



ECHOES BY
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Why do prices increase every Ramadan?

I
According to Macrotrends, the population of Dhaka is more than 22 million. The most common food that sells in Dhaka is eggs. Even if one in two people eats an egg every day, the daily demand for eggs is over 11 million.

We will revisit this in a different guise.

II
Why do prices of “essentials” increase in Ramadan? Print, online, and social media reminds you how goods are becoming more and more expensive. The government tries its best to keep prices in check. Yet, prices keep rising, or settle at a plateau that is difficult for many to reach.

What are the “essentials” in your basket? When do you want these “essentials”? You probably want them at iftar, dinner, and sehri. If you do not get them at these times, you would be sad.

The truth is, there are many like you who will want those same essentials and would be willing to pay to get them early or on time. There is a silent auction going on. On the other side of the market, sellers are aware there are many like you



DESIGN: **KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD**

who demand that essential basket at a particular time. In an ideal Econ 101 world, the sellers arrive with that essential bundle. The market or equilibrium price is established. Alas! The real world is a bit

more complex.

III
“Essentials” are important in our story. Price alone does not determine their demand. We need those essentials during Ramadan. We need them at a specific time, as mentioned above.

Even if the sellers supply in good spirit, supplying to a population of 22 million per day is a challenge. There is another problem: geographical location.

The population of Dhaka is scattered over a geographical space. Supply points are located at strategic positions. If there is a delay in getting the essentials to the supply points, prices will rise. If there is a shortage in predicting the right amount of, say, edible oil, prices may rise again.

So far, we have assumed that the actors in this “essential” drama are acting in good faith. There is no reason to presume they would do so beforehand.

IV
If suppliers can control supply at a strategic location, they can control the price during the month of Ramadan. People

will buy their “essentials”. They know this very well. This is where the government enters the story.

Governments are the moral fabric that protect citizens from outside coercion. Sadly, all governments have an upper limit in their capacity to check unethical practices. Dhaka is a city larger than many countries of the world. This makes it a big challenge for the government to keep prices of “essentials” in check during Ramadan.

V
Price increase in Ramadan happens due to supply factors mentioned above. It also happens due to demand factors, because you and I are willing to pay to get our “essentials” basket on time. The moral issue of prices reaching a plateau that is too high for many families to reach is one that needs wider debate and awareness before it can be addressed effectively.

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Dhaka needs a city school bus service, now!

A student envisions what would make this scheme successful

HRISHIK ROY

8:45 AM

As I frantically looked at my watch to realise I was 35 minutes late for school, I cursed at the horrible Shahbagh traffic. To me, it was no less than an obnoxious, stubborn monster – one which I had to slay every morning.

In fact, it is not just me who has such sentiments about Dhaka’s crippling traffic, but rather thousands of school going students face similar adversities.

However, a solution has been proposed, one which is considered by many to be the light at the end of the tunnel – a city school bus service. This service is expected to reduce the number of school-bound private vehicles and thus decrease traffic during school hours. To make a transport service such as this successful, it has to be better than the private transport being currently used. It has to incentivise parents and students to ditch private transport for public transport service.

One way to ensure this is to make sure that the city school bus service is safe. Parents are extremely sceptical of the safety of public transportation as they often operate using questionable practices, including using unfit vehicles and hiring unqualified drivers. Such practices



PHOTO: **STAR**

have resulted in multiple fatalities over the years, eroding most parents’ trust in public bus services.

Thus, authorities need to strictly regulate these services, making sure that proper safety regulations are being followed. Students need to be safely dropped off and picked from designated bus stops. Experienced drivers have to be hired for such a service and malpractices, such as dropping students off a moving bus has to be prevented.

The bus service has to be cheaper than private transport, so that a majority of students can afford it. Subsidising such a service can mean lower fares for students. There also has to be a chart regarding the fares of the bus routes to ensure that the bus conductors are not charging students extra money. Convenient ticketing services like yearly or monthly passes should be offered as well.

Additionally, these buses have to be exclusively used for students and not

for regular fare collection. Once a bus is done for the day, it has to return to the bus depot to ensure proper maintenance. This is to ensure that these buses remain clean, with functional machinery and undamaged seats. A lot of students simply choose to opt for private transport, because they are much more comfortable than public transport services. Making sure that the buses are properly maintained and not overcrowded will mean that they are comfortable enough for students to use.

Public buses often tend to wait needlessly for passengers, causing a lot of unnecessary waste of time. However, such school buses will have to be punctual and only stop for a fixed period of time. Data from schools and colleges have to be used to chart routes which provide maximum coverage to students, while being efficient at the same time.

Like most development plans, the benefits of such a city school bus system can only be realised through proper implementation. If executed properly, such a service can go a long way in easing the woes of school students in the capital.

Hrishik thinks he is growing up to be a disappointing student. See him crying over his Chemistry lessons at hrdibbo@gmail.com