

## No end of chaos in sight at HSIA, authorities ramp up measures

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 16 January, 2022



Dhaka : The current chaos at Dhaka Airport seems to have no end in sight as the sufferings of passengers are increasing with every passing day. Since December till now, Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in the capital has been a nightmare for passengers.

The airport is overcrowded, queues on every step of the way are too long, luggage carts are rare to find, health officers at PCR lab are very few, flights are getting delayed, passengers are missing flights and getting sick even, while they wait for hours and hours for PCR test results.

Such horrendous situation at the airport is being witnessed due to the closure of the airport runway at night from 12 am to 8 am for renovation of the taxiways. The runway closure at night has forced the airport to operate flights over 16 hours only during the day, earlier which were operated over 24 hours, said Group Captain AHM Tauhid-ul Ahsan, Executive Director of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport speaking to The Bangladesh Monitor at his office recently.

### Flight delays

Flights are often delayed by up to two hours at the airport. Hence, the passengers are worried about missing their connecting flights in transit countries. The counters, both check-in and immigration, are struggling over handling 15,000-20,000 passengers of 110-120 international flights a day, in just 16 hours, instead of previous 24.

"Even 7-8 flights are currently operating in an hour at the airport. This has led to a

huge pressure for Biman Bangladesh Airlines to run ground handling works. To better their services, Biman has increased its manpower and equipment in ground handling while further measures are underway," mentioned the Executive Director of the airport.

The mind boggling chaos peaks between 7:00 pm and 12:00 am when around 3,000 passengers depart on 14-15 flights.

#### Sufferings at PCR lab

The woes of the expatriate workers to the United Arab Emirates seem to have no bound as they are suffering the most at the airport currently. Since late September, the UAE has made it mandatory for arriving passengers to test negative for Covid-19 six hours prior to boarding their flights. ❌

Thus, around 3,000-5,000 passengers flying to the UAE come to Dhaka airport every day, 8-9 hours before their flights to carry out Covid tests. However, to their misfortune, there are inadequate place for them to rest for such a long time.

Most of these passengers to the UAE are seen sitting on their bags as there is not enough seating arrangement.

"PCR test results of passengers are supposed to be delivered in three hours. However, it is actually taking way longer by the testing institutions involved. Therefore, we are continuously urging them to deliver the results quicker," said the Executive Director of the airport.

#### Trolley crisis

Another example of mismanagement and lack of foresight by the authorities can be seen from the fact the airport does not have enough trolleys for the 15,000-20,000 passengers it serves a day currently. As a result, passengers, to their horrid luck, are often seen carrying or dragging their huge luggage.

"We have in total 1800 trolleys, of which 1,400 were serviceable, at the airport. We have already repaired the unserviceable ones. However, thousands of passengers to the UAE who come to the airport 8-10 hours early to carry out PCR tests occupy all the trolleys as they wait for their test results. This is resulting in a trolley crisis for passengers to other destinations," Touhid-ul Ahsan explained.

"To resolve the issue, we have employed 70 new trolley men. Their work is to bring the empty trolleys back to their designated places where other passengers can find them," he added.

Touhid-ul Ahsan also noted that by the directive of State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism M Mahbub Ali, 2,500 more trolleys will be procured soon at the airport. Such disarray at the airport could have been avoided if the authorities deployed enough manpower to handle the logistics and cater to the passengers, expressed flyers and airline officials.

However, the Executive Director of the airport claimed they are taking all necessary measures to resolve the issues and ensure better services to the passengers. He said, they have increased the number of staffers at the health and immigration counters to address the issues.

#### Migrants falling sick

The woes of the migrant workers to the UAE have increased tenfold as they are having to struggle with hunger, exhaustion and food poisoning while they wait at the airport for 8-10 hours to get PCR test results.

Lately, hundreds of expatriate workers fell sick upon reaching their Middle East destinations. Reports said about 120 workers fell sick in the UAE and another 60 workers in Qatar.

According to reports, the embassies of those countries, specially Qatar and Dubai, said, the migrants suffered from stomach ailments, due to eating at the restaurants

near the Dhaka airport before their flights.

On January 6, the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution conducted mobile court drives in the airport area and fined five restaurants a total of BDT 375,000.

Dhaka Airport's Executive Director also expressed that regular hygiene inspections are being made at food outlets inside the airport.

"We inspect the food stores inside the airport regularly. There is a different branch of sanitary inspectors. The four stores inside the RT-PCR lab are also under supervision," he claimed.

Waiting at filthy parking lot



On the other hand, many passengers are having to relieve themselves in the gaps between parked cars on the second floor of the parking lot at the airport, even after knowing there is a toilet below.

This is because the police do not allow people who go to the toilet to come upstairs again. Even if the men get their business done on the second floor, women cannot.

Due to such lack of facilities and mismanagement, the car parking of the airport has become filthier than the Kamlapur Railway Station, claimed passengers.

Utilise Ashkona Hajj Camp

According to reports, Shariful Hasan, Programme Head of BRAC Migration, urged the government to utilise Ashkona's Hajj Camp as a waiting place for migrants to the UAE as it is located just across the airport and is now currently empty.

Since it is a government establishment, there will be no additional expenses for the passengers even. This will benefit everyone as it can accommodate many people at once with good sanitary facilities, said Shariful Hasan.

Also, if the authorities can ensure reasonably priced food there, the sufferings of the migrants will reduce greatly, he suggested, warning, the water supply in that case at the camp should be tested as earlier there were records of people falling sick after drinking the water.

Rapid testing facilities at other int'l airports

A parliamentary body on January 11 recommended the government to install rapid test facilities at all three international airports of the country to carry out Covid-19 test of departing migrant workers.

The parliamentary standing committee on expatriates' welfare and overseas welfare ministry came up with the recommendations at a meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban with Jatiya Party MP Anisul Islam Mahmud in the chair.

Currently, RT-PCR test facilities are only available at Dhaka and Chattogram airports. If Sylhet airport is brought under RT-PCR testing services and more international flights are introduced to Middle East destinations, then pressure at the other two airports will lessen.