

# City traffic thrown into chaos

## Students continue to vent fury over VAT

Staff Correspondent

THE capital was brought to almost a standstill on Sunday, second time in four days, as hundreds of private university students peacefully demonstrated, blocking roads at several

key points for withdrawal of value added tax imposed on their tuition fees.

Students of several private medical colleges joined in the movement with a similar demand to private university students, who are in the street for the last five days.

Students skipped classes and exams on the first day of their strike at private universities for an indefinite period and they vowed to continue their movement until withdrawal of VAT.

Student's demonstrations blocking major roads lead to

huge tailback at the roads and lanes and by-lanes of streets in the capital. City dwellers were found stranded on the roads for tailbacks.

The finance minister AMA Muhith on Sunday said the door was open for discussion on the demand

by the private universities students.

'I hope that they would come for discussion,' he told reporters after a meeting at his secretariat office.

Teachers and officials of several private universities. *Continued on page 2 Col. 1*

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alleged that elite force Rapid Action Battalion asked university authorities to 'control' their students.

Salauddin Mithu, a protestor at East West University, said the students had rejected the government's explanation that the university authorities, not the students, would pay the VAT. The protests would continue till the withdrawal of the VAT.

Teachers and officials of Stamford University, State University, University of Liberal Arts, Daffodil International University and East West University said that members of the Rapid Action Battalion visited their campus and university authorities to control their students 'for the sake of law and order'.

RAB-1 operation officer Muhith Kabir and RAB-2 operation officer Ferdousi Rahman both said they went to the universities to discuss the situation of the movement with the universities authorities.

A proposed 10 per cent VAT on tuition fees of private universities, medical and engineering colleges was later lowered to 7.5 per cent following agitation of students in June when the parliament adopted the finance bill for the new fiscal year.

Students in the capital began their current spell of protests on September 9 in front of East West University and a police attack on them left at least 30 injured.

Private university students brought out rounds of processions at the capital's Dhanmondi and Kalabagan area.

Students of State University, Daffodil, IBIAS University, took part in sit-in at Sankar crossing and Dhanmondi 27 crossing near Rapa Plaza on the Mirpur road from 11am.

Students gave flowers to the police at Sankar in the morning and Gonoshasthaya Kendra trustee Zafrullah Chowdhury and a group of Dhaka University students expressed solidarity with the students at the place at noon. A group of Dhaka University students also expressed solidarity with the protestors.

Several hundred students blocked Panthapath and Green road crossings disrupting vehicular movement in the area.

East West students held demonstration near Rampura bridge, holding up Pargati Sarani from 10am to 4pm. Dhaka University professor Ahmed Kamal expressed solidarity with the students' demands.

Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury, registrar of the East West University said the students would not need to pay VAT in the next three years.

Protestors at American International University-Bangladesh and Atish Dipnagar University brought out processions at Gushan and Banani area. Students of North South University and Independent University brought out processions at Bashundhara area.

Students of Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology staged protests in front of their campus in Tejgaon Industrial Area.

Students took part in the sit-in the House Building area on the Airport Road

from 11am. In the beginning, police and protestors chased at each other for about five minutes, police however allowed students to sit in the road later.

Students of Shahabuddin Medical College demonstrated at Gulshan 2, and Uttara Adhunik Medical College and Bangladesh Medical College in House Building Area in Uttara. Students of Jalalabad Medical College, Sylhet Woman Medical College and Park View Medical College participated in the sit-in Sylhet.

The protestors shouted slogans declaring they would not leave until the government withdrew VAT on their tuition fees.

Commuters faced unprecedented traffic jams throughout the capital. Daily life of city dwellers of the areas on which students demonstrated came to almost a standstill. Commuters were seen getting down from buses, cars and rickshaws as they remained stuck for hours.

Office-goers waited in vain for hours to catch buses or other transports to return home, at different places including Uttara, Azimpur, Farmgate, and other places.

Many of them had to walk all the way home. School-goers had the same experience while returning home with parents.

Women, children, the elderly and the ailing were worst sufferers in traffic jams.

New Age Correspondent in Savar reported students of Gono Bishwabidyalay in Ashulia, on the outskirts of the capital, blocked Dhaka-Aricha highway at Baishmile

area for more than one hour from about 11am.

New Age correspondent in Chittagong reported students held demonstration at WASA crossing, causing a huge traffic jam in the adjacent area.

Students held a rally and sit-in at Talaimari crossing, chanting slogans against the imposition of VAT, in Rajshahi city, reported New Age correspondent in the city.

Several hundred students staged a sit-in blocking the busy Zindabazar road in front of the Shaheed Minar at Chowhatta in Sylhet city, reported New Age correspondent in the city.

Meanwhile, several private universities suspended all classes and exams for today and brought ahead vacation for Eid ul Azha. Students said that usually private universities remain closed for seven days for Eid ul Azha, this year it was declared about 10 days ahead of Eid.

BRAC University and Daffodil International University had suspended all classes for today and North South University suspended all classes and exam till Tuesday.

Independent University of Bangladesh declared Eid vacation from Sunday to September 26.

Eastern University declared Eid vacation from Saturday to September 30.

World University will remain closed from September 17 to September 28 on the occasion of Eid.

Classes of Southeast University will begin from September 30 instead of September 15 (Tuesday).

Primeasia University suspended all exams for today.