

PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

# Admission still an uphill struggle

*Govt yet to introduce uniform tests despite its decision to ease the process 7 years ago*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Like previous years, students will be subjected to a strenuous admission battle this year as the government has failed to introduce a uniform admission test, overdue for seven years, for admission to public universities.

Known as "cluster system", the education ministry in 2010 decided in principle to introduce a new admission procedure to ease the hassle of admission seekers and their guardians.

But some public universities have been opposing the idea as its implementation would cut the income of the universities and teachers from the sale of admission forms, invigilation and checking of answer scripts, said officials of the University Grants Commission (UGC).

With the cluster system in place, students would appear in uniform admission tests. For example, students would take one test for a place in any of the science and technology universities and another test for a place in any of the agriculture universities.

That would relieve admission seekers from time, costs and travels required to sit for separate admission tests in separate public universities in different districts.

As many as 8.01 lakh students -- 4.22 lakh boys and 3.79 lakh girls -- passed the Higher Secondary Certificate and its equivalent exams this year.

Of them, 37,969 got GPA (grade point average)-5, while 2.16 lakh scored GPA-4 and above.

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## Admission still

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The number of seats at the country's 37 public universities is around 60,000, according to the education ministry. Usually, a student having scored at least GPA-3.5 is eligible to apply to a university.

Of the seats in public universities, Dhaka University has nearly 7,000 seats, Jahangirnagar University 2,000 seats, Rajshahi University 5,000, Chittagong University 4,600, Jagannath University 3,000 and Khulna University 1,500 seats.

Every year, admission seekers face a huge amount of pressure when they prepare for separate tests for separate universities.

The candidates buy many admission forms from different universities and spend a lot of time and money for travel and accommodation. They travel, often with parents or guardians, across the country and sometimes have to check in hotels to appear in admission tests.

There are cases when candidates even take separate tests for a seat at separate faculties, even separate departments, under the same university. Sometimes the dates of admission tests of different universities coincide.

On November 2 last year, President Abdul Hamid at a programme at the UGC asked the public universities to hold admission tests centrally to reduce the hassles of admission seekers and their guardians.

But the system would not be introduced this year. The dates of admission tests of most of the public universities for the 2017-18 academic session were finalised on July 15 at a meeting of the Association of Universities of Bangladesh, a platform of vice-chancellors of the public universities.

Officials in the education ministry and the UGC said a number of public universities were not in favour of the system since the existing one was directly linked to some financial benefits.

"Many teachers who are involved in the admission process from holding the tests to checking scripts earn a good amount of money. So, they oppose the cluster system," said a top official of the ministry asking not to be identified.

In the cluster system, students' admission would be controlled centrally, and universities and their teachers would have no involvement.

UGC Chairman Prof Abdul Mannan said the president supported the cluster system, yet its implementation faced opposition from some major universities.

One of the reasons, he said, might be that the universities' authorities felt they would be deprived of the financial benefits coming from the existing system.

Prof Harun-or-Rashid, president of the platform, said, "The issue of cluster system was not on our agenda [at

July 15 meeting]."

Asked about the reason, he said, "I don't know exactly why the process was stopped midway. But I heard that it was halted due to difference in opinions among major universities."

Prof Harun, also the vice chancellor of Patuakhali Science and Technology University, said they rather discussed how to fix the dates of admission tests so that they did not coincide.

### REAL TEST AHEAD

Although the number of GPA-5 scorers dropped this year, securing a seat at a public university, which remains on the top of students' wish lists, is a big challenge as the number of seats at public universities is very few compared to the number of students who passed.

Take Imtiaz Marfique for example.

He was thrilled to bits after receiving his HSC results on Sunday as he got GPA-5. A student from the science group, Imtiaz wishes to study engineering and his first choice is Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.

As many as 28,935 students got GPA-5 like him from the science group. But Buet can accommodate only 1,100 students.

"Despite getting GPA-5, you cannot get admission to Buet. You have to be sure that you will get admission to your desired institution. The real test is ahead and I will have to make it,"

Imtiaz said.

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