

Local government representatives were dismissed in over 300 municipalities and 12 city corporations after the fall of the Awami League regime on August 5 last year.

The government ordered city corporation executives to do the tasks of councillors, but the volume of work appears to overwhelm them.

Councillors are authorised to issue 23 types of certificates that include the crucial certification of birth, death, succession, character and trade licences.

The interim government replaced mayors with administrators in eight city corporations on August 19. Councillors of 12 city corporations and 323 municipalities were removed on September 27.

The 12 city corporations are Dhaka South, Dhaka North, Chattogram, Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Barishal, Narayanganj, Cumilla, Rangpur, Gazipur and Mymensingh.

In the capital, the aforesaid certificates are now issued by ward-level offices with

approval from the zone-level office of the city corporations.

People complain that they have to wait for several days to get the certificates.

A councillor could issue the certificate within an hour, partly because the councillors knew many residents of their neighbourhoods, and they did not need approval from another office.

Ashiquil Islam, a banker who lives in ward 27, said he needed to make a correction on the birth certificate of his son for his admission to a school.

He said he filed an application, and after 10 days, the ward secretary told him to wait for 10 more days. "But the school requires the certificate right now."

Secretary of the ward Rifat Rahman said his office had sent the application to the office of the registrar general immediately after it was filed.

Suvendu Kumar Dev, a resident of Dinajpur town, said, "I urgently needed a citizenship certificate and filed an application with the municipality. But I received the certificate the next day."

Property disputes used to be settled by mayors and councillors. In their absence,

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**The government ordered city corporation executives to do the job of councillors, but the volume of the work appears to overwhelm them.**

## Weak deterrents fuel crime concerns

Criminals act recklessly as law enforcers' morale still low

MUNTAKIM SAAD and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Crimes such as murder, extortion and robbery continue to plague various parts of the country despite efforts by law enforcement agencies.

On January 24, Arnob Kumar Sarker, a 28-year-old MBA student at Khulna University, was shot dead by unidentified assailants around 9:15pm at the Tetultala intersection in Khulna.

On the same day, at around 1:00pm, dried fish trader Md Jahangir was shot dead in Noapara village of Raozan, Chattogram. Two men who attempted to save him were assaulted by the attackers.

The previous day, armed muggers shot a jewellery trader and reportedly stole 50 bhoiri of gold and Tk 3.5 lakh from his possession in Dhaka's Kamrangirchar area. The incident occurred around 11:00pm in the Beribad area.

On January 22, Abdul Kader Sikdar, who runs currency exchange, and his cousin Amir Hamza were stabbed in the capital's upmarket Gulshan area, with attackers allegedly making off with Tk 1 crore.

The same day, two men -- Sazu Mollah, a chauffeur, and Rimon Hossain, a vegetable vendor -- were murdered in separate stabbing incidents in Bijoy Nagar and Muga areas of the capital, reportedly over previous enmity and disputes over property.

Omar Faruk, a professor at the Department of Criminology and Police Science at Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, said

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## Govt suspends list of Bangla Academy awardees

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Just two days after announcing the 2024 Bangla Academy Literary Awards honouring ten individuals for their contributions to Bangla literature, the government has suspended its decision.

Cultural Affairs Adviser Mostofa Sarwar Farooki made the announcement in a post on his verified Facebook account last night.

Farooki said, "Our first task is to review the strange policies that enable such bizarre awards."

"We must also determine everything from how Bangla Academy will be governed to the policies it will adhere to."

"We will now move towards a comprehensive overhaul of the academy. If the country is to be reformed, why not the Bangla Academy?"

The previous announcement, made on Thursday, recognised ten individuals for their significant contributions to various genres of Bangla literature.

The honourees included Salimullah Khan for essay writing, Masud Khan for poetry, Selim Morshed for fiction, Subhasish Sinha for drama, and Faruk

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Candidates outside the Arts Building of Dhaka University after sitting for the entrance examinations for undergraduate programmes under B unit (Arts, Law, and Social Science). The photo was taken yesterday around 12:30pm.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## AL won't be allowed to run in nat'l polls

Says Adviser Mahfuj

STAR REPORT

Calling the party fascist and anti-state, Mahfuj Alam, adviser to the interim government, yesterday said the Awami League would not be allowed to take part in the general election.

"The elections will be contested among pro-Bangladesh groups only. All political parties, whether BNP, Jamaat or others, along with student organisations, workers, women, and scholars who are pro-Bangladesh, will establish future governance through a fair electoral process."

He made these remarks while exchanging greetings with students and locals at Hajiganj Bazar in Chandpur, reports a correspondent in Chandpur.

"We're working to establish a stable democratic Bangladesh, free from Awami fascism. If the Awami League returns, fascism will return with it," said Mahfuj.

He claimed that the people of the

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