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Commuters
suffer for
lack of public
transport

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka city dwellers suffered due to transport crisis as BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami and a host of other opposition political parties enforced a nationwide three-day rail, road, and waterways blockade from yesterday.

On the first day of the blockade, very few public transports plied the roads compared to usual weekdays.

Offices and a number of educational institutions were open, and, taking advantage of the scarcity of public transport, rickshaw-pullers and CNG-run autorickshaws were seen charging excess fares.

During a visit to Jatrabari, our correspondent noticed a calm atmosphere with no reported processions or picketing in support of the blockade.

In contrast, local Awami League activists gathered in a field to protest the opposition's programme. Besides, law enforcement agencies kept a close watch at crucial locations in Jatrabari.

A police personnel said, "We have deployed 70 police members at Jatrabari intersection alone. We are prepared to address any destructive activities."

"As of 9:30am, we have not seen any processions or picketing in this area," he said.

Shamim Ahmed, a private bank employee said, "I have to go to office. That's why I left home. But I'm worried about how I will go to Gulshan as I couldn't find any vehicles."

No long-distance buses left Gabtoli bus terminal yesterday morning due to "shortage of passengers", according to transport owners. Usually, 200 to 250 buses leave Gabtoli by 10:00am.

Liton Khan, a toll collector, said very few inter-city bus left the terminal.

Our reporters also talked to staffers at ticket counters of Hanif and Shyamoli Paribahan. They said they could not operate buses unless there was a certain number of passengers.



Only a handful of passengers were seen at Sadarghat launch terminal while hardly any long-distance buses left the Gabtoli terminal amid the three-day blockade in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS/RASHED SHUMON

POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY

A bad situation turns
worse for the poor

RAFIUL ISLAM

Babul Matbar managed to sell only half a kilogramme of apples during the hartal enforced by BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami on Sunday -- a significant drop from his usual daily sales of 15 to 25 kg.

Despite this setback, he arrived at the Gabtoli Bus Terminal yesterday morning, the first day of the three-day countryside blockade, hoping he would sell some apples and send money to his family in Madaripur.

But from 7:00am to 10:00am, he could not sell a single apple because very few passengers showed up to take a long-distance bus.

"I am worried about the sales. I do not know how I will manage my family expenses in days ahead as political unrest may continue," the 55-year-old lone breadwinner of his family told The Daily Star.

Like Babul, low-income people including street vendors in the city are bearing the brunt of political uncertainty as their daily sales or income have dropped sharply.



They said people already limited buying products like fruits, garments and toys due to the price hike of daily essentials.

The ongoing blockade and hartals will make their lives worse.

"The political parties are fighting for power and we are paying the price. They do not think of the common people. We are already in deep trouble due to the price hike of daily essentials," said a street vendor at the gate of

Baitul Mukarram.

He did not want to be named as he feared reprisal by political activists for his comments.

"We are in a state of panic after violence erupted during rallies on Saturday. I could not make any sales during hartal [on Sunday] too," he said.

"I did not want to open the shop as merely running my shop entails expenses of around Tk 500 per day. Still, I came to my shop so that no one damages or torches it," the 65-year-old man said.

This correspondent visited different city points including Paltan, Farmgate, Dainik Bangla, Shahbagh, Darussalam and Teigaon and heard many street vendors similarly lamenting poor sales and fearing financial ruin. In many places, the vendors did not open their shops.

"We do not want politics of violence. We want a normal situation to make a living and save our families," said Bakul, a vendor in Dainik Bangla area.

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THREE-DAY BLOCKADE

Low turnout
at schools

ARAFAT RAHAMAN and SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Student attendance was significantly lower in most educational institutions in Dhaka on the first day of the three-day blockade called by BNP and Jamaat.

Upon visiting at least seven schools in Mirpur, Kakrail, Bailey Road, Science Lab, and Motijheel yesterday, most were found to be open, with teachers present.

However, the student turnout was low. About 150 students of the currently enrolled 4,000 (morning shift) attended classes, said Tariqul Azam Khan, coordinator (administrative) of Willes Little Flower School and College.

"We assume the students are in fear following the political violence on Saturday and Sunday," he said. The school's academic council is planning to take measures to tighten students' security, he added.

Parents who brought their children to school were also concerned.

"I was confused about whether to take my child to school or not, as we saw vehicles being torched on streets," said Habiba Khatun, mother of a third grader at Monipur High School and College in Shevrapara.

Keka Roy Chowdhury, acting principal of Viqarunnisa Noon School and College, said only

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Oct marred by
rights violations
Says MSF report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government's use of its administrative powers to arrest numerous political leaders and activists in name of preventing potential violence resulted in the most severe human rights violations in October, said Manabadhikar Shongskriti Foundation (MSF).

Counter programmes of the ruling and opposition parties and their aggressive exchange of words towards each other created fear and anxiety in public mind. For the entire month, people have passed time in deep anxiety.

The rights organisation made this observation in their human rights report for the month of October. It publishes such a report every month based on various news reports and its own observations.

The report, signed by MSF founding president Sultana Kamal, said, "The country's political climate got heated as a result of searches, movement restrictions, and the use of force,

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Married,
pregnant
students can
stay at dorm

HC stays notice of
JnU hall authorities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday cleared the way for married and pregnant female students to stay in Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib Hall of Jagannath University.

The court stayed the effectiveness of a notice that prohibited these female students from residing there.

The HC bench of Justice Naima Haider and Justice Kazi Zinat Hoque issued the order following a petition filed by seven rights organisations, including Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) and Nari Pakkho, challenging the legality of the notice issued by the provost of Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib Hall on September 25.

The court also asked the education secretary and

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DEATH OF TWO RMG WORKERS

Punish those
responsible

Left-leaning leaders tell rally

DU CORRESPONDENT

Left-leaning leaders from various organisations have demanded justice for two readymade garment workers who were killed during recent clashes between police and RMG workers.

The workers have been demonstrating since last week, demanding a minimum wage of Tk 23,000.

Yesterday, the leftist leaders formed a human chain under the banner of "Mojuri Briddhite Garment Sramik Andolon" in front of the Jatiya Press Club.

During the event, they urged the government and factory owners to immediately increase garment workers' wages to Tk 25,000. They warned of tougher programmes alongside the workers if the demand is not met.

The leaders pointed out that more than 40 lakh garment workers in the country get insufficient wages, making it difficult for them to support their families amid rising prices of essentials.

They criticised the role of some labour leaders, accusing them of prioritising the interests of the government and factory owners.

Taslima Akter, the convener of "Mojuri Briddhite Garment Sramik Andolon", presided over the event.

They also announced a sit-in to be held at 11:00am today.



A man waves to his waiting relatives as a prison van takes him to CMM court in Old Dhaka. Such scenes have become all too common at court premises as many are being arrested every day in connection with the recent street agitations. The photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS