



DOUBLE JEOPARDY: With rubble from drainage renovation work littering one side and hawkers' makeshift shops occupying the other, only a narrow strip of the footpath is left for the pedestrians to use in front of Airport Railway Station in the capital. The photo was taken on Sunday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

To allow or not to allow Fate of 'seating service' buses to be decided today; passengers complain that bus operators continue charging extra

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

With the three-month suspension of a special drive against so-called "seating service" buses plying the Dhaka streets coming to an end this weekend, the fate of such service is likely to be decided today.

A meeting of an eight-member committee, which was designated to determine whether such buses can be allowed to run in the city, is scheduled to be held at Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) head office at 11:00am.

"Final decision on 'seating service' would be taken at the meeting tomorrow [today]," Mahbub-E-Rabbani, director (road safety) of BRTA and also the head of the committee, told The Daily Star yesterday.

As per their earlier announcement, transport owners on April 15 stopped operating "seating service" amid widespread allegations that the bus authorities were charging extra fare.

Following that, BRTA, in association with Dhaka Road Transport Owners' Association's vigilance teams, conducted mobile courts to stop such practice.

But the move backfired as a good number of buses were withdrawn from the streets for five consecutive days, causing immense sufferings to commuters.

Against the backdrop, BRTA suspended their drive for 15 days and later for three months. It also formed the eight-member committee to decide if "seating service" is necessary and if the service could be brought under a legal framework.

Led by Mahbub-E-Rabbani, the committee has representatives from bus owners and workers association, journalists and police.

Mahbubur Rahman, organising secretary of the association and also a member of the committee, told The Daily Star yesterday that two meetings of the committee had already been held and they had given their opinions.

"BRTA also took people's opinion through its website. Actually, people want 'seating service'," he said, adding that the decision in this regard would be taken at today's meeting.

ALLEGATIONS AGAINST SEATING SERVICES

During suspension of BRTA drive, bus operators continued charging extra fares defying government-fixed rate, alleged commuters.

During rush hours, many of these "seating service" buses turn into regular buses with people standing, said passengers, adding that the fare do not change then.

Branding their service "seating-service", "gate-lock", "non-stop", "time-controlled", "speedy service" and "counter service", operators charge high fare even though those buses stop almost anywhere their drivers deem fit, they alleged.

In a somewhat different scenario, some regular buses turn into "seating service" during office hours in the morning when the transport crisis reaches its peak, passengers said.

"I was running late and I begged them [seating service bus staffers] to let me get on the bus, but they pushed me forcibly," complained Sohanur Rahman, who was struggling to board a Gabtoli-bound bus, operating on route no 22, from Jatrabari.

"The same bus stops wherever it gets passengers at other times," said Rahman, who works at a private company in Paltan.

Another bus company, Rongdhanu, which operates between Jurain and Mohammadpur via Kakrail, charges Tk 15 from Doyaganj to Kakrail demanding it a "seating service" but they collect passengers wherever they find any, alleged some passengers.

"It is a total anarchy. They charge high but stop here and there. If we protest, the bus staffers misbehave with us," said Wahid Ahmed, a resident of Wari. "We [passengers] are ultimate losers," said a frustrated Wahid.

Mozammel Haque Chowdhury, secretary general of Passenger Welfare Association of Bangladesh, said the number of "seating service" buses has even increased after the suspension of the BRTA drive.

He said they have conducted a survey on 300 buses on 17 routes in Dhaka city during last Ramadan and found that 98 percent of them are operating in the name of "seating service".

Although operation of such self-devised system is illegal but the system has been continuing for a decade thanks to the inaction of BRTA and traffic police, Mozammel added.

Transport Owners' Association Secretary General Khandaker Enayetullah also admitted irregularities in "seating service".

He, however, claimed, "People want 'seating service'. So, the authorities have to bring the service under a legal framework."

The government can issue separate route permit for "seating service" buses, and re-fix their fares to solve the existing problem, he added.

VANDALISM CASE JU students block administrative building

JU CORRESPONDENT

Jahangirnagar University students yesterday took position in front of the administrative building demanding withdrawal of a vandalism case against 56 students.

Later, with a group of the demonstrators, the university authorities held a meeting where a teachers' association proposed another meeting on August 3.

The students, however, rejected it and declared to continue protests.

"Why do they want to sit with us after so many days? We'll continue our programmes until the case is withdrawn," said Didar, one of the protesters.

Earlier on July 17, eight students ended their hunger strike after the authorities assured them of withdrawing the case.

Registrar Abu Bakr Siddique filed the case on May 27 after agitating students allegedly carried out vandalism at the vice chancellor's residence following a police attack on them.

The day before, they were protesting a road accident that killed two JU students in C&B bus stand area, Savar.

At least 10 people were injured when police fired rubber bullets and teargas canisters at that time.

Correction

The Daily Star on July 31 published a photograph on page-3 along with a news item titled "Good news for heart patients".

In the photo caption, Dr Shagufa Anwar was identified as public relations and business development officer of United Hospital. Actually she is the chief of communication and business development.

We regret the error.

FINANCIAL REPORTS SUBMITTED TO EC AL's annual income declined while BNP's increased

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling Awami League's annual income has declined by nearly half while BNP's increased last year compared to 2015, according to their financial reports submitted to the Election Commission yesterday.

A team led by AL presidium member Abdur Razzak submitted the party's annual financial report and BNP's senior joint secretary general Ruhul Kabir Rizvi did the same on the last day for the submission.

According to the AL's report, its income

was Tk 4.84 crore while expenditure Tk 3.1 crore in 2016.

In 2015, AL earned around Tk 7.12 crore and spent around Tk 3.73 crore.

BNP earned Tk 4.13 crore and its expenditure was Tk 3.99 crore last year. In 2015, it spent around Tk 1.87 crore against the income of around Tk 1.73 crore. BNP spent around Tk 14.26 lakh more than its income in 2015.

According to the AL's report, now it has about Tk 25.58 crore in its bank account.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu) also submitted its report yesterday.

Physiotherapy at chikungunia patients' house free of cost

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) has started giving free physiotherapy and training at the patients' house following the recent chikungunya outbreak.

A patient calling the hotline (09611000999) will get the service at his home.

DSCC Mayor Mohammad Sayeed Khokon

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Businessman Moosa sued

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Businessman Moosa Bin Shamsher has been sued by Customs Intelligence on charge of using a luxurious car dodging tax worth Tk 2.17 crore.

The customs intelligence, filed the case with Gulshan Police Station yesterday, said its press release.

According to the case, Moosa used a Range Rover evading tax and submitted unclear information to the customs about Tk 96,000 crore in a Swiss bank account.

During primary investigation, customs officials found that Moosa submitted fake documents while the car was registered.

The officials seized the car from his Gulshan residence in Dhaka on March 21.

Girl's body found in employer's house

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A teenage domestic help was found dead in her employer's residence on Free School Street in the capital's Kathalagan area yesterday.

Police said they found Lucky Akter, 14, hanging from a ceiling fan in a room of a six-storey building in the afternoon.

They rushed her to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where the doctors declared her dead, Yasin Arifat, officer-in-charge (OC) of Kalabagan Police Station, told The Daily Star.

Later, the body was sent to the medical college morgue for an autopsy, said Yasin. No case was so far filed in this connection till yesterday.

The OC said Lucky, after a break, restarted working at the house of one Hanif Miah, a businessman, seven months ago.

According to Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), at least eight minor domestic helps were found dead from January to June this year while 15 cases of violence against them were reported in the media.

Of the victims, three were raped and one was killed after rape.



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