

Public stuck between 'lockdown' and work

Lack of transportation spells chaos for office-goers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Immense public sufferings in the capital marked the first day of restrictions enforced by the government to curb the spread of coronavirus infections.

As all forms of public transport except rickshaws were suspended while keeping all public and private offices open, employees of the offices, companies and factories were left stranded.

In some places of the capital, office-goers demonstrated against the lack of public transport.

At the same time, rickshaws and private vehicles were seen dominating Dhaka streets, which created traffic congestion in various parts of the capital, leaving commuters stuck on roads.

The alarming surge in Covid-19 cases and deaths caused by highly transmittable Delta variant prompted the government to announce the three-day strict restrictions ahead of an all-out lockdown from July 1.

As per Sunday's gazette on the three-day restrictions, all forms of public transport except rickshaws will be off the road. Government and private offices may remain open with only essential staff. Shopping malls, markets, tourism centres, resorts, community and recreation centres will remain closed.

Yesterday morning, hundreds of people -- mainly office-goers -- were seen standing

by the roads in different parts of the city, waiting for vehicles. After waiting on the road for an hour or two, many started walking in groups.

Many were seen approaching drivers of covered vans and private car and minibuses -- asking to drop them off to their workplaces. They were boarding whatever vehicles that agreed to take them, overlooking health safety rules.

During the office hour, the number of rickshaws and auto-rickshaws was far fewer than the demand. Taking advantage, drivers were charging extra. Motorbikers were also charging exorbitant fares to drop people off.

"It's a lockdown for the rich people. The government didn't think for us. How could they allow offices to operate, shutting down public transport?" said an exasperated Kaniz Sultana, an employee of private company in Motijheel.

Sanwar Hossain, another office goer, boarded a rickshaw from Mohammadpur to Motijheel for Tk 300.

"What should we do? There is no vehicle available, but I have to go to office. The rickshaw-pullers are charging double or thrice," he said.

Awlad Hossain, who works at a Tongi factory, was waiting at Bashabo since 7:20am, but was yet to get a vehicle till 9am.

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The capital's VIP road near Kakrail is jam-packed with cars, on the first day of the strict movement restrictions. While the government barred all public transportation except rickshaws to ply the road, private vehicles were out of its purview, and with offices open, those who had to get to work availed cars and motorbikes. Inset, in Tejgaon, people crowded on rickshaw vans to commute to Mohakhali as rickshaws charged exorbitant fares.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



Rampal, Banshkhali plants should be on top of the list

Says Prof Anu Muhammad on govt move to scrap 10 coal projects

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The decision to scrap 10 coal-fired power plants was taken as they were either not being financed by foreign investors or the sponsoring companies were moving away, said Prof Anu Muhammad at a virtual press conference yesterday.

The member secretary of National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports said if the government really thought about the environment, they should scrap Rampal power plant project first.

On Sunday, State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Nasrul Hamid announced the cancellation of 10 coal-fired power plant projects, with a total generation capacity of 8451 MW.

Bangladesh Working Group on External Debt (BWGED) organised the event following that.

Prof Muhammad said after Rampal, the list of cancellations should have the names of Chattogram's Banshkhali and Cox's Bazar's Matarbari power plants.

There are questions regarding the Environmental Impact

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Covid-19 deaths, positivity rates on rise in rural Ctg

People's apathy, lack of facilities at upazilas key reasons, say experts

ARUN BIKASH DEV, Ctg

For the last couple of days, the number of deaths due to Covid-19 has been on the rise in the rural areas of Chattogram. Even the positivity rate remains higher compared to that of the port city.

According to experts, apathy towards following health rules, social transmission of the Delta variant and limitation of proper treatment facilities at local health complexes were the key reasons behind this.

Talking to The Daily Star, they termed the situation alarming and urged the authorities concerned to take necessary steps in this regard.

As of yesterday's report, seven persons died of Covid-19 in Chattogram on Sunday. Of them, six were from upazilas.

Meanwhile, 327 people tested positive out of 1,151 in the last 24

hours till 11:30pm on Sunday. The positivity rate was 28.41 percent. Of the detected patients, 100 were from upazilas with a positivity rate of 30.48 percent.

On Saturday, six out of seven patients who died from Covid-19 were from rural areas. Of the 300 detected patients, 96 were from upazilas.

Similarly on Friday, two out of three deceased were from upazilas and on Thursday, three out of five deceased were from outside the city. Only one patient died on Wednesday who was from an upazila while on Tuesday, three patients died and of them, two were from outside the city.

Meanwhile, 35 percent of total positive patients detected on Friday were from upazilas. The rate was 41 percent on Thursday, 50 percent on Wednesday and 38 percent on Tuesday.

The positivity and death rates

which were around 20 percent and 21.74 percent in upazila level have been on the rise.

Contacted, public health expert Prof Dr Shakeel Ahmed, also head of Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (BITID) laboratory, said it is alarming that both spread and death rates have been increasing in rural areas.

He said lack of concern by people in rural areas and initiatives taken by the authorities were to blame for this.

"The social transmission of the highly contagious Delta variant of Covid-19 has worsened the situation. In most cases, if a family member is infected, others also get infected," he said.

"Moreover, patients in rural areas don't get tested or admitted to hospitals on time for lack of awareness."

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BAIL TO SUSPENDED DIG PRISONS HC seeks trial court judge's explanation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday sought explanation from a trial court judge about granting ad-interim bail to Partha Gopal Banik, a suspended deputy inspector general (prisons) of Sylhet division, in a case filed over the recovery of Tk 80 lakh from his residence in Dhaka.

The HC ordered judge Md Iqbal Hossain of the Special Judge Court-5 of Dhaka to submit a written explanation in seven working days.

The HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman also asked authorities concerned of Channel-24, a private television channel, to submit a copy of its report that questioned the Dhaka court order over granting the bail.

The bench passed the order following an appeal filed by Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) challenging the Dhaka court's bail order.

ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star that Judge Md Iqbal Hossain on June 17 granted bail to Banik in an "unusual manner" although there are specific allegations against him.

The Channel-24 has published a report in this regard, he said, adding that Banik got released from jail following the Dhaka court order.

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Tolls to be imposed on some highways

Cabinet okays 'Highway Act 2021' for better transport regulations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Cabinet Division yesterday approved the final draft of "Highway Act 2021" with the provision of a maximum of two years' imprisonment for violation of the act.

The act allows the authorities concerned to formulate rules and regulate transport movements.

"Which transport will be allowed on the highway will be defined by the rules," said Cabinet Secretary Khandaker Anwarul Islam at a briefing at the secretariat.

Saying that tolls may be imposed for using some highways, he said the rate will also be fixed according to the rules under the act.

The briefing was held following a cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Anwarul said the cabinet gave the final approval to the draft of the Highways Bill, 2021 in order to have a full-fledged law replacing a century-old law.

"There's a law of 1925 (The Highways

Act, 1925), which has only five clauses and is not adequate to deal with maintenance, management and construction (of the highways)," he said.

He said provisions of punishment have been kept as well in case of violation of the proposed law. "The punishment would be a maximum two years' jail or Tk 5,000-Tk 5 lakh fine," he said.

"There's no comprehensive highway management law in Bangladesh. So, the proposed law was prepared," said the cabinet secretary.

The current law has only five sections -- title, extent and commencement, definition, temporary closing of government roads, power to make rules, and penalties. The new law will have 20.

Anyone who erects a permanent or makeshift structure or sets up a market on the highway without prior approval may face a maximum of two years in prison or a fine between Tk 50,000 and Tk 5 lakh, or both.

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Steps taken to make NID service more efficient

Law minister tells JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has taken various steps to make NID services more efficient and dynamic, Law Minister Anisul Haque told parliament yesterday.

Anisul, who is in charge of the Election Commission secretariat in parliamentary affairs, said posts of thana/upazila assistant election officer and data entry operator have been created. The NID service will be more dynamic once the recruitment processes for the posts are completed.

The minister said this while replying to lawmakers' queries.

At the beginning of the House proceedings, Speaker Shirin Sharmin

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TRANSPORT CRISIS

RMG factory workers demonstrate in Savar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

Failing to find transport to reach their workplace, workers of several garment factories blocked Dhaka-Aricha highway's Radio colony and Savar Bazar bus-stand areas demonstrated yesterday morning.

People from different professions also joined in, expressing solidarity with the workers. Due to the blockade, traffic movement remained suspended for about an hour from 8am.

According to police and locals, the workers of different garment factories at Savar Bazar bus-stand and Ulail areas were angry, as they could not avail transportation on the first day of restrictions imposed by government.

On information, personnel of Savar Model Police Station and Savar Highway Police Station rushed to the spots and made protesters leave around 9am after talking to them.

Workers said factory authorities did not provide transport, and drivers of rickshaws and other vehicles were demanding three times the usual fare.

The workers demanded either resuming public transport service or factory authorities arranging vehicles for them.

The workers further said that they have to suffer due to sudden government instructions. The garment factories should be declared closed during the lockdown.

A senior official of Dhaka Industrial Police told The Daily Star that factory authorities only arrange transport for workers who are from faraway places, and workers who live nearby reach the factory using public transport or by other means.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association's instructions are the same till now, the official added.

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PBI sub-inspector held with 11,560 yaba pills in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab-7) have arrested a sub-inspector of Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) and seized 11,560 pieces of yaba pills from his possession in Chattogram.

Rab arrested SI Md Masud Rana from Patiya upazila on Sunday afternoon, said Dulal Mahmud, officer-in-charge of Karnaphuli Police Station.

The arrestee was later handed over to police early yesterday, the OC added. A case was also filed in this connection.

"A team of Rab-7 intercepted a Chattogram-bound private car coming from Cox's Bazar at Bhellapara Bridge point of Patiya crossing," OC Dulal said quoting the case statement.

"Rab arrested the SI after they found 11,560 pieces of yaba pills under the seat of the car," said the OC.

"The SI was on-duty and he left Cox's Bazar on Sunday for investigation purposes," said Sarwar Alam, superintendent of police of Cox's Bazar PBI unit.

"We have sent his record and other documents to the headquarters," said the SP.



Due to movement restrictions, mango sellers are finding it increasingly hard to get customers at Sylhet city. As a result, they have resorted to lowering prices. What used to get sold for Tk 50-60 is now going for Tk 30-40. The photo was taken from Zindabazar area yesterday.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Introduce biometric reg at prisons: HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Examining a list of 26 reported incidents of serving jail sentences by innocent persons instead of original accused and convicts, the High Court yesterday issued a rule on the government for introducing biometric data management in prisons to properly identify the prisoners.

In the rule, the HC asked respondents to explain in two weeks why they should not be directed to introduce biometric data management including finger and palm prints along with existing identification system in all prisons.

Law secretary, home secretary and inspector general of police have been made respondents to the rule.

The HC bench of Justice Jahangir Hossain and Justice Md Atoar Rahman came up with the rule while hearing an appeal and petition filed in connection with a murder case of Chattogram in which an innocent Minu Akhter has served jail sentence instead of a convicted Kulsuma Akhter. Minu Akhter got released from Chattogram jail on June 16 in compliance with the HC's June 7 order.

Yesterday, Minu's lawyer Mohammad Shishir Manir told the HC bench that it was not an isolated incident. Such incidents are taking place very often in the country, he said, placing a list of 26 reported incidents.



OBITUARY
Our beloved father
Tauheed Rouf Chengis (1959-2021)
peacefully left for his heavenly abode on
May 19, 2021. Please keep him in your prayers.
May Allah grant him Jannatul Ferdous.
Ameen.
Emma & Anusha