

New travel ordinance to drive mass agency closures: ATAB

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 04 January, 2026



Dhaka: Travel sector leaders on January 4 warned that the newly promulgated Travel Agency Registration and Control Ordinance-2026 could devastate Bangladesh's travel industry, forcing nearly 5,000 agencies to shut down unless the "anti-business" law is repealed.

Officials of several travel agencies strongly criticized the ordinance, terming it a "black ordinance" that runs counter to the survival and sustainability of the industry.

Calling for the immediate repeal of the ordinance, travel sector representatives urged the government to avert what they described as an impending collapse of the industry, warning that the livelihoods of nearly 5,000 agency owners, their employees, and families would be destroyed if the law remains in force.

Former Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh (ATAB) President Manzur Morshed Mahbub voiced the concerns at a press conference at the National Press Club in the capital, saying the gazette of the ordinance, published on January 1, contains several new sections, subsections, and clauses that would effectively paralyze travel agency operations.

Referring to clause (kha) of sub-section (umo) of section 4 of Act No 61 of 2013, he said the amended affidavit now prohibits the buying and selling of airline tickets between travel agencies.

He noted that out of around 5,800 registered travel agencies in the country, only about 800 are members of the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

“The remaining nearly 5,000 agencies lack the capacity to issue tickets independently,” he said, adding that barring them from sourcing tickets from other agencies would prevent them from serving passengers and from showing the mandatory annual sales turnover of BDT 5 million for license renewal, ultimately forcing closures.

ATAB Members’ Welfare Unity Alliance Convener Mohammad Jalal Uddin Tipu highlighted another provision requiring offline travel agencies to submit a bank guarantee of BDT 1 million. He said, thousands of agencies have failed to become IATA members due to financial limitations and would be unable to meet the new guarantee requirement.

The speakers also criticized a proposed ban on operating recruiting agencies at the same address as travel agencies, saying such a move would increase operating costs and raise per-capita expenses for outbound migrant workers, who have long relied on combined services from the same premises.

Expressing grave concern, the leaders pointed to a new clause under section 9 that empowers the government to temporarily suspend a registration certificate without prior hearing. They warned that such authority, exercised without due process, could lead to harassment and severe financial losses for agencies.

They also opposed the proposed increase in punishment under section 11, which raises imprisonment from six months to one year and fines

from BDT 300,000 to BDT 1 million. The speakers said the previous law was adequate and urged the government to retain the earlier penalty structure.

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