

Entry tests for medical, dental colleges December 12

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Admission tests for medical and dental colleges across Bangladesh will be held on the same day, December 12, using the same question paper.

The health ministry took this decision at a meeting on Sunday, chaired by Health Adviser Nurjahan Begum.

"Admission tests for MBBS and BDS will be on the same day with the same question paper," Mollika Khatoon, joint secretary (medical education) of the Medical Education and Family Planning Division, told The Daily Star yesterday.

She said they took the decision to ease pressure on students.

Earlier on October 6, the division had decided that MBBS entrance examinations for the 2025-26 session would be held on December 12.

The meeting also endorsed some changes to the question paper this year, to assess human quality and critical thinking. However, the marks and MCQ format will remain unchanged, officials said.

The MBBS admission test for the previous session was held on January 17, and the BDS (Bachelor of Dental Surgery) test on February 28.

Man held over rape of 11-year-old in Bandarban

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Police have arrested a man accused of raping an 11-year-old girl in Naikongchhari upazila of Bandarban.

Russel Barua, a trucker, was arrested from Rashidnagar in Cox's Bazar's Ramu upazila on Sunday night.

The arrest was made after a case was filed under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act with Naikongchhari Police Station yesterday, said Masrurul Haq, officer-in-charge of the police station.

He will be produced before a court, he said.

The girl is currently undergoing treatment at a hospital in Cox's Bazar.

Locals in Rashidnagar identified Russel after seeing his photo circulated with the rape allegation on social media. They tracked him down, held him, and handed him over to the police.

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Sandhya Mondal prepares beti reeds collected from wetlands to weave traditional mats. After drying the reeds in the sun, she crafts various kinds of mats for daily use and home décor, including prayer mats. Despite the growing use of plastic and synthetic alternatives, eco-friendly beti mats remain in high demand. She produces two mats a day, selling each for Tk 450 to Tk 800. The photo was taken at Boyra Akmaner Mor in Khulna yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Amid fishing ban, Manta fishers struggle for survival

Boat-dwelling community left out of government rice aid

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

Members of the Manta community, who live on boats along rivers in the southern regions of the country, are struggling to survive after being excluded from the government's rice allocation during the ongoing 22-day fishing ban.

Without access to fishing or state assistance, many are now facing acute poverty and food insecurity.

Officials at the Department of Fisheries said they had no previous record of the number of Manta families and have now instructed all upazilas to begin collecting their data.

More than 100 Manta men and women from three areas of Barishal's Muladi upazila protested in front of the local fisheries office on October 7, demanding aid during the fishing ban.

Around 150 Manta families live on boats in the Jorkhal area of Jhalakathi's Rajapur upazila. On October 11, several families left the area in protest but later returned after assurances from local officials.

Along the banks of the Kalabodor river in Bokainagar area of Barishal Sadar upazila, about 200 Manta families live permanently on 44 boats, catching fish with rods and nets.

"We are born on the river, and we also die on the river. Fishing is our only livelihood. Without government help, how can we survive when fishing is prohibited?" said Ayub Ali Sardar, head of the Manta fleet in Bokainagar.

"Amid the ongoing ban, we can't go fishing -- but no one cares how we'll survive."



Some of us are forced to go out at night to fish secretly just to survive, which sometimes leads to clashes with fisheries officials," he said.

Akhtaruzzaman Talukder, deputy director of the Department of Social Services in Barishal, said 178 Manta people have been identified in Lahirhat of Barishal Sadar upazila. "We are working to provide them with 10kg rice and lentils each as emergency relief," he said.

According to the departments of social services and fisheries, around 2,000 Manta people live across Sadar, Hizla, Baguganj, and Mehendiganj upazilas of Barishal district. The total population across the division is estimated at around 7,000-8,000, though

officials admit no formal survey has been conducted yet.

During the 22-day fishing ban, the government allocated 3,585.95 tonnes of rice for 1,43,438 registered fisher families in Charfasson upazila -- 25 kg for each family.

Md Anisuzzaman, assistant director of the divisional fisheries office in Barishal, said, "Not all fishermen receive rice aid. Around 80 percent of registered cardholders get it. Most Manta community members previously didn't apply for fisher ID cards, so only a few have them."

"Low literacy and lack of awareness have made it difficult for them to access aid. Moreover, since they constantly move from place to place, local representatives are reluctant to include them in official lists," he added.

Won't impose my views No compromise

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be above accountability -- everyone will be able to question my activities."

"I pledge to work as a representative of the students to perform the duties of the Cucusu, not serve the purposes of my organisation."

The Cucusu polls had long been suspended under the pretext of political vengeance and violence. It's time to move past that. This will be our first vote. Regular student union elections must be held every year from now on," he added.

Rony also said he would work to ensure a safe campus by increasing the number of security personnel, enhancing security patrols, and installing CCTV cameras and proper lighting.

"To resolve the accommodation crisis, I will pressure the administration to construct multi-storey dormitories and extend existing halls. Besides, I will work to reduce session jams, recruit doctors, improve the medical centre, acquire more

ambulances, and expand the shuttle train compartments to ease transportation," he also said.

Regarding concerns about the election, Rony said, "We urged the Cucusu election commission to learn from the two recent student organisation elections and ensure a fair and transparent one here."

Explaining why he decided to run, Rony said, "Everyone knows me as a front-line activist in the anti-autocracy movement. I have come this far through movement and struggle."

About his panel, Rony said, "Almost half of our candidates are not affiliated with Shibir. Among them are five female students, one from a different religion, one physically challenged student, and several who have held positions in different clubs. I believe each of them is the best in their own posts."

"Whoever wins the Cucusu election, we will work together with all," he added.

He also said he plans to form a committee to maintain harmony between students and the local community. "The committee will include representatives from both sides and will work together to resolve any dispute."

"CU lags behind in many aspects. The only way to overcome this is to keep Cucusu active. If it functions regularly, many issues will be resolved. If elected, I'll ensure its regular operations," Shafayat said.

Claiming his panel as inclusive, Shafayat said, "We have women, indigenous students, visually impaired students, and gold-medalist athletes. We've chosen candidates based on merit and capability."

Regarding the elections, he hopes that the administration will conduct a fair and impartial election.

"Students will choose their deserving representative," he concluded.

CCC struggles to clean city canals amid funding row

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

The Chattogram City Corporation is struggling to clean its 1,600 kilometre drainage network and 57 canals due to a lack of modern machinery.

The government has finally approved a four-year old project for CCC to procure essential equipment, but with a new condition that 60 percent of the project funds will be given as a loan and the remaining 40 percent as a grant.

The CCC, which usually operates on government grants and its own funds, now finds itself in a debt trap under the new condition.

According to CCC officials, the project includes plans to purchase a range of vehicles and equipment, including five pickup trucks, 65 dump trucks of various sizes, four backhoe loaders, nine wheel loaders, one skid-steer loader, one amphibious excavator, eight excavators of different sizes, 21 mini garbage trippers, one road sweeping machine, five garbage compactors, and 200 mobile waste containers.

With a huge burden of loans already in place, the CCC is unwilling to take on more loans for equipment purchases, said its Chief Executive Officer Sheikh Muhammad Touhidul Islam.

The CCC currently owes Tk 400 crore to contractors and an additional Tk 100 crore to the government. This existing liability is the main reason Mayor Shahadat Hossain is reluctant to agree to further loan conditions, said the CEO.

With a huge burden of loans already in place, the CCC is unwilling to take on more loans for equipment purchases.

SHEIKH MUHAMMAD TOUHIDUL ISLAM
Chief executive officer

Shahadat said, "This loan condition is not a mature move by the finance ministry. CCC is a service-providing organisation, not a commercial entity, and hence it is not suited to operate under commercial loan terms paying interest."

"The ministry fails to understand the project's importance. If implemented, it would alleviate waterlogging and keep the city clean. To this end, we badly need new equipment," he added.

Earlier, at an event on September 22, he said, "Our Tk 400 crore project to procure new equipment got only Tk 298 crore approval from the finance ministry, and then they told me that Tk 160 crore of it would be given as a loan with 5 percent interest. They will only give us a Tk 60 crore grant; the rest the CCC has to bear."

In response, Foyez Ahmed Tayeb, special assistant to the chief adviser, while speaking at the same event, urged the CCC to accept the loan and advised it to become more self-reliant.

Moreover, the LGRD Ministry provided an expensive weed harvester worth about Tk 6 crore -- designed to clean floating waste and hyacinth from waterbodies -- to the CCC even though it was not requested.

The machine is unfit for Chattogram's shallow and narrow canals, said CCC Chief Sanitation Officer Commander Iktiyan Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury.

Campaigning ends

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Shikkhartii Jote panel alleged that the administration failed to act against misleading information online and maintain a fair election environment.

At a media briefing, the panel's general secretary candidate Sayed Bin Habib said,

"Their [authorities] inaction is harming the competitive atmosphere and putting candidates under mental pressure."

Meanwhile, Sakib Rume, GS candidate of the Sarbojonin Shikhhartii Sangsad panel, accused the election commission of bias.

"Student wings of BNP and Jamaat repeatedly violated the code, campaigning inside classrooms and handing out leaflets, but no action was taken," he alleged.

The seventh Cucusu election will be held on October 15.

A total of 908 candidates are contesting for Cucusu and hall union posts -- 415 for 26 Cucusu posts and 493 for 14 hall union posts.

The draft voter list includes 27,521 students. Voting will take place in 689 booths at 15 centres across five faculty buildings from 9:00am to 4:00pm.

MJF celebrates

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The celebration concluded with a prize-giving ceremony and a vote of thanks delivered by Banasree Mitra Neogi, director of Rights and Governance Programmes at MJF.

To mark the occasion, a special talk show was broadcast on Duronto TV on October 11, jointly organised by MJF and Duronto TV. The discussants included Barrister Nihad Kabir, while Prohor, Tayeba, and Prithiya took part as child representatives.

Strict security measures have also been put in place.