

## VAT ON TUITION FEES

# Protests spread to cities

## Indefinite strike at all private universities from today

Staff correspondent

AGITATED students of private universities in the capital continued to protest for the fourth consecutive day on Saturday while their fellows at Savar, Chittagong, Sylhet and Rajshahi joined in, for withdrawal of value added tax imposed on their tuition fees.

A group of students skipped classes and exams on the first day of their three-day strike being enforced at the private universities. Besides, another group are set to begin strike at private universities for an indefinite period starting today.

Authorities of several private universities postponed all classes and exams for today, while some delayed the

start of semester scheduled today.

Students in the capital also held sit-ins, brought out processions and formed human chains at Dhanmondi, Tejgaon industrial area, Gulshan and Banani.

Students blockaded Dhaka-Aricha highway in Savar, Chittagong-Cox's Bazar highway in Chandanai in Chittagong, held sit-ins near Central Shaheed Minar at Chowhatta in Sylhet, Shaheb Bazar and Mani Chatter in Rajshahi.

The strikes at campuses were held peacefully, said Jotirmoy Chakraborty, one of the organisers of the 'No Vat on Education', a platform of protesting students that called the three-day strike.

World University of

Bangladesh suspended all its classes and examinations from 2.30pm Saturday noon until further notice, according to a notice issued by its registrar.

'Due to unavoidable circumstances BRAC University would remain closed on Sunday,' said university registrar, Muhammad Sahool Afzal. Authorities of Daffodil International University took a similar decision.

All examinations at Shanto-Mariam University of Creative Technology scheduled from September 12 were postponed until further notice.

Classes of fall semester 2015 of South East University will begin from September 30 instead of September 15, and admission process

of BBA programme of fall semester of Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology will begin on October 4 instead of September 13, according to the authorities.

A proposed 10 per cent VAT on tuition fees of private universities, medical and engineering colleges was later lowered to 7.5 per cent following agitation of students in June when the parliament adopted the finance bill for the new fiscal year.

Private university students in the capital began their current spell of protests on September 9 in front of East West University and a police attack on them left at least 30 injured.

Protests, staged by several thousand private university

students in major intersections, brought the capital's traffic to a complete halt on Thursday, causing immense suffering to city dwellers.

On Saturday, no classes and exams took place at different universities including Stamford University, State University, United International University, World University, Northern University, Asia Pacific University and others.

Private university students brought out rounds of processions at the capital's Dhanmondi and Kolabagan area. Students of State University brought out a procession from in front of their campus at Satmasjid road that paraded different areas of Dhanmondi.

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Students of World University demonstrated in front of their Asad Gate campus and brought out a procession in the area. Students of different universities formed a human chain near the Labaid Hospital at Dhanmondi. A group of students also took part in a sit-in at Rapa Plaza intersection on Mirpur Road.

Private university students brought out a procession in Kalabagan area near Daffodil University campus. Protestors of American International University-Bangladesh and Atish Dipnaker University brought out processions at Gulshan and Banani area.

Students of Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology staged protests in front of their campus in Tejgaon Industrial Area.

Salauddin Mithu, one of the organisers of student protests taking place at East West University, said they

would enforce strike at all educational institutions across the country today, and indefinite strike at all private universities starting today.

He said they rejected the government's explanation that the university authorities, not the students, would pay the VAT.

He said the protests would continue till the withdrawal of the VAT.

There are over 4.6 lakh students at 83 private universities, according to the University Grants Commission. Most of the universities are in the capital and some are in Chittagong, Sylhet and others districts.

New Age Correspondent in Savar reported several hundred students of Gono Bishwabidyalay in Savar, on the outskirts of the capital, blocked the busy Dhaka-Aricha highway at Bishmail area for more than one hour from about 11:45am.

Passengers on the high-

way suffered due to a seven-kilometre traffic jam on the highway, said witnesses.

Ashulia police officer-in-charge Mostafa Kamal said the agitated students, on request from police, withdrew the blockade at about 12:45pm.

New Age correspondent in Chittagong reported students blocked Chittagong-Cox's Bazar highway for an hour starting from 10.30am for which a huge traffic jam was created on both sides of the highway, triggering sufferings among the commuters.

Several hundred students staged a sit-in blocking the busy Zindabazar road in front of the Shaheed Minar at Chowhatta in Sylhet city, reported New Age correspondent in the city.

Students of the International University, Metropolitan University, Leading University, North East University, Jalalabad Medical College, Sylhet Woman

Medical College and Park View Medical College participated in the sit-in.

In Rajshahi city, students marched around Shaheb Bazar and Mani Chatter around noon, said Rajshahi Metropolitan Police's assistant commissioner Iftekhayer Alam.

The National Board of Revenue in a statement on Thursday said the authorities of private universities, not the students, would pay the 7.5 per cent VAT imposed on the tuition fees.

Prime minister Sheikh Hasina in the parliament and finance minister AMA Muhith at a press conference in Sylhet on Thursday endorsed the revenue board's decision.

Association of Non-Government Universities of Bangladesh urged the government to reconsider its decision for imposing VAT on the private universities from a meeting on Friday.