

public, private universities: Confusion added to chaos

Dipu Moni declares May 24 for resuming in-person classes hrs after PM gave instruction to assess situation for reopening edn institutions



Education Minister Dr Dipu Moni. Star file photo

Staff Correspondent

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday instructed the education ministry to review whether educational institutions, which have been closed since March 17 last year due to the pandemic, could be reopened.

Surprisingly, hours after the instruction was given at a cabinet meeting, Education Minister Dipu Moni announced that in-person classes at universities would resume on May 24 after the Eid-ul-Fitr. Besides, the student dormitories at those universities will reopen on May 17, she said.

Students demonstrating for the reopening, however, rejected the announcement and demanded that their universities reopen on March 1. They continued their protests on their campuses yesterday.

Talking to The Daily Star, sources in the cabinet meeting said no specific date regarding reopening of educational institutions was mentioned in the prime minister's instruction.

While briefing reporters after the meeting, Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam also did not give any dates.

"Now educational institutions in European countries, except England, are open. From this point of view, the prime minister instructed the education ministry to review the matter and see whether we can do the same with our educational institutions," he said.

"We'll sit in a meeting with all concerned, including consultants, experts and law enforcement agencies, within the next five to six days to make a decision on the issue," he added.

Wishing anonymity, a minister, who attended the meeting, told this newspaper that the education minister's announcement was "premature" and it created "confusion".

Addressing a virtual press conference that began around 2:00pm, the education minister said, "In-person classes at all public and private universities will resume on May 24, after the Eid-ul-Fitr. All residential halls of universities will reopen on May 17."

All procedures to this end will be completed following the health guidelines, she said, adding that 1.30 lakh residential students, 15,000 teachers and other staff members of public universities would be vaccinated before May 17.

"Vaccination is a must for students if they want to return to their halls. But if any student has any logical medical ground for not taking the jabs, the issue will be taken into consideration," she said.

No examinations will be held at those universities before the reopening. But online classes will continue, the minister said.

There are 48 public and 107 private universities in the country. About 41 lakh students are currently enrolled into the public universities and their affiliated colleges, while the private universities have around 3.50 lakh students.

At the cabinet meeting, which began around 10:30am, the PM instructed the authorities concerned, including the education ministry, to examine whether the current situation was conducive to reopening educational institutions, said the cabinet secretary. The PM joined the meeting from the Gono Bhaban via videoconference

He said that the prime minister also instructed to ensure that all teachers, officials and other employees were vaccinated before the reopening.

Besides, the PM asked to ensure safety of the residential students of all universities, he added.

On March 17 last year, the government closed all educational institutions aiming to contain the spread of coronavirus. The closure led to cancellation of exams, leaving academic calendars in disarray.

The government in phases extended the closure until February 28.

Authorities of school, colleges and universities started online classes but many students still remain out of it due to a lack of digital devices and internet facilities.

'LEAVE HALLS'

At the press conference, the education minister said if students have already gathered at any dormitories, they will have to leave immediately. "Government directives should be honoured. Otherwise, actions will be taken in line with the existing law," she warned.

Dipu Moni said universities will not take responsibilities for any "illegal" activities outside the campus.

She voiced the warning when several groups of students of Jahangirnagar University on Saturday broke into at least six dormitories. They demanded reopening of the halls.

They were still in the halls when this report was filed around 11:00pm, our correspondent at the university reports.

Students of Dhaka University also broke the locks on the doors of two halls yesterday, demanding the reopening of the university dormitories.

Residential students of Dr Muhammad Shahidullah Hall and Amar Ekushey Hall entered the hall premises in the afternoon, breaking the locks. They demonstrated for about half an hour demanding the dormitories are reopened.

BCS EXAMS TO BE DELAYED

Dipu Moni also said the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination will be delayed in line with the reopening of universities and halls.

The government will take necessary steps so that students who have crossed the age limit, due to the closure, can sit for the exams, she said.

Preliminary examination of the 43rd BCS is scheduled to be held on August 6, according to the Bangladesh Public Service Commission.

On January 27, the BPSC extended the deadline till 6:00pm on March 31 for applicants, from January 31.

This was announced after the University Grants Commission requested the BPSC in January to extend the deadline, as many final semester students would not be able to apply for the sought-after government jobs as their university exams could not be held during the pandemic.

In a letter, the UGC said all educational institutions remain closed since March last year. Because of this, honour's and master's exams were not held as per schedule.

Keeping this issue in mind, many public universities have started preparation to hold final honour's and master's exams, the letter added.

Dipu Moni also said the date of admission tests at different universities would be fixed following discussion with the educational institutions through the UGC.

Officials have recently said 20 public universities would hold uniform admission tests, likely in June-July.

The tentative date for admission test for students from the humanities group is June 19. For the business group, it is June 26 and the science group either July 3 or July 10, said officials.

Besides, Chattogram University of Engineering and Technology (Cuet), Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology (Ruet) and Khulna University of Engineering and Technology (Kuet) have set June 12 as a tentative date for a single entry test.

The 20 public universities include Jagannath University, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Khulna University, Begum Rokeya University, Islamic University, Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science and Technology University, Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, Noakhali Science and Technology University, Comilla University, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Jessore University of Science and Technology, Pabna University of Science and Technology, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science and Technology University, University of Barisal, Rangamati Science and Technology University, Rabindra University, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Digital University, Sheikh Hasina University, and Bangamata Sheikh Fojilatunnesa Mujib Science and Technology University.

Besides, a cluster-based admission test for seven agricultural universities is likely to be held on May 29.

The tentative dates for Dhaka University admission test are May 21, 22, 26, 27 and June 5, while it is June 10 for Buet.

The entry test for Jahangirnagar University is likely to be on June 6-10 and June 20, added the officials.

In another development, the National University yesterday said examinations at all colleges under the university would remain suspended until further notice.