

The Maruti Suzuki Vitara Brezza receives a facelift

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When looking for a mid-sized SUV on the Bangladeshi market, your most common option is either the Honda Vezel or the Toyota CHR. Recently though, cars like the MG ZS and the Maruti Suzuki Vitara Brezza have been getting under the radar of customers; for good reason. Most of these SUVs come equipped with engines less than 2L, they are big and have a modest price tag; making it the correct formula for the market.



OVERVIEW

The Suzuki Vitara is more designed towards commuting rather than comfort. To put it as easy as possible on paper, the Brezza does everything a mid-sized SUV is supposed to do. It drives all right, the 1.5L four-cylinder engine producing 105 HP is fairly fuel-efficient and the car looks good. LED head and taillights come as standard in all levels. The Brezza comes in two main packages; Sporty and Urban. Both the packages contain visual cosmetic mods only where the sporty package contains enhancements like the front, rear & side skid plates, wheel arch cladding, blacked-out grille, roof end garnish, and side body accent in the cubic finish, fog bezel garnish, rear lamp garnish, designer mats, seat cover, and interior styling kit package.

On the Urban package, things are a bit more sophisticated where the features include black carbon accents with loads of chrome garnish, front and rear skid plate garnish, fog bezel garnish, roof end garnish, bodyside molding, rear lamp garnish, seat cover, designer mats, and interior styling kit package.

INTERIOR AND INFOTAINMENT

The interior of the Brezza is all right. Since the front compartment is rather big, the front dash compartment is supposed to be empty; Suzuki provided an extra glove box making use of that empty cosmos which is a brilliant use of space that could supposedly be left untouched. Other than that, there is no leather at all. The seats are made of fabric, the steering wheel is plain but, it has a dual-centred AC which is an essential feature in a climate like we have. Other than that, the infotainment system is a 7-inch touchscreen with Bluetooth connectivity for hands-free calling and music. The Vitara Brezza comes only as an automatic in Bangladesh but a manual version with a four-speed gearbox does exist, only for the Indian market.

VERDICT

If having an SUV is totally a necessity on a minimum budget, then yes. It's a good commuter and since the engine size is within 1.5L, the taxes you would be paying for the Vitara will be the bare minimum. In our honest opinion, we think the Vitara is average. It gets the job done right but for the price is set on, we cannot complain either.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2021 TOYOTA AQUA MEET



PHOTOS: AKIF HAMID

The road to 'One Country, One Rate'

The story of the rural freelancers who made internet available at flat rate across the country

ZARIF FAIAZ & NAHALY NAFISA KHAN

On June 6, Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), fixed the maximum tariff for broadband internet across the country at Tk 500 a month for using a broadband connection with a minimum internet speed of 5 Mbps. For 10 Mbps, the rate would be Tk 800 to Tk 1,000, and for 20 Mbps, Tk 1,100 to Tk 1,200, and so on.

The landmark decision to fix the rate of broadband connection across the country came after a series of meetings with operators of the International Internet Gateway, Nationwide Telecommunication Transmission Network, International Terrestrial Cable, and internet service providers. But behind the scenes, the credit goes to a small community of freelancers in Kushtia who have been campaigning for internet equality for the last 5 years or so. This is their story.

In 2013, Rasel Ahmed, a freelancer based in Kushtia, was paying a whopping Tk 20,000 for a broadband speed of 4 Mbps. "The price difference between internet connection in Dhaka and in rural areas were unimaginable. Internet speed is already drastically slower in rural areas, compared to bigger cities like Dhaka. We had no choice but to take packages that offered higher speeds at higher prices, just so

we could keep working," says Rasel. "We wanted at least the same price as that of Dhaka, if not lower. We often have to get on video calls with our clients or collaborate by sharing screens. The only way to do that in rural areas was to pay extra and get a connection with higher speed, which isn't very reliable either. Not everyone could keep up. We were losing clients to freelancers armed with cheaper, better internet. That wasn't a fair game."

Like Rasel, other freelancers working from rural areas were struggling to keep up with the burgeoning and unfair cost of broadband connection. Sabbir Ahmed, another rural freelancer, was paying at least 5 to 6 times more than his counterparts in Dhaka for a speed that was barely one-tenth of the usual internet speed in the capital city. "I once had a deadline to complete an assignment within a week. For four to five days, I was stuck trying to download a large file. I later had to get someone in Dhaka to download it for me, upload on a local server, and only then could I access it. It was a nightmare," Sabbir shared.

"Compared to freelancers in Dhaka, freelancers in rural areas are falling behind in every aspect. Even when a freelancer in Dhaka is just starting out, they are already quite a

few steps ahead of their counterparts in villages, just because they have access to better, cheaper internet," said Sabbir.

This growing digital divide between freelancers in rural areas and freelancers in the cities acted as the catalyst for a campaign that advocated for internet equality across the country, led by freelancers like Rasel and Sabbir at the forefront of the movement.

"We started out voicing our concerns in a Facebook group at first. We started campaigning in major public places with our demands and continued to appeal to lawmakers and concerned authorities. We were lucky to have been supported constantly by *Projukti Kushtia*, a community of local tech enthusiasts who helped us reach top authorities," said Rasel. "Freelancers have led this movement from the front. We have been campaigning for equal internet for a long time. It took us almost 5 years but we are finally here. After the pandemic struck, the case for internet equality was not only about freelancers any more, it was about everyone. As people shifted to online classes, meetings etc and started relying on the internet, they began to understand what we, freelancers have been going through for ages. Perhaps that acted as a wake-up call

for the authorities to finally make it happen."

But fixing the tariff rate is only half the job, according to the freelancers who have been with the movement since the beginning. Sabbir Ahmed believes that maintaining the fixed-rate requires strict monitoring and proper enforcement. "We are beyond happy with this new policy. Maybe finally, the marginal freelancers will get equal opportunities. But there's still room for discrimination if the ISP's continue to provide us with low internet speeds. The authorities need to properly monitor the ISPs and ensure that at a fixed rate, service remains the same across the country," says Sabbir.

"Nationwide Telecommunication Transmission Network or NTTN's monopoly over internet prices was why ISPs couldn't lower internet prices in the past. With this new move in place, it is now up to the ISPs to hold their end of the bargain," adds Rasel.

BTRC's new move to fix internet prices across the country is commendable. It remains to be seen how much of it will end up benefitting the marginal freelancers who continue to suffer from internet disparity. As Rasel Ahmed puts it, "It's a milestone, surely. But there remains a long road ahead."

EQUAL
INTERNET
FOR ALL