



Cashing in on Eid rush for home

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With Eid-ul-Fitr only about a week away, homebound passengers looking for tickets of inter-district bus, launch and train are held hostage by transport companies and ticket scalpers.

All the bus and launch operators have raised their ticket prices for the days preceding the Eid and a section of transport workers and brokers are selling tickets at exorbitant prices.

Thousands of people every day rush to Gabtoli, Sayedabad, Sadarghat and Kamalapur to buy tickets. They are forced to buy tickets paying 25 to 50 percent higher prices.

As many as 40 lakh people will leave Dhaka to celebrate Eid with their near and dear ones living in villages, sources in the transport associations said.

The law enforcing agencies deployed in the bus terminals, Sadarghat launch terminal and

Kamalapur railway station have failed to check the ticket scalping.

SAYEDABAD

Passengers complain the long-route bus operators at Sayedabad bus terminal are selling advance tickets for different routes at higher prices, taking the advantage of the Eid rush.

All the transport companies operating from this terminal to the districts in Khulna, Chittagong and Sylhet divisions have raised the fare by at least 25 percent.

"A ticket for Khulna costs Tk 170 but I had to pay Tk 250," said Shamim Reza, a private company official, who is going to Khulna to celebrate Eid along with his family.

For a trip to Choumohoni, passengers are paying Tk 250 to 280 against the usual fare of Tk 220. Tickets for Sylhet and Chittagong routes are also selling at higher prices.

Passengers alleged the ticket scalpers have created an artificial crisis by buying most of the advance tickets. They are now selling them at

Ticket scalping rampant at bus, launch terminals and railway station. Thousands of homebound passengers forced to collect tickets at exorbitant prices

exorbitant prices.

"This is a common picture of the bus terminals before every Eid. We are held hostage by the operators and brokers," said Abdul Kader who could not manage a ticket for Khulna.

The passengers said the transport companies are just cashing in on the rush for tickets before the biggest festival of the Muslims.

"There is reason for raising the bus fare again which was increased a month ago when petroleum prices were raised," Kader said. "This is just for making high profit."

However, a staff of Shyamoli Paribahan said they were compelled to increase the fare as they have to make up for the loss in the return trips to Dhaka before Eid.

"Most buses return to Dhaka almost empty before Eid. So we have to raise the fare for outgoing trips," he said. "Besides, we have to pay Eid bonus to our staff." Tanvir Rana, chairman of South Bengal Coach and Bus Owners' Association, said they would take action against any operator if passengers lodge specific complaints.

GABTOLI

The bus operators at Gabtoli terminal in collusion with brokers have created an artificial crisis of tickets for more than 20 north and south-western districts.

Most of the passengers looking for tickets for November 1 to 3 are returning home empty-handed as the bus counter staff say all the

tickets have already been sold out.

However, the brokers are selling tickets charging almost double the usual prices.

"There is not a single ticket available from November 1 onwards," said Abu Taleb who wants tickets for Rangpur. "Only brokers are selling tickets at higher prices."

The bus counter staff said more than 700 buses leave the terminal for different districts every day but the demand for tickets is much higher, leading to the crisis.

Brokers roaming around the terminal ask the passengers to pay more and buy tickets from them.

The passengers complained that the brokers had bought most of the advance tickets to make quick bucks before Eid. Passengers are compelled to buy tickets from them.

The police deployed at the terminal do not pay heed to the activities of the brokers, the passengers complained. But the patrol police, when asked, denied the allegation.

Sources in the Gabtoli Bus Truck Malik Samity said tickets are being sold from about 150 counters in the terminal for 450 to 500 buses operating daily. During Eid, the number of trips increases to 700 to meet the huge demand.

When asked about the ticket crisis and high prices, Malik Samity official Sheikh Mohammad Aslam said: "This is a normal practice before every Eid."

He said they will incur loss if the fare is not increased, because the return trips are almost empty before Eid. "Moreover, extortion increases during the festivals."

The prices of tickets for the 16 districts in greater Rangpur, Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Pabna and Bogra have been increased by Tk 50 to 100 for the pre-Eid trips. Tickets on Barisal, Patuakhali, Chuadanga and Bagerhat routes have also been raised.

A trip to Barisal now costs Tk 280, Patuakhali Tk 300, Chuadanga Tk 280, Bagerhat Tk 380 and Rajshahi Tk 250. The usual fare ranges from Tk 150 to 180 for these districts.

SADARGHAT

Md Al Amin went to Sadarghat on October 26 to book a cabin for a launch trip to Barguna before Eid. He was astonished to know that the fare is Tk 1,200 to 1,400 for a double-bed cabin which was Tk 500 when he came to Dhaka only five days ago.

"If I protest, I won't get a cabin. Because of Eid the demand for cabins has increased and the launch operators are cashing in on this huge demand," he said. "Passengers are forced to pay such a high fare as they are desperate to go to their villages."

Hundreds of passengers, mostly intending to go to the southern districts by launch, every day rush to Sadarghat and face the same situation.

The launch staff said tickets for deck and cabins in Chandpur, Barisal, Bhola, Galachipa, Pirojpur, Patuakhali and Barguna bound launches have already been sold out.

The fare increased from Tk 150 to Tk 200 for deck, from Tk 500 to Tk 700 for a single cabin and from Tk 1,000 to Tk 1,400 for a double cabin,

ensure tickets. I have managed tickets for Noakhali from black market at higher prices," said Illias Uddin, a passenger.

"My relatives have bought tickets from black market for November 1 giving Tk 100 extra per ticket and I had to pay additional Tk 140 for a trip to Sylhet on November 3," said Nahid.

The ticket scalpers are selling tickets in places around Kamalapur station due to the drive by the mobile courts and presence of law enforcers.

"The presence of mobile courts has made the station free from brokers but it could not stop the illegal business," said Touhidul Alam, a banker.

Many passengers had to change their date of journey due to unavailability of tickets for the expected day while many have to look for alternative way to go home.

"I had planned to go home on November 1 but could not manage ticket for that day and have got ticket for November 2," said Adnan Ahmed, a passenger who wishes to celebrate Eid with his family members living in Rangpur.

"We have added one to two compartments to the trains operating from October 30 to November 1 and two to three compartments to the trains on November 2 and 3," said Soleman Shikder, station master, Kamalapur station.

The railway officials admitted that they could not provide tickets for all passengers.



Dazzling display of cards

Musical Eid cards steal most buyers' hearts

SHARMIN MEHRIBAN

Eid card dealers in the city are making brisk business this season.

The variety and creativity in designs and the improved quality of paper has seen people thronging their favourite foreign and local brand card outlets like Hallmark, Archie's, Ideal, Azad and Aarong although cheap duplicates are available on the pavements even.

"The cards sold on the foot-paths are made of normal paper whereas we use art paper that are thicker in texture," said Sohel, a salesperson at Archie's.

"Even if they imitate our brand name, any regular buyer can see the difference between the normal paper and art paper," he added.

The cards at Hallmark and Archie's are printed in India. Some corporate firms buy them in bulks during Eid and other festive occasions while there is a traditional rush of customers for Eid cards, said

Rahela Khatun, wife of the owner of Archie's outlet at Karnophulli Garden city. For this Eid, Hallmark has released over 100 different types of cards while Archie's has presented around 1700 types. The motifs are floral in the regular style, the European style with baskets and laces and the Persian style that appears like Islamic calligraphy in the shape of mosques.

Ideal Products are offering some 1200 new cards this Eid with a particular focus on the very popular musical cards. "The musical cards, which came at Tk 180 each, have been sold out and are also out of stock," said an employee of Ideal Products. Each musical card contains seven songs in Hindi, Bangla and English. Other designs include sequences, foil and hand-made print, floral motifs and offset print in various shapes. The sequences are both of local and foreign origin.

The varieties include heart-

shaped, diamond-shaped, pentagon-shaped, die cutting, floral and tri-folded. A particular heart-shaped card, known as the hologram card, has a metallic ambush. The magic card has wide slits on top with a sliding page beneath. The page shows two different pictures. The super ambush card is tri-folded. The material used is Indonesian ambush, perfumed and glazed paper. Designs are self-made. The cards are available either with or without texts.

Azad Products released 1420 types of cards.

"Our musical cards have six songs in each and all are traditional Bangla numbers," said Md. Mokbul Hossain, the sales manager of Azad Products. These cards have been priced at Tk 250.

Other specialties include the 'paan' card that is shaped and coloured like a betel leaf and the tri-folded super ambush that has a length and width of 22 and 28 inches. Designs include hand-

crafted, ambush made with sticks, offset print and floral.

The material used are German and Swedish ambush paper. Designs are from India and Thailand.

Aarong's cards are a step ahead in terms of quality and design. There are some 30 new designs available this Eid, according to Faiza Rahman, product development manager at Aarong.

Apart from being 100 percent locally made, the cards are offered both in the regular art paper and the Eco-friendly hand-made paper.

"The hand-made paper is made of recycled paper, silk and other thread waste, floral petals, leaves and wheat husks," explained Rahman.

"Although these have a rough finishing, they are made attractive with beads, rural sequences, zari, and nakshikatha patchwork," she added.



A young girl shows her hands decorated with mehndi (Hena) at the Sobhanbagh Community Centre at Dhanmondi on Friday. Ligion Herbal, a local fashion house, organised a Hena design contest there ahead of Eid.