

Education in peril

Anxiety grips students, guardians as JSC-JDC exams coincide with opposition's planned blockade, hartal next month



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Around 20 lakh schoolchildren are all set to bear the brunt of the ongoing political turmoil, thanks to the BNP-led opposition's planned three-day blockade on Monday, which coincides with the start of the JSC and JDC examinations.

And the woes of these children and their guardians are unlikely to end with the end of the blockade, as the opposition alliance plans to intensify its street agitation in the coming weeks to realise its demand for a non-party election-time government.

Also worried and panicked over such programmes are about 30 lakh primary and ebiedat students, as their exams begin on November 20.

Officials say they have completed all preparations for the Junior Secondary Certificate and Junior Dakhil Certificate tests. It will be difficult for them to reschedule the exams if the opposition keep enforcing hartals and blockades.

Exams in two subjects of the JSC and JDC are scheduled for Monday, the day the three-day possible blockade of roads, rail and waterways begins. The exams of these class-VIII school

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and madrasa students under nine education boards are scheduled to end on November 20.

The BNP-led 18-party alliance's decision about the three-day blockade came on Tuesday night. Party insiders say they may call more shut-downs or blockades until mid-November, when the Election Commission is expected to announce the polls schedule.

"After enforcing a three-day blockade in the first week of November, the opposition alliance plans to enforce hartal or blockade in the second week as well," a BNP policymaker told The Daily Star yesterday, requesting anonymity.

Demand and the EC declares the election schedule, the opposition will go for non-stop agitation programmes, including hartal and blockade to resist the polls, party sources said.

"We want a solution to the ongoing crisis though talks. But under no circumstances our programmes will be relaxed," Moudud Ahmed, a BNP standing committee member, told this newspaper yesterday.

Such a plan is sure to wreak havoc on the students and their guardians, not to mention the people in general.

The three-day blockade will also put the country in a holiday trap. If the blockade is enforced, the first week of November will have two work days -- Sunday and Thursday.

But then on Sunday, the ruling Awami League is to hold a rally in the capital where the party

expects to gather a huge number of leaders and workers from adjacent districts. This may very well collapse the capital's traffic system.

Thursday, the remaining work day of the week, will see a BNP rally in the capital.

Parties are yet to announce programmes for the second week of November, but it is likely that they will.

Meanwhile, examinations, guardians and teachers expressed deep frustration over the planned blockade and urged the political parties to refrain from announcing such programmes during examination.

"We are in a great uncertainty as to whether our examinations will be held on time. It hampers our preparation badly," said an examinee of Vignamisa Noon School and College.

Guardians say they are very concerned over the political situation and fear it will affect the academic lives of millions of students.

"Our children had suffered a lot due to the hartals during the SSC and HSC examinations. Their exams were postponed one after another, ruining their preparation at that time. We don't want such ordeals to return," said Nizam Uddin, a guardian from Mirpur.

He said it was difficult to go out of home on hartal days as violence, arson and bomb explosions were seen almost everywhere during shutdown.

Such scenes affect children's psychology, he added.

"We would make a fervent appeal to the political leaders to reconsider their programmes," Nizam said.

nal month for students.

the annual examinations will begin in the middle of next month. The schools give importance at lessons and last minutes' advices during this time. But things will be difficult if such volatile political situation persists," said a senior teacher of a reputed school in the city.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid fears the education sector may suffer a heavy blow if the political situation worsens further.

Apart from the 20 lakh JSC-JDC examinees, academic life of around four crore children of up to secondary level will be badly hampered," he told The Daily Star.

He urged the opposition to refrain from enforcing any programme that harms education. "The children are our future. So, please reconsider your decision."

18-Party Meeting

Chiefs of the alliance components last night met BNP chief Khaleeda Zia at her Gulshan office and recommended enforcing three days hartal instead of blockade.

Most leaders said they should call hartal, keeping educational institutions out of its purview considering the examinations, including that of the O and A-levels, meeting sources said.

Khaleeda spoke in favour of blockade, but she was yet to make the final decision.

The decision in this regard will come tomorrow, said Bangladesh Islamic Party Chairman Abdul Mobin, who attended the meeting.