

## Bus services resume

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Meanwhile, train and launch services resumed yesterday. The number of passengers leaving the capital was lower than that of the Dhaka-bound ones.

Train and launch fares remain unchanged.

Besides, Biman Bangladesh Airlines and two private airlines are set to resume flights on three domestic routes today.

The government had enforced a shutdown of most public and private offices as well as public transport from March 26 to contain the spread of Covid-19.

On May 28, the government announced that all offices would reopen and public transport services would resume on a limited scale on May 31, making it mandatory to follow the health safety guidelines.

### NEW BUS FARES

At a meeting on Friday, stakeholders in the road transport sector decided that buses would carry passengers at half capacity when the services resume.

Transport owners demanded that bus fares be doubled.

A committee led by acting chairman of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority Youssuf Ali Mollah on Saturday proposed an 80 percent hike in bus fares. The proposal drew huge criticism from various quarters saying this would deal a heavy blow to the already economically affected people.

Yesterday morning, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said the government would rationally adjust bus fares, considering people's present financial ability.

"An 80 percent hike [in bus fares] will put an extra burden on people," Quader said while speaking from his residence through video conference with officials of the Road Transport and Highways Division.

Hours later, the ministry issued the circular.

The government last adjusted the inter-district bus fares in May 2016 at Tk 1.42 a kilometre.

With the new hike, it will cost a passenger Tk 700 (excluding tolls) to travel from the capital's Gabtoli to Barishal through Faridpur. Before the shutdown, it would cost Tk 438.

Bus fares on routes inside the capital were last adjusted in September 2015 at Tk 1.70 per km.

Now, one has to pay Tk 53 instead of Tk 33 to travel to the Mirpur Zoo from Notre Dame College.

Bangladesh Jati Kalyan Samity and the Road Safety Foundation demanded that the government scrap the new bus fares.

In a statement, the Samity said the government has fallen into the trap of transport owners, and irrationally increased bus fares by 60 percent which will put an additional burden on people.

Passengers' interest was ignored while making this unilateral decision. This will increase passengers' sufferings and would cause anarchy over fares,

## Commuters'

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"It will not be possible to maintain three feet of distance among passengers in the buses, no matter what rules the government makes," said the employee of a private company.

He cannot afford to go to work on a three-wheeler, he said, adding that he was the only earning member of his family of five.

Public transport will officially resume from today, but buses were seen plying the roads yesterday, and people posted on social media photos and videos of crowded buses in the capital and Chattogram.

Nilima Jahan, a correspondent of this newspaper, said, "We live in Kazipara and my husband works in Uttara. How will he afford Tk 600 for each trip to work?"

"Besides, he works in sales and needs to visit several places for work each day. Now, if he avoids the buses, I cannot even fathom what the daily expenditure

read the statement signed by Samity Secretary General Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury.

Romesh Chandra Ghosh, chairman of Bangladesh Bus-Truck Owners' Association, said he accepted the new fares as the government issued it considering people's financial hardship.

"But many of our owners are unwilling to run buses at this new rate. They want at least 80 percent increase. But I am trying to convince them. We will operate buses from tomorrow," Romesh, also managing director of Shyamoli Paribahan, told this correspondent last night.

Khondaker Enayet Ullah, secretary general of Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association, said, "We have accepted the new fares considering passengers' interest and already started selling tickets."

He urged passengers to help them maintain health safety guidelines.

### TRAIN, LAUNCH SERVICES RESUME

Yesterday, eight intercity trains were run on seven routes at half capacity.

Chapainawabganj-bound Banalata Express left the capital around 1:30pm with most of the passengers maintaining physical distancing.

Earlier in the morning, Subarna Express left Chattogram for the capital.

Eleven more intercity trains would resume operation on June 3.

Visiting Kamalapur Railway Station in the afternoon, Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan expressed satisfaction over the safety measures taken by the authorities, and said they did not get any complaint.

Meanwhile, launch services to and from the capital resumed yesterday.

The first launch left Sadarghat terminal for Chandpur around 7:15am, said Alamgir Kabir, joint director of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority at the terminal.

"We have installed disinfectant tunnels, and all passengers have to go through those to enter the terminal. Besides, we are providing hand sanitizer and have also kept many seats empty to ensure social distancing," he mentioned.

Badiuzzaman Badal, senior vice-chairman of Bangladesh Inland Waterways (passenger carriers) Association, said the number of Dhaka-bound passengers was much higher than that of those leaving the capital.

### DOMESTIC FLIGHTS RESUME

National flag carrier Biman, Novoair and US-Bangla Airlines will operate 24 roundtrip flights a day on three domestic routes from today after over two-month suspension.

Of those, 11 will be run on Dhaka-Chittogram-Dhaka route, nine on Dhaka-Saidpur-Dhaka route and four on Dhaka-Sylhet-Dhaka route.

Biman and Novoair will operate seven flights each a day and US-Bangla Airlines 10 flights, said sources in the airlines.

would look like."

A 29-year-old employee of a top-tier pharmaceutical company said she was thinking of quitting her job.

"I went to visit my ancestral home before the shutdown, so I got stuck in another district. Now the office is asking me to go back to Dhaka," she said, requesting anonymity.

"My department is international marketing but export is closed, meaning work is light. We routinely work from home, because I always coordinate with different time zones and work late."

Her requests for permission to continue working from home were rejected by the management, she added.

Health experts have been saying that lifting the restrictions at a time when the daily new cases are rising would worsen the outbreak. For a large section of the workforce, however, it just means making a choice between unemployment and risking coronavirus infection.

"Schools and colleges will reopen in phases," she said.

All educational institutions have remained closed since March 17 due to the pandemic.

### GOOD RESULTS A RELIEF

Education officials said the good results have brought a sense of relief for the students who had been confined at home amid the coronavirus crisis.

This year results were not announced at schools due to the Covid-19 situation. Examinees, rather, received their results online and via SMS.

Unlike the previous years, schools across the country did not wear a festive look during the results yesterday. But students and their parents celebrated their results at home.

"If the light of education does not enter every house of the country, it won't be possible to eliminate poverty from the country," she said.

In this connection, she mentioned that the government has formulated the education policy.

The PM said students of the country are very much brilliant and they can prove themselves if they get chances.

She asked the students to build themselves as the country's worthy citizens imbued with patriotism and humanity, and the government is providing all necessary support in this regard.

Dipu Moni handed over a summary of the results of SSC and equivalent exams to Hasina online from her secretariat office. Deputy Minister for Education Mohibul Hassan Chowdhury was present on the occasion.

PM's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus and PMO Secretary Tofazzal Hossain Mian were present at the Gono Bhaban, while Secretary of Secondary and Higher Secondary Division Mahbub Hossain moderated the results handing ceremony at the education ministry.



People start returning to the capital by train yesterday. Train service resumed after over two months of suspension to slow the spread of coronavirus. The photo was taken at Kamalapur Railway Station.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## Curbs loosen, noose tightens

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on "a limited scale" despite fears of an intensified virus onslaught.

Even the government's National Technical Advisory Committee on May 28 suggested the withdrawal of closure in phases, warning that the situation might worsen if safety measures are not strictly implemented.

But their recommendations went unheeded.

Dhaka returned to its usual chaotic self somewhat with traffic jams in different intersections yesterday. A huge number of private cars were seen plying the roads. Long queues were seen in front of banks and post offices in the city.

However, only a handful of shopping malls in different areas had lifted their shutters.

Services on the rail and waterways resumed with overcrowded ferries, raising questions about compliance of health guidelines, deemed very crucial in the fight against novel coronavirus. Buses are scheduled to begin operating from today.

The government first declared the nationwide shutdown from March 26, coinciding with Independence Day, till April 4 after the country on March 18 confirmed the first coronavirus death, 10 days after the detection of the first three Covid-19 cases.

The shutdown was extended in six phases until May 30. Although it was maintained loosely, it halted transport services and closed down most businesses.

The poor and those who rely on day labour to survive were hit hardest. The country's economy, which had already been ailing, was sustaining deep wounds.

Meanwhile, the new-case curve continued to go up.

Against this backdrop, experts fear that lifting the shutdown before strictly enforcing the rules and requirements for slowing the spread will have dire consequences.

Speaking to the Daily Star on Saturday, Dr Iqbal Arsalan, a member of the National Technical Advisory Committee, said the infection index will rise further due to the opening of offices and businesses.

"We do not have enough hospital beds or ventilators to deal with the crisis. Physical distancing is being stressed upon. The law enforcers will try to maintain physical distancing but soon the crowds will get out of control. We have seen this before Eid -- law enforcers tried to disperse crowds but failed to because they cannot jump on civilians with riot gear."

He spoke about an impending transport crisis among office-goers, since there has always been a shortage of public transport.

The government formed the 17-member advisory committee to tackle the coronavirus outbreak.

On May 28, when the government declared it would relax closure, the committee in a press release said there would be a severe rise in cases if health and safety measures were not properly enforced.

"It has been seen that countries that lifted the lockdown, before experiencing a definite reduction in the infection rate, saw a rise in the infection," said a statement signed by its Chairperson Prof Dr Md Shahidullah and Member-Secretary Prof Dr Meerjady Sabrina Flora.

"Lifting the lockdown before strictly implementing the rules and requirements of preventing transmission will increase the number

of positive patients and create pressure on the healthcare system," warned the statement.

Prof Shah Monir Hossain, a member of the committee, said, "We had hoped to flatten the curve by the end of June but that is probably not going to happen anymore because the number of coronavirus patients will increase [due to the lifting of the shutdown]."

### BRIEFING

In the daily online briefing on the outbreak, Prof Dr Nasima Sultan, additional director general (administration) of the DGHS, said 406 Covid-19 patients have recovered since Saturday, taking the total number of recoveries to 9,781.

Of the dead, 33 were male and seven female, she said, adding that 28 were from Dhaka, eight from Chattogram, two from Khulna, one from Rangpur and another from Rajshahi division.

One was aged between 21 and 30, five between 31 and 40, 11 between 41 and 50, eight between 51 and 60, 11 between 61 and 70, and four between 71 and 80, she said.

A total of 391 people were kept in isolation and 126 were released in the 24 hours till yesterday afternoon, she said.

So far, 5,794 people are in isolation and 3,016 were released across the country, she added.

In the 24 hours till yesterday afternoon, 2,947 people were put in quarantine while 3,042 others were released throughout the country.

Currently, 60,181 people are under home or institutional quarantine, the DGHS official said.

Data shows that the young were most infected with Covid-19. Nearly 72 percent of total infected people are aged between 21 and 50.

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