HSC results a wake-up call for edu sector

Govt must address learning gaps, teacher shortages, growing inequalities

This year's Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) results should serve as a wake-up call for the government regarding the state of our education system. With only 51.62 percent of candidates passing, the success rate has fallen to its lowest level in 22 years. The number of GPA-5 achievers has also dropped sharply, while the number of institutions with zero pass rate has increased. This is the second consecutive year of a steep decline in HSC pass rates, and must prompt a serious examination of what has gone wrong.

This year, the exams were held on the full syllabus, with full marks and duration, unlike last year's shortened versions. The assessment standards were also stricter. But these factors don't explain the poor results. Educationists have indicated some deep-rooted problems behind this year's performance: for instance, the candidates have experienced repeated disruptions over the past six years, beginning with the prolonged school closure during the pandemic. During that time, many students from low-income families could not participate in online classes, which widened the existing learning gaps.

The July uprising in 2024 and the subsequent instability in educational institutions further disrupted their studies. The abrupt reversal of national curriculum, teacher harassment and forced resignations, campus unrest, and deteriorating teacher-student relationships have also impacted the learning environment. Moreover, rising living costs and declining purchasing power have forced many families to cut back on their children's education spending.

This year's results have also exposed the urban-rural divide and inequalities among educational institutions. While leading colleges in Dhaka recorded pass rates of 95-100 percent, some colleges in rural and small town areas performed extremely poorly. At Kishoreganj Model College, for instance, only 6.71 percent of candidates passed, compared with 98.83 percent at Notre Dame College in Dhaka. This is concerning.

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For years, successive governments have invested in buildings and infrastructure without giving enough attention to recruiting competent teachers, providing them with regular training, and improving their salaries and benefits. The consequences are evident in subjects such as English and ICT, where pass rates have deteriorated across the country. In many institutions, teachers of other subjects are assigned to teach English despite lacking adequate proficiency, while ICT lessons remain largely theoretical. This must change.

We urge the government to investigate the reasons behind this year's poor results rather than rely on assumptions. It must conduct a thorough assessment of institutions with low/zero pass rates, examining everything from classroom teaching and teacher recruitment to institutional management and facilities. Institutions with high failure rates must be held accountable, and the struggling ones should be provided with targeted support to improve teaching quality. The government must also address the wider learning gaps that leave students in rural and under-resourced institutions at a disadvantage. Last but not the least, parents must not be harsh on their children who have failed this time and instead should support them through this difficult time.

Fix staffing gaps in govt vet services

Prolonged crisis is compromising animal healthcare

The chronic staff shortages at the country's government livestock facilities that are hindering healthcare facilities for animals is deeply frustrating. According to a report by this daily, more than half of the sanctioned posts for veterinary surgeons, field workers, artificial insemination workers, laboratory staff, and support staff in at least eight districts are vacant. These shortages are disrupting treatment, vaccination drives, disease prevention, artificial insemination, farm inspections, and advisory services, affecting farmers' livelihoods and the country's agricultural economy.

A short survey of more than two dozen livestock farmers from those districts highlighted persistent inadequacy in service delivery, which can be correlated to the 301 vacant posts among 677 sanctioned ones for veterinary personnel. The shortage is equally worrying nationwide. According to the September 2026 report of the Department of Livestock Services, only 7,261 employees are working against 12,915 sanctioned veterinary posts, leaving nearly half of the positions empty. Nearly 60 percent of the veterinary field assistant posts also remain unfilled. A livestock official said recruitment for these posts had remained suspended for nearly a decade, which is difficult to justify in a sector that depends heavily on timely intervention. The government must investigate this without delay, especially because the consequences are no longer abstract ideas.

The persistent shortage of staffers results in farmers having to make repeated trips to understaffed government facilities. Not only is this financially challenging for small-scale farmers, but such repeated, often long travels take a toll on the ailing animals as well. What perhaps contributes to unnecessary affliction is that in many cases, even existing diagnostic facilities remain underutilised because there are not enough personnel to operate them. Such shortcomings are particularly ironic considering the expansion of the livestock sector in recent times. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 43.64 percent of households across the country are involved in livestock and poultry rearing, contributing around 1.81 percent to national GDP and 16.56 percent to agricultural GDP. Leaving such a crucial sector's well-being at risk is neither wise, nor desirable.

While we welcome the Department of Livestock Services' aim to fill at least half of the vacant posts by next year, we strongly urge the government to prioritise recruitment, resolve procedural bottlenecks, and ensure that the existing laboratories and other facilities are fully functional. After all, while private veterinary services have become increasingly available in major cities, they are not a substitute for affordable public services.

The red-to-orange shift must not weaken safeguards in shipbreaking



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Bangladesh's latest shipbreaking controversy is being framed as a choice between faster industrial approvals and stronger environmental protection. On September 29, a government committee reportedly decided to move shipbreaking from "red" to "orange" environmental category. Industry leaders point to an approval process lasting around 90 days; by contrast, environment experts fear that a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) may cease to be mandatory for new yards. Both concerns deserve attention, but the more fundamental weakness is that decisions made before a yard opens, before a ship is dismantled, and before workers enter a hazardous space are not reliably connected.

That broken chain cannot be repaired just with a simpler colour code. The shipbreaking industry needs three distinct, enforceable safeguards: i) environmental clearance for the facility; ii) technical clearance for each incoming vessel; and iii) and operational authorisation for hazardous work. These safeguards serve different purposes, and treating one as a substitute for another creates precisely the gaps in which preventable disasters occur.

The first safeguard is site-specific environmental assessment. A ship recycling yard is not merely a steel-processing factory. Its footprint extends to tidal land, coastal water, sediment, hazardous waste storage, and the nearby communities. The EIA for a new facility or significant expansion should examine drainage, impermeable working surfaces, runoff, pollution containment, emergency access, waste disposal, and cumulative pressure on the coast. Public consultation matters because the surrounding communities live with these consequences. While the government should reduce duplicated paperwork and impose transparent processing deadlines, it should not make a serious assessment optional simply by lowering the industry's risk classification.

The second safeguard begins with the vessel. Every obsolete ship arrives with a different history of cargo, fuel, coatings, residues and enclosed spaces. Its Inventory of Hazardous Materials (IHM) must inform a ship-specific recycling plan, a verified sequence of dismantling, and the equipment and trained personnel needed. The Bangladesh Ship Recycling Board (BSRB) already describes separate approval requirements for facility plans and ship recycling plans. Their implementation should become a meaningful technical examination, rather than a formality repeated for each application.

One further gap concerns ships flying the flag of a state outside the Hong Kong International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships (HKC). The government inquiry into the toxic gas exposure during the cutting of scrap vessel *MT Rasi* in Ferdous Steel Ship Recycling Yard on August 14 this year reported that the ship had lacked an International Ready for Recycling Certificate because its flag state was not a party to the HKC. Bangladesh should require equivalent verified hazard documentation and risk assessments before authorising such a vessel for dismantling. An absent international certificate must never mean an absent safety check.

The third safeguard is the most immediate: no dangerous task should start without conditions being checked at the workplace. The August incident killed 10 workers, despite the yard's green status. The subsequent official inquiry reported that the gas-free certificate had not included hydrogen sulphide testing, and that critical safety supervision and emergency arrangements were absent. This was not simply a question of whether the site once qualified for a certificate. This was a failure to verify the risks of the particular compartment and operation on the particular day.

A permit-to-work system for confined-space entry, tank draining and hot work must require gas tests appropriate to the actual hazard, competent supervision, continuous or repeated monitoring when conditions may change, available rescue equipment, and named responsibility for authorisation. Workers should be able to refuse unsafe entry without losing their livelihood. If a certificate does not address the space or substance involved, the work must not proceed. These requirements need inspection at the site, not merely upload of documents.

The HKC, which came into force in June 2025, supports this distinction. It requires authorised facilities and ship-specific recycling plans, but does not make Bangladesh's domestic EIA process redundant. Nor does a green designation guarantee continuous compliance. Indeed, a facility can satisfy design requirements while an individual operation may breach basic safety practice. International standards and national environmental law should reinforce one another.

A practical solution is already on the government's agenda. In July, it announced plans for a single online service for ship recycling approvals, alongside JICA-supported work on capacity, training and better plans. That initiative should become more than an electronic application counter. It should link the Department of Environment's site approval, the BSRB's facility and vessel plans, the factory inspectorate's safety notices, and the competent authority's gas clearance records through one traceable workflow. Each organisation would retain its statutory powers, while decisions, deadlines and unresolved deficiencies become visible to other regulators.

Crucially, an unresolved serious safety notice should automatically flag the facility for the authorities responsible for operations and clearance. Inspectors need clear escalation rules, including stop-work directions where legally warranted, deadlines for correction, and documented reinspection before hazardous work resumes. Certification bodies, consultants and testing organisations should also face transparent review when their assessments prove materially incomplete. This would prevent one agency's warning from disappearing in another agency's file.

Regulation should continue after steel-cutting begins. Yards should keep verifiable records of where asbestos, oily residues, contaminated sediment and other hazardous material are transferred, and whether authorised waste facilities actually receive them. Periodic coastal water and sediment monitoring would help distinguish compliance on paper from environmental performance. Publishing a concise yard-level record of serious incidents, inspection findings, and corrective actions would also reward responsible operators and help shipowners choose credible recyclers.

This is also an issue of industrial competitiveness. Investors benefit from predictable approval times, clear technical requirements, and consistent enforcement; responsible yards lose when shortcuts become a cheaper business model. A well-designed system can give complete applications' fixed review milestones and enable parallel assessments where the law permits, without dispensing with environmental scrutiny or physical inspections. Speed should come from better coordination, not weaker tests.

Before implementing the proposed reclassification, the government should publish the legal and technical rationale, consult workers, environmental specialists and yard operators, and demonstrate that mandatory site-level scrutiny will be preserved. It should simultaneously publish a time-bound implementation plan for the integrated approval and compliance system, with measurable targets for inspection follow-up, injury reduction, and waste accountability.

Bangladesh does not need to choose between a competitive ship recycling industry and a safe one. The meaningful distinction is between certificates issued at separate desks and safeguards that remain connected until the last hazardous material leaves the yard. That is the reform the industry and its workers deserve.



A ship recycling yard is not about steel-processing only; its footprint extends to tidal land, coastal water, sediment and hazardous waste storage, not to mention the nearby communities. FILE PHOTO: **RAJIB RAIHAN**

HSC results should prompt a rethink of how we teach and assess



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This year's Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination results have shaken parents, educationists, and policymakers. The pass rate has fallen to a 22-year low, and the number of students securing GPA-5 across all 11 education boards is at an eight-year low. What's telling is that the failure rate has been rising for several years now.

Acknowledging the unsatisfactory results, Education Minister ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon announced that failed students will get a chance to retake the exams within a month. The gesture is humane, but it raises a hard question: how can students learn in a few weeks what they could not learn in two years? Realistically, this can happen only by memorising answers from question banks, the very habit that largely contributed to the deterioration in our education system.

After more than 40 years of teaching at a university, I see these results as a mirror held up to our education system. They do not prove that students are getting weaker. They warn of deeper problems in how we teach, examine, and assess.

High-stakes exams reward memorisation. Students spend their time learning answers rather than understanding ideas. In the past, rote learning could easily carry a student through to the tertiary levels. Since then, courses have multiplied, and their content has expanded, but assessment has barely changed. Good results largely depend on questions coming from the question bank. Today we live in a world of artificial intelligence, automation, and rapid change, which demands critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability. Sadly, our examination system has not kept pace.

At universities, many students suddenly face a different kind of learning. They have to analyse complex problems, question assumptions, apply knowledge to unfamiliar situations, and develop their own solutions. I have seen capable students struggle not for lack of intelligence, but because no one ever asked them to think without a model answer in hand.

Because success is measured by marks in primary and secondary levels, the whole system is built around marks. Teachers rush through the syllabus, coaching centres drill likely questions, and guidebooks replace textbooks. Anxious parents reinforce the pattern. As a result, the system produces students who can repeat information but cannot use it.

But in today's world memorising and reproducing information is exactly what machines do faster and more accurately than people. What machines cannot easily replace is judgement: asking the right question, weighing conflicting evidence, adapting to the unexpected, and taking responsibility for decisions. A graduate who can only recall answers is competing with a technology that never forgets.

This holds even for students who pass with high GPAs. And a quick exam retake cannot fix this problem. In fact, a retake within one or two months mainly tests cramming. Thus, it should be paired with remedial classes in the weakest subjects and guidance on how to learn, not just what to memorise.

Change must start in primary school, where children first learn whether education means understanding or memorising. A child encouraged to wonder, ask questions, and explain ideas in Class 1 will reach the HSC with strong foundations. A child taught only to copy and recite will not be rescued by reform in Class 11.

The most powerful lever is the examination itself, because exams shape what teachers teach and what students study. If questions can be answered from a guidebook, students will study those. Papers should therefore include more questions that ask students to explain why, compare options, interpret unfamiliar information, or apply an idea to a new situation. Classroom assessment, projects, and practical work should also count, so that a student's future does not rest on three hours in one exam hall.

Better exams, however, will achieve little without better teaching. Since many teachers were trained in the same memorisation culture, they need ongoing training in teaching for understanding, and in setting and marking questions that test reasoning. They also need manageable class sizes and a lighter syllabus, because an overloaded syllabus pushes teachers and students towards speed and memorisation. A leaner curriculum leaves time for discussion, experiments, reading and writing. Once exams change and classroom teaching improves, families will rely less on coaching centres and guidebooks.

This year's results should be treated as information, not only as bad news. Which subjects had the highest failure rates? Did poorly resourced institutions do worse? Honest, public answers would turn a bad result into a guide for reform.

A system built to reward only what students can recall fails both those who fall short and those who succeed, at a time when the world needs curiosity, judgement, and adaptability. Our objective should be to develop people who can think. The sooner we make that choice, the less we will need such a harsh mirror to show us what is wrong.

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