

Commuters left high and dry

Half-capacity buses, ban on ridesharing motorbikes spell misery for people in capital for second day

ZYMA ISLAM

In addition to bus capacity being slashed to half, ride-sharing using motorcycles was banned beginning yesterday, leaving commuters in the capital in despair.

Beginning Wednesday, public transport workers are keeping half of their seats vacant to implement government directives to contain Covid-19 spread, and charging 60 percent higher fares.

The vexation of office-goers was palpable at every bus stop and major street intersection, as half-full buses kept doors tightly closed and zoomed past them.

As most offices, companies and factories are operating in full swing, many were seen waiting for an hour to board a bus while some attempted to desperately get into buses.

Halima Begum lives in Shyamoli and works at the registry office in Tejgaon. She usually boards a bus from Farmgate.

"I was sitting at Farmgate bus stop for one and half hours last night. I am older than them, and a woman. Can I compete with young men who jump on the bus before I?"

Yesterday too, she had been waiting for 30 mins for a bus. "I am exhausted. If I don't get anything in the next 15 minutes, I will get a rickshaw. I cannot afford a CNG, my job does not allow that. I am too old to compete to get on buses," she said.

Twenty-year-old college students Meraz Ahmed and Rubel had come to visit their uncle who has a shop in Farmgate.

"We walked from Farmgate to Moghbazar, but could not find any bus to go back to Shahjahanpur. Finally we got on



Bus commuters demonstrated at the capital's Khilkhet yesterday, leading to huge tailbacks at Banani, top. Ridesharing motorcyclists protested ban on the service by blocking Bijoy Sarani, bottom left. At Shyamoli, people were seen standing endlessly with bags, in hopes of catching a bus ride.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN, RASHED SHUMON

a rickshaw. The irony of the matter is, our pockets were empty and had come to visit our uncle for some financial help, and we ended up spending it on rickshaw fare," he said.

Commuters at the starting point and ending point of routes managed to get transport, but those in the middle suffered.

The Khilkhet bus stop for example, is a median stop on all bus routes. The neighbourhood lies sandwiched between the periphery of major commercial points, and houses a wide range of income groups.

Yesterday, passengers carried out demonstrations at Khilkhet bus stand after being unable to find any transport during the morning rush hour.

Officer-in-charge of Khilkhet Police Station Munshi Sabbir Rahman said buses starting from Abdullahpur got half filled at the starting point and refused to stop at Khilkhet. "We had to ask them to take some passengers, so passengers would stop protesting. The buses complied," he said.

This shows that for buses running the Khilkhet route at least, the BRTA directive was not possible to be implemented.

There was a queue of around a hundred people at Hatirjheel near Rampura Bridge, as office-goers tried in vain to catch a vehicle of the circular bus service.

SADARGHAT SEES SPARSE CROWD
Even though Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority hiked launch fare by 60 percent on condition that they will carry half their capacity, the effect could not be felt yesterday at Sadarghat. Police said it

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TIPU MURDER CASE

First depositions recorded in 10yrs

Army chief's brother Anis testifies as witness before Dhaka court

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Two prosecution witnesses, including a brother of Army chief Gen Aziz Ahmed, yesterday gave their depositions before a Dhaka tribunal in the case filed over the murder of Sayeed Ahmed Tipu, after around ten years.

Tipu, another brother of Gen Aziz, was murdered in the capital 22 years ago.

Of the witnesses, one is Anis Ahmed, brother of Gen Aziz, and the other is the victim's friend Syed Shahriar.

Before yesterday's deposition, the last time the court recorded witnesses' statements was on May 22, 2011 last. The latest hearing in the case before yesterday was on March 12 this year.

Gen Aziz, complainant of the case, gave his deposition before the court on January 6, 2004.

After getting presidential clemency in the murder case on March 28 of 2019, Anis Ahmed yesterday appeared before the Special Tribunal for Prevention of Public Safety Disturbances of Dhaka for the first time to give his depositions in the case, court sources said.

Anis Ahmed remained a fugitive since May 2004 when he was convicted of murdering businessman Mustafizur Rahman Mustafa.

Judge Begum Chaman Chowdhury of the tribunal yesterday recorded statements of Anis and Shahriar and set April 5 for next hearing in the case.

Tipu was shot dead around 7:30pm on March 13, 1999, on Airport Road in Khilkhet when he was in a car. A murder case was later filed with Badda Police Station.

CID pressed charges against six accused, including top-listed criminals Sanjiddul Islam Imon, Mohammad Islam Munna, Shamsur Rahman Mona, Anisur Rahman Zaved, and

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'Synergy is the key'

Foreign minister tells BIMSTEC ministerial meeting on multi-modal connectivity, enhanced trade and investment in region

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka wants seamless multi-modal connectivity and enhanced trade and investment in the BIMSTEC region.

"Enhanced trade and investment in this region will facilitate income and employment generation. Seamless multi-modal connectivity is a precondition for trade and investment promotion and people to people contact," said Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen while addressing the 17th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting virtually held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, yesterday.

"We need the legal documents to be ready for signature at the earliest. Hosting meeting regularly and concurrences and participation of member states in those meetings are very much crucial in this regard," he said.

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is an international organisation of seven nations of South Asia and Southeast Asia, housing 1.5

billion people and having a combined gross domestic product of \$3.5 trillion (2018). Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand are its members.

Though the sub-regional group was formed nearly three decades back, its various initiatives have remained slow.

Foreign Minister Momen said, "We need to work simultaneously on a faster pace in all priority sectors to bring synergy in our cooperation to make BIMSTEC a result oriented regional forum."

Bangladesh is a founding member of BIMSTEC, whose secretariat is in Dhaka, said Momen, adding that as the host country, Bangladesh is committed to extend all possible support to strengthen the secretariat.

He said Bangladesh's Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, a visionary leader, thought of working together with the neighbours in the region for collective progress and prosperity of people. Regional cooperation

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Public gatherings banned in Ctg for two weeks

Tourist spots closed too; movement of tourist ships on Teknaf-St Martin's route halted

STAR REPORT

Against the backdrop of increasing Covid-19 cases, Chattogram district administration has banned all sorts of public gatherings in the city until April 14.

Deputy Commissioner of Chattogram Mominur Rahman issued a public circular in this regard yesterday, reports our staff correspondent from Chattogram.

The circular said all tourist spots, cinema halls, theatres, amusement places, coaching centres and educational institutions would remain closed by this time.

All sorts of political and social programmes would remain postponed and religious programmes would be held on a limited scale following health rules, said Sumani Akter, additional district magistrate of Chattogram.

None will be allowed to go out after 10pm without emergencies, the official added.

Restaurants would have to cater to customers at half the capacity while public transports will also do the same, she

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Empower women, prevent violence: Mahila Parishad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad through its two-day National Council Meeting 2021 called for women's economic, political, and social empowerment and prevention of gender-based violence and demanded the necessary law reformations.

The organisation also demanded women-friendly healthcare services and special attention to women in tackling climate vulnerabilities and disaster management.

With the slogan, "Let's face the challenge of Covid-19, let's move forward the women's movement", the meeting was virtually held on March 31 and yesterday.

Mahila Parishad president Dr Fauzia Moslem presided over the event. She said

women's position has changed a lot in 50 years of independence, yet they haven't been able to break out of a conventional image.

"Although women have progressed significantly, we are concerned about the ongoing gender-based violence. The culture of impunity, lack of accountability, communal violence -- everything has had a negative impact on women," she added.

Mentioning the Beijing Platform for Action, which was introduced 26 years ago to establish the rights of women and girls, UN Women country representative of Bangladesh Shoko Ishikawa said every country has been working on establishing the rights of women and girls.

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MINI BYTES



NFT: The Mona Lisa of crypto-world

RAHBAR AL HAQ

Recently, there's a new Ethereum blockchain-based unit of data based around digital art and other collectables. Called Non-fungible Tokens (NFT), some of these tokens are being sold for as high as 69 million US dollars. This has led many to claim NFTs as the digital answer to collectables, while sceptics think it a fad that will soon die out.

WHAT IS AN NFT?

In economics, fungibility is a good or asset's ability to be interchanged with other individual goods or assets of the same type. Simplified, it means something of value can be exchanged for another thing holding an equal value. For example, a 100 Taka note is fungible, as it can be exchanged for two 50 Taka notes. On the other hand, a famous painting such as the Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci is non-fungible, as it is a one-of-a-kind artwork that is impossible to reproduce. NFTs are such "one-of-a-kind" assets in the digital world that can be bought and sold for real money.

HOW DOES AN NFT WORK?

One of the main reasons art such as the Mona Lisa is deemed so valuable is because it is impossible to replicate. And while it is possible to take a picture of the painting or buy a print, both methods produce significantly different copies from the original. Things get more complicated when it comes to digital artworks. A digital

art —may it be a picture or a video— can be endlessly replicated, with one copy being identical to the other. This makes it hard to put a value on a digital collector item, as it is almost impossible to tell which copy was the first. NFT, solves this issue by creating a blockchain-based digital certificate for an artwork. And since such a certificate is virtually impossible to forge, they give the art a unique identifier similar to that of a physical painting.

DOES NFT PREVENT COPYING OF ART?

No. Any item sold as an NFT can still be freely copied and shared. In many cases, the artist even retains copyright ownership. The buyer of an NFT receives a digital certificate that proves he owns the "original" work. Many compare the practice to purchasing a signed copy or an autograph.

WHAT IS THE POINT?

Much like a rare car or a painting, NFTs are a speculative asset. Meaning a buyer can later sell it for a profit. However, many are on the fence about the NFT's success. David Gerard, the author of Attack of the 50-foot Blockchain, told BBC he saw NFTs as buying "official collectables", similar to trading cards. Beepie - real name is Mike Winkelmann -, is an artist whose art NFT ended up selling for \$69 million at an auction. In an interview with the BBC, he also said: "I actually do think there will be a bubble, to be quite honest... And I think we could be in that bubble right now."

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

A father's dream for a children's haven

MINU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

Dipthandu Dip Roy Bablu's family was thrown into uncertainty when his young son was diagnosed with autism. Bablu was at his wit's end to figure out how he would get treatment for the young Debabrata Roy in Kusumbagh area of Moulvibazar sadar upazila.

At the time of his diagnosis in 2005, Debabrata had both neurological and physical limitations. He could not walk without the help of others.

His parents visited many doctors, but could not ensure the consistent treatment required for neuro-divergent children.

Bablu then decided to take matters into his own hands for the sake of his child. He traveled to multiple cities in India including Kolkata, Delhi and Bangalore over



Children with autism perform in a cultural programme organised by their school, Blooming Roses, in Kusumbagh area of Moulvibazar sadar upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

92 days to receive training on teaching autistic children in 2006.

Upon his return, he began implementing his lessons to help his son. Soon enough, the child's neurological responses became more active, and he was able to communicate with his parents.

Noticing the benefit Debabrata was getting from the lessons, Bablu decided to set up a school -- Blooming Roses Buddhi Protibondhi O Autistic Bidyalaya -- with the aim to improve the lives of children with disabilities.

"I was taking care of my son with

my skills that I learned from the training in India. But I thought that I could provide similar care to other children with disabilities. Being driven from that spirit, I set up the school," said Bablu.

"I started the school inside a room in my house with just four autistic children. They began showing signs of improvement within a few days," he said.

"As the news spread, many other parents of autistic children came to me for advice. The number of students at the school grew fast. It became difficult to handle additional numbers of children in my small school," he added.

Later in 2012, the school was shifted to a building near Moulvibazar Sadar Upazila Parishad office with the help of local administration.

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Accept refugees fleeing Myanmar

UNHCR urges countries

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The UN Refugee Agency has made urgent calls across the region to offer refuge and protection to all those fleeing Myanmar for safety amid escalating violence.

"It is vital that anyone crossing the border, seeking asylum in another country, is able to access it," said Gillian Triggs, UNHCR's assistant high commissioner for protection in a briefing in Geneva yesterday.

Shootings by Myanmar military, which took control of the country through a coup on February 1 ousting the elected leaders, including State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, have killed more than 500 civilians so far amid protests.

UNHCR said it is shocked by the indiscriminate violence against civilians across the country, in addition to the renewed fighting between the Myanmar military and ethnic armed groups in some border areas. These events in Myanmar are driving people to flee within the country and across borders.

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ACC CASE AGAINST CID OFFICIAL, WIFE

Row over implication of two tax officials

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN, Ctg

A row has been created after Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) implicated two tax officials of Chattogram in the charge sheet of a case filed against a sub-inspector of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and his wife for amassing wealth worth Tk 1.38 crore from unknown sources.

The implication came to light in the second week of March. This correspondent managed to collect copies of the charge sheet and case statement.

ACC Deputy Director Md Ali Akbar, investigation officer of the case, accused tax inspector Dipankar Ghosh of not cooperating with ACC during the investigation. He also accused additional assistant tax commissioner Bahauddin Chowdhury of assisting the couple to amass wealth through false documents, according to the charge sheet.

However, Dipankar Ghosh, inspector, tax region-1 (circle-9), said he was deliberately implicated, and he even did not join the service when the corruption occurred.

An official letter on December 30, 2020 to the National Board of Revenue, seeking steps to exempt him from the charges.

On an allegation, ACC had launched a primary investigation and found the couple's wealth in Dhaka and Chattogram. Later on October 9 in 2019, ACC deputy director Ali Akbar filed the case with ACC Integrated Office Chattogram-1.

According to the case statement, SI Nawab Ali of CID and his wife Gulzar Begum amassed wealth worth Tk 1.38 crore from unknown sources. After investigation, the IO pressed charges before a Chattogram court on October 10, 2020, accusing the couple of accumulating wealth illegally and laundering money.

As per the charge sheet, Nawab's wife Gulzar opened income tax file in 2014-2015 tax year, in which she showed Tk 1,13,05,000 as income from a fishery project, and brokerage commission from 2005-2006 to 2013-2014 tax years. Nawab opened his file in 2016-2017, showing wealth of Tk 35,84,853.

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