

Paying more for riskier journey!

Dhaka-Barishal launches not only charging more, but also boarding more than 50pc passengers

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

In line with the recent government mandate, launch fares on the Barishal-Dhaka launch route were supposed to increase by 60 percent. But much like the overcharging going on in land, passengers of the waterways say they are being charged at least twice the usual fare on the route.

Passengers say they are even more frustrated because while the fare has been ramped up, the launches are not complying with other pandemic protocols, like carrying no more than half their seating capacity and providing hand sanitiser at the entrance.

After visiting the Barishal River Port yesterday, this correspondent found that though launches were boarding passengers up to at least 80-85 percent of their capacity, there was no one from the authorities concerned of the government to check on that.

This means while passengers are paying more, they are actually travelling at great risk. Due to this, the launches have become host to endless altercations between passengers and

staffers over the last few days, port sources told this correspondent.

However, launch owners are justifying the fare situation through an earlier confusion over pricing on the route.

Saidur Rahman Rintu, owner of the Sundarbans Launch Company and vice-president of Launch Owners Association, said though passengers were charged Tk 200 on a one-way journey during regular times following a decision taken by the launch owners around two years back, the official fare was actually Tk 250.

Adding Tk 150 as sixty percent of Tk 250, the fare now stands at Tk 400, Rintu said. "But since customers were used to paying Tk 200, they're seeing it as a doubling of regular ticket price," he added.

But this reasoning is not sitting well with passengers, for whom the burden of the increased fare is too much.

Talking to this correspondent, a regular passenger of the route said he feels overwhelmed to have to pay Tk 400 on a single journey, that too when he has to travel at great risk since the

launch owners are not cutting down on the number of passengers or providing sanitiser, temperature checks or any other hygiene requirements.

Like him, a female RMG worker travelling from Barishal to Dhaka also told this correspondent of her suffering. "It used to cost Tk 800 to make the journey with a family of four. It's now Tk 1,600. Our limited income during the pandemic simply cannot afford it anymore."

Contacted, Mostafizur Rahman, Barishal River Port officer, said while they understand the situation and are planning to talk to owners about fixing the fare at around Tk 320, they cannot take action against the owners since they are only charging according to the previous official fare of Tk 250.

However, owners will be penalised for boarding additional passengers, he added.

According to port sources, at least six to eight passenger launches run daily on the Barishal-Dhaka route during regular times., carrying three to four thousand people on seats, cabins, and decks.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

With the sharp rise in Covid-19 infections across the country, many residents of the capital are taking extra precautions to make sure they are safe from the virus. This man was spotted carrying five containers fitted with spray nozzles, presumably to spray disinfectants, in the capital's Sabujbagh area earlier this week.



Dhaka-bound passengers from Barishal huddle into groups on the deck of a launch, with no regard to social distancing, exposing themselves to possible Covid-19 infection. This photo was taken yesterday from Barishal launch terminal.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Extortion institutionalised

FROM PAGE 3

COMPLAINTS POUR IN

Visiting different city points recently, this correspondent saw toll collectors at work.

At Jai Kali Mandir, a toll collector was seen running behind a pick-up van and stopped it near a filling station, around 200 metres away from the spot they were collecting tolls.

The driver Mohammad Aslam reluctantly paid Tk 30.

"I'm carrying goods from our factory to deliver it to Gulshan. I have not used any terminal... why should they charge me?" said a frustrated Aslam.

Kalu Sheikh, managing director of Moumita Paribahan, said they are operating around 150 buses from Chandra to Narayanganj.

"We pay parking fees at Gabtali Terminal and to Narayanganj City Corporation. But DSCC is now collecting Tk 40 from each bus from Bakshibazar point although we don't park our buses at Gulistan," he said.

Mohammad Barkat Ullah Bhulu, president of Dhaka Mahanagar Autorickshaw Behoshayee Malik Samity, said due to acute shortage of parking

facilities in the city, their drivers are already paying traffic penalty every day.

"We are already paying fines to police for illegal parking... now DSCC is taking terminal fees from us without even giving us any terminal facility," he said.

Khandaker Enayet Hossain, secretary general of Dhaka Sarak Paribahan Owners' Association, said they are not against paying tolls. "But DSCC will have to ensure that there are terminals for us," he said.

He expressed dissatisfaction over the rise in toll fees -- at Fulbaria from Tk 20 to Tk 40, at Gulistan from Tk 30 to Tk 60 and at Sayedabad from Tk 40 to Tk 60.

ALL IN NAME OF ROAD REPAIR

Contacted, ABM Aminullah Nuri, chief executive officer of DSCC, said they have introduced it to stop illegal toll collection and bring the system under discipline and a legal framework.

Asked why they are collecting tolls in the name of terminals when there are no proper terminals in the areas, and as well as from roads, Nuri said, "We are collecting tolls as vehicles are using DSCC roads and the city corporation

has to spend money to repair it. We are only collecting tolls from commercial transports."

Regarding the allegations of illegal and additional toll collections, the DSCC CEO said they have already instructed police to take necessary steps in this regard.

"We will also conduct mobile court drives to stop that," he assured.

Contacted, Md Altaf Masud, managing director of Uttara Chaka, said some people unbeknownst to them collected toll from trucks initially. "We have instructed our people not to take tolls from trucks," said Masud. He said they have also informed the police station concerned to take action against this illegal toll collection.

He said they are not charging extra money from vehicles beyond the DSCC assigned rate.

Md Shaifur Rahman, proprietor of Minhaz Enterprise, also said they do not take any extra money from vehicles.

He, however, alleged that they do not get tolls from many vehicles though they were supposed to pay tolls as per the contract. He said they are taking tolls from the designated places as per the contract with DSCC.

Atiqullah Ensuring

FROM PAGE 3

Even in adverse situations, Atiqullah did not compromise while dealing with issues against the spirit of the Liberation War, as well as issues related to communalism and fundamentalism, said Bhorer Kagoj Editor Shyamal Dutta.

It was a dire necessity to have a man like him to fight against communal forces, Shyamal said.

Former general secretary of Dhaka Reporters Unity Raju Ahmed, blogger Kabir Chowdhury, and Dhaka Union of Journalists Publication Secretary Asaduzzaman Asad, among others, spoke at the programme, which was chaired by Janakantha Unit Chief Rajan Bhattacharya.

FROM PAGE 3

Besides, two new apps of the 999-service will be launched soon. The police chief will inaugurate the apps soon. One is SOS, where a person can communicate with us just by pressing a single button. The other one is for ambulance service. Currently, we have 10,000 ambulances registered with our system.

DS: What is your response time now?

Tabarak Ullah: We are trying to minimise our response time. Currently, it takes around 15 to 20 minutes to respond to a call on average. This is mainly because police, fire service or ambulance services often face difficulty reaching destinations due to busy roads, narrow roads, or traffic jam.

For this reason, it is not possible to reach destinations or cross 20-kilometre distances within five or ten minutes.

Outside the city, police stations have to cover around 20 to 30 kilometres, which delays response time too. In addition, we are working to include the facility of automatic locations and caller identification with our systems so that we don't have to waste time on these simple questions.

DS: How do police stations deliver services through the 999-service?

Tabarak Ullah: We are installing Thana Disperse System (TDS) in every police station for the 999-service so that we can communicate with the police stations without delay.

TDS includes a separate telephone line,

computer and a desk. There's around 660 police stations across the country and we have already completed installing TDS in 315 of those. Besides, we have started installing "mobile data terminal" (MDT) sets in all police patrol cars to ensure quicker service. Once the MDS are installed, we will be able to monitor patrol car location from our office and direct nearby cars to rush to the aid of a support seeker.

MDT sets have already been installed in 275 patrol cars. The disperse system and MDT will also be installed in 350 fire stations and their vehicles in phases. Besides, police stations are already experts in dealing with the issues we receive calls for, so this will not be a problem for them.

DS: With all these planned expansions, what will your human resource situation be like?

Tabarak Ullah: We have around 450 staffers now, who are providing round the clock service in three separate shifts.

Besides, some 12 officials from the health ministry and six officials from fire service and civil defense are working with us. After a service seeker calls for fire hazards or ambulance service, these officials take charge of the issues and follow up on the incidents.

In the coming days, we have planned to increase our workstations to 500 so that we can receive over 500 calls in a minute. For this, we have already submitted a proposal to the Police Headquarters. The proposal asks for the staff pool to be increased to 2,888.

The cabinet has already approved 999-service

to turn into a separate police unit under the lead of a police officer, who is at least of deputy inspector general rank on November 30, 2020. The fire service and health ministry officials will work with the unit jointly under the DIG.

The unit office will be situated in Demra and a 22-storied building has been constructed there. On top of this, seven-bigha land has already been acquired there from the land ministry and the land filling process has been started.

DS: Though caller identity was not supposed to be disclosed, there has been some allegations related to this, with some support seekers allegedly facing problems due to this. What do you have to say about this?

Tabarak Ullah: We do not disclose any caller's identity. But if any caller's identity gets leaked from the local police then we can take necessary action through proper investigation. We do not want any help seeker to get into any sort of trouble related to their identity. Ensuring safety of service seekers is our top priority.

DS: What are the challenges to ensure a smoother 999-service experience?

Tabarak Ullah: Due to our limited workstations, callers sometimes find our numbers busy, especially during the peak hours of 2pm to 10pm.

Once the number of workstations here are increased, this problem will hopefully no longer be there. Besides, the number of staffers also needs to be increased for smoother service delivery as well.

Tour operator, daycare centre bills placed at JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

"The Bangladesh Tour Operators and Tour Guides (Registration and Operation) Bill, 2021" was placed in parliament yesterday for making it mandatory for the tour operators and guides to get registered.

The proposed law was prepared aiming to bring the tour operators under the legal framework for ensuring the best services and thus give a boost to the tourism sector.

State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry M Mahub Ali placed the bill which was sent to the respective parliamentary standing committee for further scrutiny.

The committee was asked to submit its report by a month. As per the proposed law, a touring company will have to collect a licence. No company will be allowed to operate tours without having registration. If anyone does, it would be tried under the Code of Criminal Procedure.

According to the bill, there is a provision of handing over the registration to another tour operator in case of death, physical and financial incapability.

As proposed, the activities of tour operators, tour guides, general tour guides, cultural guides, nature guides and trekking guides will now be regulated. Now, there is no guideline and rule for tour operators in the country.

Meanwhile, Child Daycare Centre Bill-2021 was placed in the parliament to support the children of working women.

State Minister for Women and Children Affairs Fazilatun Nesa placed the bill, which was sent to the parliamentary standing committee on the respective ministry for scrutiny.

The committee was asked to submit its report before the House within two months. The proposed legislation was prepared as the number of working women is increasing.

According to the proposed law, there will be four types of child daycare centres in the country.

Registration will be required to set up child daycare centres and there would be a separate authority for their registration. The Women and Children Affairs Ministry will monitor the daycare centres.

According to the proposed law, the maximum punishment for failure to maintain proper safety and security of children in the daycare centres would be Tk 10 lakh fine.

If anyone runs any child daycare centre without registration, they would be fined Tk 50,000, said the bill.

TO-LET
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বাংলাদেশ পেট্রোলিয়াম কর্পোরেশনের একটি অঙ্গ প্রতিষ্ঠান।
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পদ্মা অয়েল কোম্পানী লিমিটেড এর বিভিন্ন পদে নিয়োগ সংক্রান্ত আপাতী ৯ এবং ১০ এপ্রিল ২০২১ তারিখে অনুষ্ঠিতব্য মৌখিক পরীক্ষা অনিবার্য কারণবশতঃ স্থগিত করা হলো।
মৌখিক পরীক্ষার পরিবর্তিত তারিখ ও সময়সূচী পরবর্তীতে জানানো হবে।

সবাই নিলে গড়বো দেশ,
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জিডি-৬৬৩

New Executive Committee of OGSB

President
Prof. Ferdousi Begum

Secretary General
Prof. Gulshan Ara

The New Executive Committee (2021-2022) of OGSB with President-Prof. Ferdousi Begum and Secretary General-Prof. Gulshan Ara has taken charge of office on 31st March 2021.



Trading Corporation of Bangladesh is stationing at different parts of Barishal city to sell daily essentials at affordable prices ahead of Ramadan. This photo was taken yesterday from Jaikhana Mor.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

TODAY MARKS THE 25TH DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF

Late Salahuddin Ahmad
(May 6, 1926-April 4, 1996)

Your memory has not dimmed, your presence felt evermore.....May Allah (SW) grant you Jannatul Ferdous and rest your soul in eternal peace.

We humbly request all our relatives, friends and acquaintances to remember late Salahuddin Ahmad in their prayers.

Wife, children and grandchildren