

Students' demo stops Dhaka

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universities in the current budget. The decision drew widespread criticism from students and guardians.

Yesterday, students of several universities, including East West, North South, Brac, Independent, State University, United International University (UIU), Stamford and Daffodil, began their demonstration around 10:00am.

Holding banners and placards, they were seen peacefully chanting and writing slogans on the streets such as "No VAT on Education," "Education is not a product" and "Why firing on students?"

Students of Brac University, American International University of Bangladesh and South East University

would eventually fall on the students as the authorities would use some or other pretext to increase the fees to adjust their expenses.

Students of East West University continued their demonstration from around 11:10am, chanted anti-VAT slogans taking position near Rampura Bridge for a second straight day. They left the place for the day around 6:00pm.

During the demonstration throughout the day, vehicles stood bumper-to-bumper in a massive traffic tangle. As a result, hundreds of commuters suffered being stranded for hours on the road amid the sweltering heat.

Traffic situation went out of control by 2:00pm, with the entire stretch of the road from Mohakhali to airport got jam-

They also demanded immediate actions against the police officials who attacked the students of East West University on Wednesday.

They later staged another protest rally in front of Chittagong Press Club.

In Sylhet, students of Sylhet Metropolitan University, Leading University, International University and South East University blocked streets at Court Point, Chourasta, Surma Point and Taltola areas around 10:30am.

Several hundred commuters were stranded on roads, reports our Moulvibazar correspondent.

Meanwhile, left-leaning student body Bangladesh Chhatra Federation in a press release yesterday expressed solidarity with the private university students.



Students of East West University stop a bus on the Rampura-Badda road near Aftabnagar. As on Wednesday, they blocked the road for hours yesterday as well, protesting a 7.5 percent VAT on 'tuition fees' at private universities. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

marched on the streets of Mohakhali and Gulshan while hundreds from North South and Independent universities staged a sit-in on Progoti Sarani at Bashundhara.

Students of Stamford University blockaded Dhanmondi's Satmasjid road and those from Daffodil university blockaded Mirpur Road in Sukrabad area.

Sudipto, a sixth-semester student of Computer Science and Engineering at UIU, said after the police action on East West University students, they communicated with students from different universities on social media overnight and decided on the demonstration programmes.

"The public universities could not accommodate us. So we are studying in the private varsities, spending huge money. Imposing VAT is nothing but an additional burden on us," said Monwarul Alam, a student of Brac University.

Kakon Biswas, a student of East West University, said it was not that only the children from well-off families study in private universities. A huge number of students come from the limited income families.

"Many guardians have already sold out their land to pay the tuition fees. And if the tuition fees are increased further, they won't be able to continue funding their children's education," he said.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith said the universities would have to pay the VAT, not the students.

But Kakon Biswas argued that even if the universities were to pay, the burden

packed with vehicles. Other areas saw a similar situation.

School-going children and patients were among those who suffered the most. A five-minute drive took Zahed Khan two hours as he was taking a patient from Tejgaon to a hospital in Mohakhali.

While caught in the jam, he saw another ailing woman being taken out of an ambulance and carried to a nearby hospital since her already critical condition worsened further.

Hundreds were seen walking to and from their destinations, in some cases for several kilometres.

Saif Al Din Abdullah, a mechanical engineer, said he could not attend an important meeting at Gulshan as he was stuck on Progoti Sharani for nearly two hours.

However, the former Buet student added, "I can understand why the students are agitating. VAT on education is not acceptable."

There are 83 private universities in the country where about four lakh students study.

DEMO IN CHITTAGONG, SYLHET

Several hundred students from different private universities of the port city demonstrated at the GEC intersection blocking the busy CDA Avenue for an hour till noon, reports our Chittagong correspondent.

The demo created a two-kilometre gridlock from GEC intersection to Lalkhan bazaar and GEC to Muradpur.

The students chanted slogans protesting the government decision to impose VAT and also against the finance minister.