

Admission to class-1: Heavy loads on tender shoulders

Test worries drive parents to coaching

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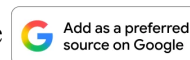


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The government's move to reintroduce written admission tests for class-1 from the next academic year has sparked concern among parents, with many turning to coaching centres and private tutors to help their children prepare for the exams.

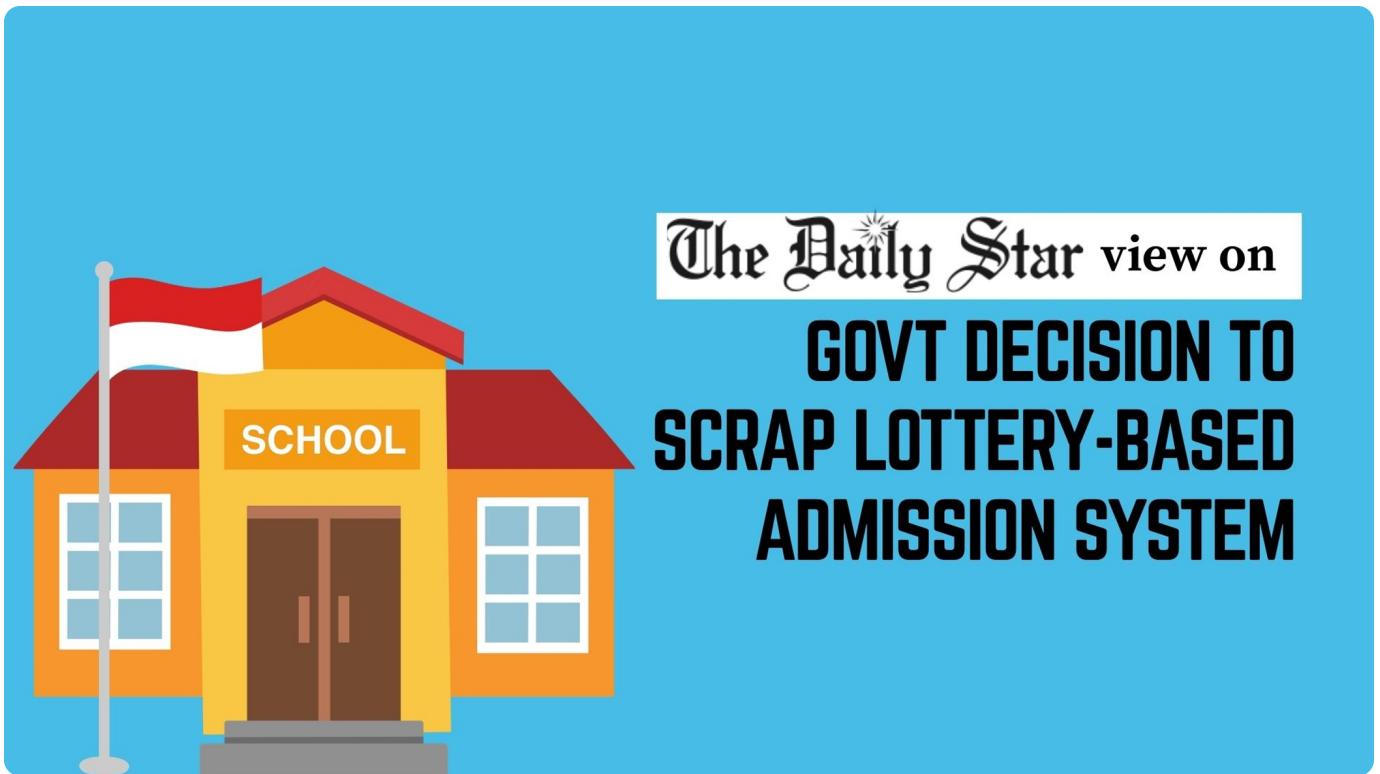
The tests are set to replace the lottery-based admission system for public schools.

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In an effort to allay parents' concerns, Education Minister ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon last month said the entrance process for young children would be simple and would not encourage coaching or private tutoring.

However, visits to several coaching centres in the capital revealed that they are already offering dedicated courses and school-specific guidance for class-1 admission seekers.



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Why reintroduce school admission exams?

Parents and educationists said the decision risks pushing children into competition even before school life begins.

“Children should not be required to take tests to gain admission to schools. It is an injustice to them and also to their families,” said Mohammad Mojibur Rahman, a professor at the Institute of Education and Research at Dhaka University.

- Coaching centres offering school-specific courses
- 6-month preparation course costs up to Tk 9,000
- School "branding" key reason for admission race
- Experts urge uniform admission process for class-1
- DSHE says new admission process not finalised yet

He warned that such pressure could affect children's future learning.

The lottery-based admission system for class-1 was introduced in public schools in 2011 to reduce reliance on coaching centres and address allegations of irregularities in the admission process.

On March 16 this year, the education minister announced that the system would be discontinued from the next academic year.

In a notice issued the same day, the Secondary and Higher Education Division said the lottery-based admission system for class-1 to 9 in government and private schools will be scrapped from 2027 and that a new admission process will be introduced following consultations with all stakeholders.

According to the Annual Primary School Statistics 2024, 35.46 lakh students were enrolled in class-1 across all types of primary schools in the country. Of them, 17.48 lakh were boys and 17.99 lakh were girls.

COACHING CENTRES GET BUSY AGAIN

Seeking anonymity, the founder of a coaching centre in Farmgate said they have launched a dedicated batch for children seeking admission to class-1 at Holy Cross School. The centre is charging Tk 1,700 for enrolment and a monthly fee of Tk 1,200.

Similar preparation programmes are being offered for admission to Viqarunnisa Noon School and College and Adamjee Cantonment Public School, he said, maintaining that the centre tries to ensure the preparation does not become a source of stress for children.

At another coaching centre in Farmgate, a tutor said they provide admission preparation for 39 schools in Dhaka and admit around 20 children in each batch.

The centre charges Tk 3,000 as admission fee and Tk 3,500 as monthly fee, meaning one has to pay Tk 6,500 at the time of enrolment. Classes are held three days a week, both in person and online, the tutor said.

In Mirpur-1, a coaching centre official said the institution runs three batches daily for prospective Class-1 students amid rising demand for preparatory courses.

Children attend classes four to five days a week. The centre charges Tk 8,000-9,000 for a six-month package, while those who choose not to take the package pay Tk 2,000-2,500 per month.

Many parents have opted for home tutors instead of coaching centres.



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Rumi Akter, a homemaker and a resident of Pallabi, said she hired a tutor for her seven-year-old son for Tk 3,500 a month as she preferred not to send her child to coaching centres.

Questioning the government move to reintroduce class-1 admission tests, she said children are being forced to compete at a very tender age.

Fatema Chowdhury, the mother of a six-year-old girl, also expressed a similar view, saying a child of six or seven years of age is too young to sit an admission test.

“How much do they really understand? These exams will put them under huge stress,” said Fatema, a resident of Shewrapara.

One parent, however, supported the government move. Sharmin Akter Rima from Mirpur-10 area blamed the lottery system for her son not being able to get admitted to several schools even though he can write his name and read simple sentences.

“The outcome of a lottery depends entirely on luck. If my child was unlucky in the draw, does that mean he is undeserving?”

WHAT EXPERTS SAY

Helal Uddin Ahmed, associate professor of the National Institute of Mental Health, said the pressure around school admission comes mainly from unequal school quality and the “brand image” of a few institutions.

The problems surrounding school admissions cannot be solved simply by choosing between a lottery and admission tests.

Noting that the lottery system is not a scientific approach, he said, “Through a lottery, we leave a student to fate at the very beginning of school life.”

On the other hand, admission tests create pressure on children and often turn into a competition not only for children, but also for parents.

Parents should not turn a child's school admission into a "war", as many feel compelled to get their children admitted into certain schools because those institutions have become social "brands".

"If schools were of similar quality, this competition would not exist."

He suggested that the government reduce the competition by making the admission process uniform and considering area-based restrictions.

"Every school's admission test should follow a uniform method." At the same time, families must avoid putting excessive pressure on children over school admission, he added.

Giving a similar opinion, Prof Mojibur said the lottery system is not a long-term solution. "When you cannot solve a problem, you leave it to luck. It can be a temporary measure."

The proper solution is to improve all neighbourhood schools so children can study near their homes under a catchment-area system, he noted.

A child should study at a school near home. But for such a system to work, all schools must have proper teachers, toilets, infrastructure and learning conditions, he said.

He further said coaching centres will automatically lose relevance if schools completed children's learning within classrooms.

"If children's schoolwork is completed at school, they will go home and spend time with family and play. Why should schoolwork be dragged into the home? The main focus has to be school-centric learning," he added.

When contacted, Khan Moinuddin Al Mahmud Sohel, director general of the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, said the admission process for the next academic year has not yet been finalised.

Referring to coaching centres offering courses for class-1 admission, he said they would look into the matter and bring it to the education minister's attention.

Education Minister Milon and Secretary Abdul Khaleque did not respond to phone calls and WhatsApp messages.

