



People crowd the entrance of a bus at Agrabad intersection in Chattogram city, attempting to begin their commute after a long wait at the bus stand. Most commuters in the port city are frustrated by the newly-imposed rules that limit the number of passengers on buses to contain spread of Covid-19. PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

PUBLIC TRANSPORT RESTRICTIONS IN CTG

Commuters pay the (extra) price

ARUN BIKASH DEV, Ctg

Ratna Raha, a retired schoolteacher, stepped out of her home at Chawkbazar's KB Aman Ali Road yesterday morning. She needed to make a trip to Teribazar area for some emergency shopping.

To her utter surprise, she soon found out that there was no vacant rickshaw that could take her to the nearest bus stand. After waiting for 20 minutes, she decided to start walking and reached the bus stand at Chawkbazar, where more surprises awaited her.

There was an unusual gathering of people at the bus stand yesterday. Everyone was waiting for a seat at a public transport, except none were there. "What happened?" she asked a person.

She got to know that buses and human hauliers weren't carrying more than half their capacity, which has created this crisis for transport across the city. "I've been standing here for half-an-hour to go to Anderkilla," the man told her.

Minutes later, a bus arrived, raising everyone's hopes. But it only had 10 vacant seats, while there were around 50 people willing to ride. Everyone rushed to board it, but 40 people, including Ratna, failed to make their way to the seats and had to come back, in frustration.

Ratna started to look for CNG-run auto-rickshaws, but even they were hard to find. The few that could be seen were charging almost double the usual fare, but Ratna couldn't afford to pay so much. She

decided to start walking again.

"Have you decided to walk all the way to Teribazar?" this correspondent asked her. "Maybe not all the way, it's pretty far off, but as much as possible, and then take a rickshaw or auto-rickshaw from there," she replied. "If I can bring down the fare even a little bit by walking, that would help me a lot."

Ratna's tale is just one out of many. When this correspondent some important areas in the port city, including Chawkbazar, Muradpur, Bahaddarhat, and Sholashahar Gate No.2, he came across similar experiences by people who suffered due to this acute shortage of public transport yesterday.

In many areas, passengers alleged that although government has declared a 60 percent increase in fare, some transport workers were realising almost double that, adding to the passengers' woes.

According to the updated fare, Kamrul Hasan's trip from Kazir Dewri to Chawkbazar on a human haulier should cost Tk 8, as the previous fare was Tk 5. But in reality, he was charged an addition Tk 2.

"The increased fare should be Tk 8 for the distance but they compelled me to pay Tk 10. When I protested, they threatened to kick me out and so I had to oblige," the frustration could be heard in his voice.

Human haulier driver Md Sohel admitted to this overpricing, but said

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23 Europe returnees sent to institutional quarantine

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 23 passengers, who returned to Bangladesh from different European countries including the UK, were put under 14-day institutional quarantine at different government approved hotels in eight hours since early yesterday.

Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh's (CAAB) strict measures came into effect from 12:01am yesterday, after reviewing the deteriorating Covid-19 situation throughout the country and world.

The measures will continue until further notice, officials said.

Of the 23 returnees, seven returned from different European countries while 16 from the UK, Dr Shahriar Sazzad, in-charge at the Health Desk of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, told The Daily Star.

INSTITUTIONAL QUARANTINE OF RETURNING EXPATS IN SYLHET

A system doomed to fail

Many leaving hotels amid lax monitoring; mobile court drives begin

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

Two UK expatriates who were on mandatory institutional quarantine at Hotel Star Pacific in Sylhet city 'forcibly' went out on Tuesday morning.

After returning to the hotel around 6:30pm that day, they gave the excuse of going out to get haircuts.

However, a mobile court led by executive magistrate Md Mesbah Uddin sentenced the duo -- Abdun Noor (42) and Alam Hasan Rouf (36) -- to seven days' imprisonment and fined them Tk 10,000 each.

Going out during quarantine and showing such excuses has been a common practice since the mandatory quarantine was enforced since January 1 this year, due to lax monitoring and an ineffective system in place.

"They have been making silly excuses to go out of hotel, no matter how hard we tried to make them aware of the situation," said Shamma Labiba Arnab, assistant commissioner (Covid-19 and media cell) of Sylhet district administration.

After a new variant of Covid-19 was detected in the United Kingdom last year, the Cabinet Division on December 28 ordered that all passengers from UK are bound to stay

in mandatory institutional quarantine.

The time period was 14 days first, which was later reduced to four days, and then extended to seven days on January 23.

Since January 4, around 2,861 passengers from the UK came to Bangladesh through Sylhet airport till March 22. Except 40 passengers having Covid-19 negative certificates, all others were sent to ten hotels for institutional quarantine.

The hotels are Britannia (now excluded, after contract was cancelled), Anurag, Noorjahan Grand, Holy Gate, Holy Side, Star Pacific, La Rose, La Vista, Rainbow Guest House and Royal Plum.

The hotels' management, with the police personnel posted at the premises, were ordered to ensure quarantine of passengers properly. However, the system has been flawed since the beginning.

The first flaw was exposed on March 21, after a nine-member family violated quarantine rules and went out of Hotel Britannia to visit an ailing relative.

The district administration that night fined five adults of the family Tk 3,000 each and another adult Tk 5,000, and cancelled its contract with

the hotel. A day later, another incident at Hotel La Vista was exposed.

At the hotel, a wedding ceremony of a UK returnee was arranged on March 20, which was attended by around 50 guests.

However, no legal action was taken against the UK expatriates, the attendees and the hotel authority.

Sumath Nuri Jewel, president of Sylhet Hotel and Guest House Owners' Association, said, "Since the beginning of the discussion, we've been telling the administration that the quarantine must be maintained and monitored by the administration itself. But they gave that responsibility to hotel authorities."

"Due to negligent monitoring, the boarders in quarantine found ways to go out, and the whole system collapsed," he said, adding that the expatriates mostly believe that everything is possible in Bangladesh, and the system let that happen.

Faruque Mahmud Chowdhury, president of Sushashoner Jonno Nagorik's (Shujan) Sylhet chapter, said, "There's no use of law, if not enforced strongly. If the administration were able to enforce the law and order

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Showing complete disregard for social distancing, people huddle up to buy staple food in front of a truck stationed for open market sales in the capital. Some were even seen with no mask covering their faces. As Ramadan nears and commodity prices begin to increase, crowds are also becoming larger in front of such fair-price sale points, elevating the risk of Covid-19 transmission. This photo was taken yesterday from near the Jatiya Press Club.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Women became more vulnerable in pandemic: study

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The experiences of vulnerabilities in the Covid-19 pandemic are significantly different for men and women; women have become increasingly vulnerable to physical and mental abuse caused by domestic and intimate partner violence, a recent study has found.

In addition, women's health concerns have also been found to be secondary in the management of the coronavirus and their access to information and services on sexual and reproductive health was disrupted greatly due to the pandemic, it said.

Manusher Jonno Foundation and Brac James P Grant School of Public Health (JPGSPH) jointly organised a webinar yesterday to share the key findings of the research "Life in the Times of Coronavirus: Gendered Perspective".

According to the study jointly conducted by JPGSPH and MJF and supported by Share Net International, although gender relationships and sexual and reproductive health services suffered the most throughout the pandemic, very little attention has been paid to these.

Many respondents were found to cut consumption of food from three meals a day to two. Although men at least went out and had some food options, women only

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Chhatra Union divided over emergency nat'l council

DU CORRESPONDENT

A rift deepening within left-leaning student organisation Bangladesh Chhatra Union as two separate factions are gearing up for emergency national council on different dates in April and June.

Chhatra Union President Foez Ullah and General Secretary Dipok Shil in a statement yesterday urged all to take preparation for holding emergency council on June 4.

In the statement they urged all activists across the country to resist the move to destroy the unity of the student organisation.

They said that the decision of holding

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'Ensure reintegration of women migrant workers'

Speakers at roundtable urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a roundtable yesterday urged the government to establish effective and well-founded reintegration programmes for women migrant workers, providing necessary facilities such as financial guidance and psychological support.

Stressing the need for trained staff for the programmes, they said during the reintegration stage, government agencies have to closely follow up on women migrants to protect them from social isolation, violence, and disempowerment.

Care Bangladesh with support from migrant rights group Warbe Development Foundation and The Daily Star organised the roundtable at The Daily Star Centre in the capital.

Speakers said the government can initiate multiple orientation sessions throughout all three migration stages, from pre-departure to return, to guide female migrants.

They said government need to hire more trained staff to provide specific help to migrants in all their services.

Bangladesh missions abroad should include reproductive healthcare services and protection for victims of violence. Besides, the government should establish offices that can serve as help desks or resource centres at the airport in destination country, they said.

It should be made mandatory for the missions to regularly check up on woman migrant workers, they added.

For female domestic workers, missions should have services where consultants can go visit them. There should be alternative methods so that workers are not required to visit in-person to be able to access services, said the speakers.

They said many NGOs and CSOs want to offer support to migrants. Governments can collaborate with them to further strengthen services.

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RIISING COVID-19 CASES

CJ urges all to follow health guidelines

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain yesterday expressed concerns over the rapid surge of Covid-19 cases, saying that coronavirus infection rate is growing as the health guidelines are not maintained properly.

All the lawyers, court officials and staff members and others concerned must be conscious about health and they must wear masks and follow the health guidelines strictly during the court functions in order to avoid the Covid-19 infection, he said.

The chief justice said this while presiding over a bench of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court to run the judicial functions virtually.

Deputy Attorney General Samarendranath Biswas told The Daily Star that as the guardian of the judiciary, the chief justice has cautioned all concerned to follow the health guidelines.

Earlier on Tuesday, the chief justice asked the judges and lawyers concerned to wear white shirts, saris, salwar kameez and neck bands during the court proceedings in the changed situation regarding Covid-19 pandemic. The judges and lawyers need not wear black coats and gowns, said Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain.

The SC administration issued separate notifications containing the chief justice's directives.

COVID-19 INFECTION SURGE

12th parliament session may have only three sittings

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 12th session of the current 11th Parliament may have only three working days (sittings) considering worsening Covid-19 situation across the country, sources at the parliament secretariat said.

The session is scheduled to begin at 11:00am today.

President Abdul Hamid on March 15 convened the 12th session, exercising the power bestowed upon him as per the Article 72 (1) of the Constitution.

Like other sessions during the pandemic, this parliament session will run maintaining health safety guidelines.

In this case, only MPs who were tested negative for Covid-19 will be allowed to attend the session.

Limited number of MPs required for fulfilling quorum in the House will be asked to attend the parliament session on rotation basis, sources at the parliament secretariat said.

The parliament has already taken various steps to ensure hygiene at its building and premises.

After Covid-19 test, only a limited number of essential officials and staff will be allowed at the offices during the session.



THAT'S NOT A MASK, SIR... A fishmonger covers his face with his hands as an executive magistrate of Barishal District Administration running a mobile court conducted drives across the city yesterday to enforce mask-wearing to curb the rising number of Covid-19 cases. This photo was taken from the city's Port Road area.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Seven killed in Ctg, Sylhet road accidents

STAR REPORT

Seven people were killed and another was injured in road accidents in two districts yesterday, according to reports from our correspondents.

Our staff correspondent from Chattogram reports, four people were killed when a CNG-run auto-rickshaw was hit by an oncoming sand-laden truck on Chattogram-Kaptai highway in Razoan upazila in the early hours.

The accident occurred around 2:30am, said Md Anwar Hosen Shamim, additional superintendent of police in Chattogram.

The deceased -- identified as Shah Alam, Kamrul Islam, Idris and Siraj -- were in the auto-rickshaw, said the police official.

Due to the accident, vehicular movement between Chattogram and Kaptai remained halted for about two hours, witnesses said.

The truck was seized from the spot, said the ASP, adding that the driver managed to flee.

Filing of a case was underway.

Our Sylhet correspondent adds, three people, including two of a family, were killed and another was injured after a bus hit a CNG-driven auto-rickshaw carrying them in Lalabazar area in Dakshin Surma upazila in the afternoon.

The deceased were identified as Rahela Begum (50) and her daughter Kamrunnahar Sipa (22) from Purba Chanshibazar village in Bishwanath upazila; and the auto-rickshaw driver Shamim Miah (35) from Nij Kurua village in Osmaniganj upazila.

BM Ashraf Ullah Taher, additional deputy commissioner (media) of Sylhet Metropolitan Police, said, "The Sylhet-bound bus of Habiganj Express from behind struck the auto-rickshaw that subsequently hit a covered-van in front of it."

"The two passengers of the auto-rickshaw died on spot and another succumbed to his injuries at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital," he said, adding that the injured was undergoing treatment at the hospital.