

Student union election: DU, JU set for Sept polls, other univs lag behind

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A frontal view of the Ducusu Bhaban. File photo

The much-anticipated Dhaka University Central Students' Union (DUCSU) election is likely to be held in the second week of September.

The official schedule will be announced on July 29, said DUCSU Chief Election Commissioner Prof Jasim Uddin yesterday after a final meeting with stakeholders at the university's Senate Bhaban.

"It typically takes 40 to 45 days after the schedule is announced. We are committed to holding the election within this timeframe," he said.

DU is the second public university, after Jahangirnagar, to announce a tentative timeline for student union polls. Rajshahi and Chittagong universities are yet to declare concrete plans, leaving students frustrated.

The demand for student union elections gained momentum after the July uprising, which reignited calls for democratic representation on campuses.

However, the process has been delayed due to bureaucratic inertia and unresolved student grievances.

“DU last held election in 2019 after a gap of 29 years; JU in 1992; RU in 1989 and CU in 1990. BUET last held polls in 2001, BAU in 1998, and SUST in 1997.

Though the student union election is supposed to take place every year, DU last held it in 2019 after a gap of 29 years since 1990; Jahangirnagar University in 1992; Rajshahi University in 1989 and Chittagong University in 1990.

Currently, seven public universities -- DU, RU, JU, CU, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU), and Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST) -- have provisions in their ordinances that allow student union elections. BUET last held polls in 2001, BAU in 1998, and SUST in 1997.

DHAKA UNIVERSITY

In December last year, DU authorities initiated the process of holding the DUCSU polls.

They formed a 10-member Election Commission on June 16 and approved a revised constitution. As part of preparations, returning officials held discussions with student representatives from various departments and institutes earlier this month.

DUCSU CEC Prof Jasim yesterday said that to ensure transparency and fairness, voting will be conducted at six centralised neutral centres. These centres will accommodate voters from all residential halls across the university.

Addressing concerns over voter eligibility, the commission clarified that students from the 2018–19 academic session whose master's results have already been published will not be eligible to vote or contest in the DUCSU or hall union elections.

Others who will not be included in the voter list are 385 of the named DU students, among 500, in a case filed with Shahabag Police Station over an attack on July 15 during the uprising last year. Around 126 others who were suspended based on a university probe will also not be allowed to vote.

JAHANGIRNAGAR UNIVERSITY

JU authorities recently announced a fresh election date -- September 11 -- after deferring the polls previously scheduled for July 31.

Seeking anonymity, a JU faculty member said final decisions on disciplinary actions against the students involved in attacks on July protesters last year will be made by August 4, and the election schedule will be announced the same day.

A JU committee is supposed to complete its probe into July mass uprising-related allegations against faculty members and staffers by August 31. The investigation report will be sent to the International Crimes Tribunal in early September. The polls date was set, considering all these issues, said the faculty member.

Student organisations at JU appear divided over timing of the polls.

Chhatra Dal and Gonotantrik Chhatra Sangsad insist that the Chhatra League activists involved in attacks on July protesters must be brought to justice before polls are held.

Zahir Uddin Babor, convener of JCD unit at JU, said, "The university administration has yet to bring to book the BCL activists involved in the attacks. They still occupy seats in dormitories, and many teachers and staffers who backed them hold key posts. A fair and acceptable election is not possible under such circumstances."

On the other hand, Amartya Roy, president of JU Chhatra Union, said, "We view the deferral of polls as a calculated move. It suggests that the administration and certain student bodies don't want the election at this time. If the polls are postponed again, it will be seen as a repetition of past tactics."

CHITTAGONG UNIVERSITY

Following students' demands, the administration formed a committee on January 4 to draft guidelines for Chittagong University Central Students Union (CUCSU) election.

The committee was supposed to submit its report by January 26 but failed.

On February 17, the authorities held a meeting with student groups and pledged to prepare a CUCSU constitution based on their observations. The draft constitution now awaits Syndicate's approval.

CU Pro-VC Prof Kamal Uddin said election guidelines will be presented at a Syndicate meeting on July 24. "We aim to hold the polls by September and are moving forward with that target in mind."

Roman Rahman, member secretary of Student Rights Council, said, "We held meetings [with university authorities] and heard promises but there is still no election roadmap."

Sudipto Chakma, president of CU Chhatra Union, said the administration appears unwilling to hold the election as it will empower students.

RAJSHAHI UNIVERSITY

The university authorities have yet to publish the voter list, which was scheduled to be released in May as per an election roadmap.

In protest, students under the banner of "March for Our Rights" staged a sit-in recently, demanding RUCSU polls as early as possible.

"We are deeply frustrated with the administration's failure to hold polls as promised," said Salahuddin Ammar, former coordinator of Students Against Discrimination.

"Despite the VC's assurance in September last year that the election would be held within four months, no election schedule has been announced yet," he added.

RU Registrar Prof Iftekhar Alam Masud said the RUCSU Election Commission hoped to announce the schedule by June but was held back by security concerns.

RUCSU Chief Election Commissioner Prof Amzad Hossain said, "I can't give a date, but we hope to hold the election very soon."

SUST AND BUET

SUST VC Prof AM Sarwaruddin Chowdhury said they are having discussions on how they can hold polls soon but are yet to reach any decision.

Asked about student union polls in BUET, VC Prof Abu Borhan Mohammad Badruzzaman said in a WhatsApp message that there have been no discussions on the matter yet.

(Our correspondents from DU, JU and RU, and a reporter from CU contributed to this report.)