



Very few buses plied long-distance routes yesterday as most opted to stay parked due to fear of violence amid the changing political situation in the country. The photo was taken at the Sayedabad bus terminal in Dhaka in the morning.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

# Goods transport in limbo as operators play it safe

Assessment stopped at customs houses; passenger transport resumes on a limited scale

**STAR BUSINESS REPORT**

Intercity and long-route passenger transport providers resumed bus services on a limited scale yesterday afternoon amid a lack of passengers, but transport of goods remained largely halted, according to sector insiders, especially with assessment activities halted at three customs houses around the country.

They added that passengers would not feel comfortable travelling and transporters would not risk their vehicles and cargo until security is assured around the country following a spate of unrest.

The streets of Bangladesh convulsed with violence and death over the last three weeks, leaving over 300 dead, the vast majority of whom were student protesters.

The movement, which has been raging since July, climaxed on Monday with Sheikh Hasina handing in her resignation from the post of prime minister.

However, many reports of violence and

arson were reported in the aftermath.

Due to security concerns stemming from the uncertainty clouding the nation, customs officials stopped assessment activities at several stations, including Chattogram, Dhaka and Benapole Customs House, from 1:30 pm on Tuesday.

Officials also said the clearance of goods from the port was low.

According to the Chattogram Port Authority, importers released 1,350 containers by 4:00pm on Tuesday. However, on average, the port authority releases 6,000 to 8,000 containers each day.

"There was a lack of security considering that a customs house is an important establishment. So, customs operations were stopped from 1:30pm in line with orders from senior officials," an official of the Chattogram Customs House told The Daily Star.

"The army later assured us of security from Wednesday and we hope our operations will be normal from Thursday."

Mohammed Amirul Haque, managing director of Premier Cement Mill Limited, added that businesses cannot stabilise until normality is restored.

He said that delivery of goods as well as import and export activities are yet to start, adding: "We will not start delivery of cement to dealers and retailers until the situation stabilises."

Since the political landscape changed drastically just a day prior, he said more time was needed to observe the situation.

"When the situation is favourable, we will resume business activities," he stated.

Chowdhury Zafar Ahmed, general secretary of the Bangladesh Covered Van-Truck-Prime Mover Goods Transport Owners Association, said they did not begin operations as importers are yet to start releasing imported goods due to a lack of security along the Dhaka-Chattogram highway.

According to him, until the situation becomes normal, transport owners will

not operate regularly.

"There is no alternative but to wait for everything to become normal," he said.

However, some transport providers began providing bus services.

Md Abdus Sattar, general manager of air-conditioned bus service provider Green Line, said their buses began operating on seven routes yesterday noon on a test basis.

"But the number of passengers is very low and business is unviable," he said.

He added that they resumed operations to help their staff and workers, who are paid on a daily basis.

At best, 20 to 30 of their fleet of 200 buses operated yesterday, he said.

Meanwhile, Hanif Enterprise began operating buses on all routes yesterday noon, with an official remarking that the situation was gradually becoming normal.

However, he added that the number of passengers was low due to security concerns.

## Garment factories to reopen today

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Garment factory owners yesterday decided to reopen their production units from today to ensure timely shipments as they are facing pressure from international clothing retailers and brands.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) at its office in Dhaka, confirmed a BGMEA director alongside a statement of the platform afterwards.

The reopening was decided for the fact that factory owners would have to continue to pay workers' wages, said the director, adding that if the goods are not produced and shipped timely, the buyers would not clear payments.

This will result in factory owners failing to pay workers on time, he said.

The garment factories were kept shut initially for three days and then for another four days over a student movement which led to the resignation of Sheikh Hasina from the post of prime minister.

Industry insiders, exporters and international retailers and brands have already expressed concern over the delays in production and suspension of transportation of raw materials to the factories and shipment of goods.

July, August and September comprise the peak season for both shipment of Christmas goods and for booking work orders for the next summer and spring seasons.

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Mohammad Ali Khokon, president of Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, said he did not ask anybody to reopen their units but anyone could do so at their own risk as law and order was still to improve.

Mohammad Hatem, executive president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), said they would also reopen factories from today despite the risks as there was pressure from international retailers and brands for the timely shipment of goods.

Garment exporters are expecting a strong recovery in exports and business as normalcy is being gradually restored with the changing political scenario.

Another BGMEA director who was present at the meeting said another reason behind reopening factories was to keep workers busy so that they did not get involved in any unrest.

Most factories will pay workers' salaries today or tomorrow, the director said, adding that if the factories were not reopened, it would be difficult to disburse the salaries.

However, the factory owners also decided to shut down their units whenever they sense any unrest to save their business and properties, the director also said, asking not to be named.

The apparel exporters have been facing challenges in sending goods to retailers through the Chattogram port amidst the violence.

## Islami Bank staff demonstrate alleging deprivation

**STAR BUSINESS REPORT**

Over 100 officials and staff of Islami Bank Bangladesh yesterday staged a demonstration in front of the bank's head office in Dhaka's Motijheel alleging that they were deprived of benefits and promotions.

They also took down and destroyed portraits of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Some officials also vandalised the "Bangabandhu Corner", located at the bank's head office in Dilkusha, said officials of the bank.

Hasina resigned and fled the country on Monday in the face of deadly protests centring a public job quota reform movement.

The demonstrators alleged that senior officials of Chattogram-based S Alam Group, which bought a majority stake in Islami Bank in 2017, hired bankers of their choice and deprived many officials who were appointed earlier of their benefits.

They also alleged that appointments were made through irregularities and did not follow due procedure since then and so such appointments should be cancelled.

They also sought the reinstatement of officials who were "illegally" sacked.

From the demonstration, Anisur Rahman, a leader of the Collective Bargaining Agent (CBA) of the bank, said executives who joined after 2017 must not be allowed to stay in the bank.

Those who have been deprived of promotions should be promoted accordingly, they demanded.

Insiders said many officials were forced to quit jobs while many junior officers were promoted to senior positions after the change in ownership.

Islami Bank officials said Managing Director Mohammed Monirul Molla met with the CBA leaders and assured that he would provide promotions gradually.

The Daily Star tried to reach Molla over the phone but he did not pick up.



A nearly empty wholesale fish market at Jatrabari in the morning yesterday, signifying that a very little amount of fish arrived in the capital due to fear of violence and attacks amid the changing political situation.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

# 'We had to save our jobs'

BB deputy governor says over irregularities in banking sector

**STAR BUSINESS REPORT**

A deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank yesterday said they often had to turn a blind eye towards irregularities as they have limited capacity to fight against politically influential people who bring about such malpractices.

"We have to manage various things in order to save our jobs as we too need job security," said the official, Md Khurshid Alam.

"We have to work with many limitations to save our jobs, which are contractual. This leaves the scope to terminate us at any time with three months' salary as severance pay," he added.

He also said the authorities can hire or sack people as they wish, making it very difficult to fight against influential people engaged in malpractices, especially those who are politically connected.

Alam made these comments in response to journalists' queries about the cause of widespread corruption, money laundering and other irregularities in the country's banking sector.

He was speaking at a view-exchange meeting

between journalists, led by Economic Reporters Forum (ERF) President Refayet Ullah Mirdha, and Bangladesh Bank officials at the central bank headquarters in Dhaka.

Four deputy governors of the Bangladesh Bank - Kazi Sayedur Rahman, Nurun Nahar, Md Khurshid Alam and Md Habibur Rahman - its Executive Director and Spokesperson Md Mezbaul Haque and ERF General Secretary Abul Kashem were also present.

The ERF president said as a guardian of Bangladesh's banking sector, the central bank should look into the situation of default loans, which now stand at more than Tk 182,000 crore.

Also, money launderers and other corrupt people in the banking sector should be identified and punished accordingly, he added.

Bangladesh Bank Governor Abdur Rouf Talukder was absent from his office yesterday.

On the reason behind the absence, Bangladesh Bank Deputy Governor Kazi Sayedur Rahman said Talukder has fallen sick and was still inside the country.

However, a confidential source said the central bank governor was likely to resign from his post

and to try to leave the country as soon as possible.

Rahman, whose tenure as deputy governor will end soon, told journalists that the central bank was working to restructure the banking sector and was ready to work with the new government.

In a step for improving transparency in its activities, Bangladesh Bank yesterday withdrew the restriction on journalists' entry to the central bank.

Rahman said all types of information would now be freely shared with journalists, as was the case before the restriction was imposed in April.

Bangladesh Bank had taken the decision at a time when the country's economy was facing several challenges, including growing irregularities in the financial sector, high inflation and a forex crisis.

During an emergency meeting without their governor, high-ups of the central bank instructed all its staff to keep calm amidst the changing situation to avoid conflict.

A source at Bangladesh Bank said Rahman has instructed them not to disclose any information on social media or other platforms amid the ongoing situation.

## US retailers' body wants quick restoration of normalcy

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

The American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA) hoped the situation would improve and normalcy would be restored soon in Bangladesh, which is the third largest garment supplier to the USA.

"We are heartbroken by the ongoing tragedy in Bangladesh that has taken hundreds of lives. We continue to urge calm and urge all sides to come together peacefully so we can jointly move past this crisis," AAFA President and CEO Steve Lamar said in a statement on Monday.

"It is imperative that full democratic institutions be maintained and stability be assured. These are key steps in supporting the lives and livelihoods of Bangladeshi citizens and ensuring short-term disruptions will indeed be temporary," Lamar also said.

The AAFA released the statement in response to Sheikh Hasina handing in her resignation from the post of prime minister on Monday in line with the demands of protesting students.

Bangladesh is the third-largest supplier of garments to the US and has been a fast-growing supplier of footwear and travel goods as well, the statement also said.

The USA is Bangladesh's single-largest export destination and is considered by American clothing retailers and brands as an important sourcing destination for their end-consumers.