

Protests lead to traffic chaos across Bangladesh

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Students demand the abolition or reduction in civil service recruitment quotas for families of liberation war martyrs, women and minorities. The 'martyrs' quota is particularly unpopular because of widespread corruption and nepotism

Protesters pushing for reduction in public recruitment quota called off their demonstrations for Wednesday after the prime minister had announced a quota cancellation while cities faced severe congestions because of the protests all day long.

Bangladesh Sadharan Chhatra Adhikar Sangrakkhan Parishad, the platform of the protesting students, would announce its next course of action this morning.

Platform joint-convenor Rashed Khan made the announcement at a sit-in near Teachers-Students Centre of the Dhaka University at about 6:00pm following the prime minister's announcement.

Intensified protests on Wednesday brought the capital to almost a standstill and heavy traffic chaos on streets and disrupted road communications across the country.

The protesters took to the street on Sunday and continued the protests for five point demands, including reduction of quota in public service recruitment to 10 per cent from the existing 56 per cent.

The protests intensified with the joining of private university students and even college and in some cases school students.

Since Wednesday morning protesters and students staged protests at Dhaka University, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, Jahangirnagar University, Rajshahi University, Chittagong University and other campuses.

Students of private universities, including North South University, East West University, Daffodil University, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, State University of Bangladesh, blocked Mirpur Road, Rokeya Sarani, Sat Masjid Road and Pragati Sarani, Airport Road, Outer Circular road.

As the students of different public and private universities held demonstrations in important intersection in Dhaka, city dwellers experienced exasperating traffic jams for hours.

Protests at places on Dhaka-Aricha, Dhaka-Tangail, Dhaka-Mymensingh, Dhaka-Chittagong highways kept travellers to and from capital stuck on the highways.

Patients, elderly people, returnees from office, school children and Higher Secondary Certificate examinees were worst sufferers of the traffic chaos across the country.

Bangladesh Sadharan Chhatra Adhikar Sangrakkhan Parishad started the latest round of movement on Sunday. Central leaders on Monday evening, coming out from a meeting with road transport and bridges minister Obaidul Quader, suspended their protests.

Many protesters, however, rejected the decision and continued the protests.

The protesters have been on the streets since February for the five-point demands, including recruitment of jobseekers in vacant posts on the basis of merit if eligible candidates were not found under the quota, an end to special recruitment tests for quota candidates and a single age limit for all jobseekers.

Students were on the street as 56 per cent quotas are reserved in government jobs – 30 per cent for freedom fighters' children and grandchildren, 10 per cent for women, 10 per cent for districts lagging behind, 5 per cent for ethnic minorities and 1 per cent for physically challenged people.

At the Dhaka University protestors resumed their protest at about 10:00am on Wednesday. They held a sit-in near Teachers Students Centre till prime minister's announcement of cancellation of quota system.

They also demanded withdrawal of agriculture minister Matia Chowdhury's derogatory comments made on Monday terming them 'children of razakars' and finance minister AMA Muhith's remarks made on Tuesday that reform of existing quota system was not possible before the next budget.

Students of Udayan Higher Secondary School, Engineering University School and College, Nilkhet High School and others joined the protesters while Dhaka University Teachers Association expressed solidarity with them.

The association in a statement supported the demand for reform of the quota system. The statement signed by association president ASM Maksud Kamal and general secretary Shibli Rubayat Ul Islam said that reform of quota was a 'demand of time'

Ruling Awami League-backed student body Bangladesh Chhatra League brought out a procession hailing prime minister's announcement on the campus in the evening.

Shahbagh police station officer-in-charge Abul Hossain said that four cases were filed with his police station for the vandalism of Dhaka University vice-chancellor's house and violence during protests.

Police officials said that all four cases were filed against unnamed people.

Students took to the streets at the Dhaka University early Wednesday as Chatra League activists reportedly beat up or threatened students at different halls for joining protests.

Kabi Sufia Kamal Hall unit Chhatra League president Iffat Jahan Esha and her fellows allegedly beat up Botany fourth year student Morsheda Akter for joining the protests. Earlier, they beat up three protesters on Monday.

Students of private universities, including Daffodil University, University of Asia Pacific, North South University, East West University, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, State University of Bangladesh, Stamford University Bangladesh, Eastern University, International University of Business Agriculture and Technology, BGMEA Institute of Fashion and Technology, South East University blocked Mirpur Road, Sat Masjid Road, Airport Road, Outer Circular road, Panthapath and Pragati Sarani and demonstrated extending their support to the five-point demands and protesting at attacks and assault on protesting students at Dhaka University halls.

In Sukrabad, Panthapath, Dhanmondi and Kalabagan areas, several hundred students of Daffodil

International University, ULAB and State University blocked Mirpur Road and Sat Masjid Road for 5-6 hours from 10:00am.

ULAB student Noble Rahman said that they would continue their protests along with the other university students until a formal decision on reform of quota came from the government.

In Rampura, Natunbazaar and Bashudhara areas, hundreds of students from East West University, AIUB, North South University also blocked Pragati Sarani from morning for several hours.

AIUB student Pritom Zyed demanded that Matia Chowdhury must apologise for branding the protesters as 'children of razakars'.

Students from different universities gathered on the campuses and then took to the streets following processions holding banners and placards and chanting slogans for reduction of quota.

Students of BRAC University formed human chains at Mohakhali adjacent to their campus, while in Malibagh-Siddheshwari area Stamford University Bangladesh students brought out processions and observed sit-in on Outer Circular road.

Dhaka College and Eden College students blocked Mirpur Road from Science Laboratory intersection to Azimpur intersection since 11:00am for more than five hours.

Protests cause huge tailbacks and the worst sufferers were people returning from offices, elderly people and patients to and from hospitals.

Many were seen walking towards their destinations. Cashing in on the situation, rickshaw-pullers and auto-rickshaws charged double and triple fares.

Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Avenue, Green Road, DIT, Mirpur Road and Airport road were worst affected as vehicular movement came into a standstill there.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police joint commissioner (traffic-south) said Mofizuddin Ahmed said that since noon there were huge congestions in Dhanmondi and Nilkhet areas.

At about 6:00pm, the congestion became less while huge congestion was seen in Mohakhali and Mirpur areas at the same time.

Hasibul Islam, a city dweller, said he was scheduled to go to Khulna by a Shohagh paribahan bus on Wednesday at 5:00pm which had been cancelled by the operator.

New Age district and university correspondents reported that protests caused huge traffic chaos across the country.

Several thousand students of Jahangirnagar University for the third day blocked Dhaka-Arica highway.

They kept the road blocked for over five hours since 10:00am triggering huge traffic chaos on the highway.

Students of different colleges blocked Dhaka-Tangail Highway at Karatipara for about an hour from noon.

Students of Rajshahi University and Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology blocked Dhaka-Rajshahi highway for about five hours from 10:30am.

Students of Begum Rokeya University and Carmichael Government College, Rangpur Government College and different institutes blocked road at Lalbag bazar for two hour from noon causing a severe traffic jam in Rangpur city.

Chittagong University students keep shuttle train at halt at the city's Shosohor station for six hours from about 8:30am.

Students in Faridpur formed human chain at in front of press club in the town.

Students of Government Suhrawardy College in Pirojpur brought out procession on the campus.

Students of Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science and Technology University in Dinajpur blocked Dhaka-Dinajpur highway for several hours from 11:00am.

Dinajpur Kotwali police officer-in-charge Redwanur Rahim said that the students held peaceful protests.

Students of Khulna University, Khulna University of Engineering and Technology and BL College held demonstrations on the respective campuses.

BL College students also blocked Dhaka-Khulna highway for one hour from 11:00am.

At about 1:00pm students of the three institutions and others gathered in Shibbari crossing to begin sit-in. Movements trigger traffic chaos in the city.

Students of Islamic University in Kushtia blocked Kushtia-Jhenaidah highway for several hours from 11:00am.

Students of Comilla University, Comilla Victoria College and Comilla Government College held sit-in at Kandirpara for about five hours from 10:00am. The protests caused traffic chaos in the city.

Students of different educational institutions blocked Mujib Sarak in front of Jessore Press Club for about half an hour from noon.

Students of Jessore University of Science and Technology also staged agitation on the campus.

Though the movement of long-route buses was normal in the morning, buses stuck on highways, including Dhaka-Chittagong, Dhaka-Aricha and Dhaka-Mymensingh highways, after the highways were blocked at about noon.

Gabtoli Bus Terminal Workers Union president Mofijul Haque Bebu said that they ran long-route buses of northern districts bypassing highway adjacent to Jahangirnagar University since 11:00am.

The buses ran on Hemayetpur-Singair-Manikganj-Paturia and Beribadh-Jamgarh-EPZ-Shaheed Minar-Manikganj routes, he said.

Mohakhali Bus Terminal Owners Association president Abul Kalam said they ran buses on Dhaka-Mymensingh and Dhaka-Chittagong routes whenever the roads got free and passengers suffered a lot.

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