

A dark day for commuters

Fuel price hike leads to transport crisis across country

STAR REPORT

No buses in sight, exorbitant fares, and jam-packed vehicles, yesterday was an exhausting day for commuters of the country's cities and towns, as the fuel price hike led to a public transport crisis.

Buses almost disappeared from the roads, and taking advantage of this, human hauliers and three-wheelers had no problem overcharging passengers.

On Friday night, the government hiked fuel prices by up to 51.7 percent, the highest in the country's history.

As per the revised rate, the price of a litre of octane has risen to Tk 135 from Tk 89; petrol now costs Tk 130 as opposed to Tk 86, while prices of diesel and kerosene is Tk 114, which was Tk 80.

In Dhaka, public transportation was a rare sight in the morning. The few vehicles that caught eyes were packed with passengers.

Commuters, especially office-goers, had to wait for ages to board a bus. Many were seen hanging on to the bus door, putting themselves in harm's way.

"I finally managed to get on a bus after waiting for about 40 minutes. Other days, I get on within five to 10 minutes, a fraction of today's time," said Abbas, a private job-holder.

Shah Alam, a fabric trader, was seen waiting with a sack full of fabrics at the capital's Shanir Akhra bus-stop around 3:00pm. He was planning to go to New Market.

"I'm waiting here for around half an hour. I don't see as many buses like I do any other day. Even the few buses that are arriving after long intervals are jam-packed with

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Commuters form long lines as they wait for a bus on the Dhaka-Aricha highway in Savar yesterday. Due to the price hike of fuel, vehicles were hard to find on the city streets. Top right, many had to wait for hours and choose alternative modes of transport to go to their destinations. Bottom, the usually busy Dhaka-Chattogram highway at Shanir Akhra also witnessed much less traffic on the day.



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN, AMRAN HOSSAIN

Illogical, inhumane, unacceptable

Political parties lambast government

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Different political parties, including BNP and Jatiya Party, yesterday blasted the government for increasing fuel prices. They wanted to know for whose interest the government has taken the decision when global prices are decreasing.

Some parties staged demonstrations in different parts of the country.

They said people will bear the brunt of this hike, as transportation costs and prices of essentials will increase because of high fuel prices.

Party leaders demanded the government immediately withdraw its decision.

Speaking at a programme in front of the party's headquarters in the capital's Nayapaltan area, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhurul Islam Alamgir said the government is repeatedly increasing prices of fuel, edible oil, gas, electricity and water.

"They [the government] started oppressing people immediately after assuming power. People are at a loss due to repeated price hikes of different necessities," he added.

"The fuel prices were abruptly increased by almost 50 percent last night [Friday night]. It's like rubbing salt in our wounds," he said. "It has become the responsibility of all to oust the Awami League government."

Jatiya Party Chairperson and Deputy Leader of Opposition GM Quader said the decision to increase fuel prices by more than 51 percent is ruthless and unprecedented.

"This has proved that the government has no mercy towards the people of the country," he said in a statement.

"While prices have started to fall around the world, the rise of fuel prices in the country has disappointed all quarters," said the JP chief. In the statement, the JP chairperson also said the cost of transportation will increase due to the increase of fuel prices; the price of daily goods will increase.

Besides, production cost of domestic products will increase, and so, prices will also rise. It will also cause a disaster in the export



PHOTO: STAR

industry. The country's economy will move towards dire consequences, he added.

The price of fuel around the world is now on downward trend. Benchmark crude oil prices have fallen by 29 to 30 percent in the last four to five months at various locations. US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) oil prices fell below \$89 per barrel, the price of which rose to \$124 last March. International benchmark Brent crude is selling at \$94 per barrel, the JP leader said.

In a statement, Workers Party also lambasted the government, saying that the "illogical" decision of increasing fuel prices is a reflection of the government's "inhumane behaviour" towards the country's people.

It said citizens are already facing dire consequences due to inflation and uncontrolled price hike of daily essentials. "Increase of fuel prices will create a serious crisis in people's lives."

The leftist party also said the government has increased fuel prices in a bid to fulfil IMF's

condition to get a loan.

At a protest meeting in front of Jatiya Press Club, Left Democratic Alliance said the government will be forced to step down for creating such a situation in the country.

Meanwhile, Gono Odhikar Parishad demonstrated in the High Court area, while Bangladesh Chhatra Federation brought out a torch procession in front of National Museum at Shahbagh.

At a meeting, Gonoforum leaders announced a countrywide protest programme and procession on Wednesday. The party also announced a protest meeting in front of Jatiya Press Club the next day.

Socialist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist) also demonstrated in front of Jatiya Press Club.

United Communist League of Bangladesh in a statement said there is no alternative to ousting the government to get rid of the ongoing problem.

Meanwhile, Jatri Kalyan Samity in a statement termed the decision "illogical".

Ride-sharing riders in trouble

ARAFAT RAHAMAN

Bike riders of ride-sharing platforms have been facing trouble due to a shortage of passengers, following the hike in fuel prices, which came into effect yesterday.

"Passengers aren't willing to pay a higher fare. I only managed to get three trips in three hours, which is half compared to the days before the hike," said Pathao bike-rider Faizar Rahman, while waiting for passengers near Farmgate bus-stand yesterday afternoon.

"With fewer passengers, I have no option but to accept rides at the previous rate," he added.

For Wadud Mia, the hike might be the end of his means of making some extra cash through ride-sharing services, alongside running his small grocery shop in Mirpur.

"I had to spend extra money to buy fuel, but I had to accept two trips at the previous fare rate," said Wadud, standing near Karwan Bazar intersection. At the same place, another rider Akbar Ali was seen bargaining with a passenger.

He said, "Passengers still offer the previous fare

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It's lower than neighbouring countries

Says information minister

UNB, Dhaka

Even after the latest hike in fuel prices in Bangladesh, it is equal to India and comparatively lower than the other neighbouring countries, said Information Minister Hasan Mahmud yesterday.

The minister made the remark at a seminar marking Sheikh Kamal's 73rd birth anniversary at Dhaka University.

The minister said the government provided a subsidy of Tk 53,000 crore or 6 billion dollars in fuel and power sector in the last fiscal year.

The neighbouring countries did not provide

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29TH ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM

Bangladesh can become a regional hub: Momen

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh told Asean leaders its vision of becoming a hub of road, rail, riverine, maritime and air connectivity for landlocked South Asian and Southeast Asian countries.

"Bangladesh believes that maximising the Bay of Bengal's potential and improving connectivity can revitalise the region," Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told the two-day 29th Asean Regional Forum (ARF) in Cambodia, which ended yesterday.

He said the country is the link between two of the world's most vibrant economic regions, Southeast Asia and South Asia, and can play a vital role towards regional cooperation on all fronts.

Momen highlighted Bangladesh's massive investment in developing and upgrading infrastructure, including land ports, airports, roads and rail networks.

He expressed the country's aspiration

to collaborate and cooperate with Asean by becoming a "sectoral dialogue partner". He sought support from all Asean countries in this process.

He emphasised on collective efforts by Asean leaders to tackle challenges faced by the region, including the Rohingya crisis.

Momen mentioned that in the fifth year of the Rohingya crisis, not a single of around a million Rohingya people has been repatriated to Myanmar.

He sought more focus and active support from ASEAN Regional Forum countries in strengthening ongoing efforts to help create an environment within Myanmar that will encourage Rohingyas to return.

Momen said Myanmar secured high foreign direct investment despite the genocide it committed. He also pointed out that even after the 2017 Rohingya crisis, trade and investment of EU countries increased substantially.

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PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

At Dhaka University yesterday, this photojournalist spotted a flower seller lighting a mosquito repellent coil, while her baby sleeps soundly under a mosquito net beside her. With the surge of dengue cases in recent times, it seems people from all strata of society are taking adequate precautions to counteract the outbreak.



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MIRZA FAKHRUL ISLAM ALAMGIR

BNP Secretary General



The decision to increase fuel price by more than 51 percent is ruthless and unprecedented.

GM QUADER

Jatiya Party Chairman



People are already facing dire consequences due to inflation and increase in price of daily essentials. This new hike will create serious crisis in people's lives.

Workers Party



PRAYER
TIMING
AUGUST 7



Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 4:20 12:45 5:00 6:47 8:15
JAMAAT 4:55 1:15 5:15 6:50 8:45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION