

Businesses lament political intolerance

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being arrested on the mere suspicion that they might create anarchy. Restrictions were clamped on city hotels about accepting guests.

Paralysing road communications in the city, police have requisitioned a large number of buses, trucks and pickups.

Operators have been asked by the government to keep inter-district buses and launches off the routes in efforts to stop a streaming of people into the rally.

Transportation of essential commodities, such as vegetables, was disrupted. Businesses passed a dull day amid a low turnout of buyers in city markets.

"A panicky situation prevails among people in the country. All are afraid of what is going to happen tomorrow [today]," said Azad.

"It is totally unfortunate for the nation," he said. "We do not want this kind of political atmosphere forty years after gaining independence."

"We are now under a democratic government and it should show the highest level of tolerance."

The FBCCI chief said uncertainty dampened business confidence. Many are not sending out trucks on the highways in apprehension of hijacking or attacks today.

Supply of vegetables from North Bengal as well as fish to Dhaka city is also affected.

The FBCCI leader urged both the ruling and opposition parties to resolve their disputes through dialogue both in and out of parliament for the sake of industrialisation and a good image of Bangladesh abroad.

"Political uncertainty

creates fear and thus discourages new investment. If domestic investors do not feel confident, foreign investment too will not come," he said.

Shafiu Islam Mohiuddin, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said people did not want to see any political programme that can create panic among the people.

"Our country is already suffering from a lot of problems. We should not create further problems that can only affect our progress," he said, urging all to sit for a dialogue.

"It is not that we are fighting to free Bangladesh from Pakistan. Why shall we be engaged in confrontation?" said Shafiu, who represents a major sub-sector of the garments industry, the main

export earner.

Fazlul Hoque, former president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said the current political environment was not healthy at all.

"It is not desirable," he said, adding the government could have handled the opposition programme in a much better way.

Fazlul said many people failed to join office yesterday. They might do the same tomorrow.

"It's an environment of unease. Nobody loves to live with it," said Fazlul who did not allow his son to go to university yesterday. "I felt uncomfortable allowing him to go to university."

Mir Nasir Hossain, former president of FBCCI, feared that the economy might get worse due to deterioration of

political atmosphere.

While the government shows weaknesses in financial sector management, Eurozone crisis bites exports receipts, he said.

He said businessmen did not want strikes. "But meetings are normal democratic norms. It should not be obstructed."

Amjad Khan Chowdhury, president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said political parties and leadership should reach a consensus in the greater interest of the country and the economy.

"We as business people want a conducive environment to do business in the domestic market as well as in export business," he said, adding that confrontational politics took liking to a strain on the economy.

BTRC serves

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of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), said ETV did not have a radio equipment licence which is a requirement for any kind of broadcasting.

He also said the frequency the channel used was in a suspended situation. "So they do not have the frequency as well."

"Marking out these two issues -- radio equipment licence and frequency -- the BTRC has sent the letter to

ETV," Ahmed said.

He said the BTRC would take further steps once it received ETV's answer.

Citing a provision of the Telecommunications Law, the BTRC chief said anyone could be fined Tk 300 crore and sentenced to imprisonment for 10 years for broadcasting illegally.

For their part, the ETV authorities said they were yet to receive such a letter from the BTRC.

Maj Md Rezaul Karim, general manager (adminis-

tration), said all the administrative-related letters were supposed to come to him but he had not received any such letter until yesterday evening.

ETV, the first private terrestrial channel that broke years of state monopoly in the broadcast media, was shut down on August 29, 2002 following a Supreme Court verdict that declared the channel's licence illegal.

The channel resumed operation on December 20, 2006 as a satellite channel.

Church blast kills 10 in Nigeria

REUTERS, Jos

A bomb blast struck a Catholic church in the volatile central Nigerian city of Jos yesterday, causing numerous casualties, witnesses and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) said.

A Reuters reporter on the scene said 10 people were killed in the attack.

Islamist sect Boko Haram has claimed responsibility for a wave of bombings against churches, raising fears they are trying to ignite sectarian conflict in Africa's most populous country, split roughly evenly between Christians and Muslims.

Jos has been plagued by ethnic and sectarian conflict in the past decade.

On February 26 a suicide bomber drove a car packed with explosives into a church in Jos, killing two people and wounding 38. Christian youths beat two Muslims to death in revenge.

Dhaka-Paturia

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passengers had thronged the terminal and adjacent roads.

However, till then not a single bus had appeared to ease the situation.

When the passengers realised they had tough luck ahead, they started looking for alternatives. The fortunate ones hopped into private cars, human-haulers or even trucks that passed along the road.

Around that time, a number of buses appeared with the aim of doing 'good' business. They demanded unusually high fares to transport people to places like Savar, Nabinagar and Paturia.

But their business plan soon withered as the transport union leaders joined the show.

Abdus Salam, executive president of Dhaka District Transport Workers Association, aided by his supporters, dragged the drivers and helpers from the buses and beat them up for defying an order. They

also forced the waiting passengers to get out of the buses. Angry transport workers also ransacked several buses, bringing about a total halt to transport movement.

This action explained why there had not been a single inter-district bus on the 80-km Dhaka-Paturia Highway for the best part of the day. The busy road was almost empty with thousands of stranded people waiting for any modes of vehicles at different bazaars.

Some CNG-run autorickshaws, human-haulers, trucks and minibuses were seen overcrowded with passengers.

The round-the-clock busy Paturia ferry ghat looked almost deserted, with only a few trucks and private cars to be seen.

"On average, 500 buses use the ferry ghat every day. Usually buses and trucks queue up for miles to get on the ferries," said Nur Mohammad at BIWTA toll counter.

Only four out of nine ferries operated yesterday, he added.

All the 37 launches that mainly carry passengers on the Paturia-Daulatdia route remained anchored since Saturday night. Launch owners said the local administration had asked them to halt services till the evening of March 12.

"All launches plying on the Paturia-Daulatdia and Aricha-Kazirhat routes have been asked to stay in Paturia and Aricha so that people from the other sides cannot cross the river," said Siddique, master of Anonya River Lines.

The picture at the Daulatdia end was similar. Passengers coming on ferries narrated the same miserable stories of their struggle for transport.

"I reached Daulatdia from Jhenidah after changing vehicles on several occasions. It was like a nightmare," Moshir told The Daily Star at Paturia at noon. He and dozens of others were in a hurry as

they were to face the same kind of hurdles all the way up to Dhaka.

The journey towards Dhaka was, however, more difficult not because of the transport crisis but owing to repeated checking by police at different points. Policemen spared not a single taxicab, autorickshaw or private car coming from Paturia and Aricha.

"Where are you coming from? Why are you going to Dhaka? What do you do?" These were the questions police asked each of the passengers. Each vehicle and person was also checked thoroughly.

Senior ASP of Manikganj Sadar Circle Jasim Uddin said the search was to prevent criminals from going to Dhaka and making attempts to create anarchy tomorrow (Monday). There was, however, no arrest or recovery of illegal arms or ammunition during the police search till 2:00pm at Manikganj bazaar.

AL on alert

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formed the 12-km human chain from Gabtali to Jatrabari to press home its demand to speed up the trial of war criminals and foil any plot to hinder it.

The 14-party programme ahead of the opposition rally was apparently a showdown by it. Key leaders of the combine, associate bodies of the AL and like-minded professional and other organisations joined the human chain at different points.

The combine men will remain on the roads from early morning today in all the constituencies in the capital along with the law enforcers to prevent any chaos. The AL high command has already directed all the party lawmakers of the capital to keep their supporters on standby in all lanes and by-lanes of their respective constituencies today, party insiders said.

They have also been directed to make sure that no opposition men can join their Nayapaltan rally in processions from the respective constituencies, AL sources said.

"The government will resist by all means any bid to create chaos in the capital tomorrow [today] for the sake of peace and security of lives and properties," AL General Secretary and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Syed Ashraf Islam said addressing the human chain at Gulistan.

"We have information that many BNP men have come to Dhaka with firearms, and the cadres and militants of Jamaat and different militant outfits have also been directed to join BNP's rally. We have also information that these cadres will try to create chaos," he said.

The LGRD minister said the opposition leaders were threatening the government for the last several days centring their rally. "It seems that they [BNP leaders] have declared a war against the pro-liberation forces to protect the war criminals.

But we want to say the government will maintain law and order at any cost for the sake of continuation of democracy and trial of war criminals."

Urging the BNP to give up any destructive plans for today and join parliament session to discuss the process of holding the next national elections in a free and fair manner, the ruling party spokesperson said the government is ready for discussion if the opposition places specific proposals to this end.

"There is no alternative to dialogue in a democratic system, and we believe any problem can be solved through discussion," said Ashraf.

Senior AL leader Tofail Ahmed asked the party workers to build resistance in every house in the capital like they did in 1971 against the Pakistani occupation forces.

AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif said their party and the government would not obstruct BNP's rally if it is held peacefully. In case of any bid to create chaos, he asked his party men to take position in all wards, lanes and by-lanes in the capital and build united resistance against the opposition's troublemakers.

Dhaka City AL General Secretary Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya asked the party men to give the opposition activists a befitting lesson if they create anarchy.

The others who addressed the human chain at different points include 14-party leaders Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Amir Hossain Amu, Suranjit Sengupta, Matia Chowdhury, Abdul Jalil, Obaidul Quader, Rashed Khan Menon, Hasanul Haque Inu, Shahara Khatun, Mohammad Nasim, AFM Bahauddin Nasim, Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury and Mrinal Kanti Das.

Dhaka-Sylhet

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Those that were underwent searches at police check points.

Bus operators in Bhairab and Kuliarchar said they had stopped services to avoid police harassment and attacks on the road by ruling party activists.

Meanwhile, police checkpoints installed on the highway, where all buses were stopped for detailed search, created a huge tailback of vehicles, triggering woes for passengers.

This correspondent, who was on Shwopno Bilash, a Bhairab-bound bus from Kuliarchar, had to stick for around one and a half hours (from 1:30pm to 3:00pm) at Bhulta, Rupganj in Narayanganj due to a checkpoint.

A supervisor of the service said the company had stopped services from yes-

terday fearing police requisition. Only one bus ran that day to Dhaka, charging double and even triple the usual fare from passengers.

Many of the Dhaka-bound buses stopped before entering Dhaka due to the harassment panic. Buses of Chalan Beel, a Bhairab-Mohakhali service, were carrying passengers but dropping them off before entering Dhaka.

Meanwhile, opposition leaders and activists of Bhairab and Kuliarchar upazilas, fearing harassment by law enforcers, were seen going to Dhaka by train and other modes of transport.

They said they had to stay away from their homes to avoid arrest since the law enforcers had been raiding their houses for the last few days.


Md Rafiqul Islam, conve-

nor of Bhairab upazila BNP said party leaders and activists had been under detectives' watch for the last one week and four had been arrested so far.

He said they had initially planned to bring around 2,500 activists to the Dhaka programme by 40 buses but now the number might come down to only 500 due to harassment by law enforcing agencies.

"On personal initiatives we are going to Dhaka separately and staying at the houses of relatives," he said.

Nurul Millat, general secretary of Kuliarchar upazila BNP, said after their plan to join the rally by hiring buses was foiled, their activists had been using trains and buses and going to Dhaka separately over the last few days.



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