

Launch fare hiked 30pc

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government's decision to increase launch fare by 30 percent came into effect from yesterday.

A passenger will have to pay Tk 3 instead of Tk 2.30 per kilometre within a 100kms distance.

For extra distances over 100kms, passengers will have to pay Tk 2.60 per kilometre instead of Tk 2.

The minimum fare has been increased to Tk 33 from Tk 25.

The ministry of shipping issued a notification yesterday in this connection.

Earlier, launch owners demanded to double the fare following the recent record surge in fuel prices.

In response to their demand, the ministry of shipping on August 8 formed a seven-member committee to revise the fare.

Yesterday, the ministry raised the fare based on recommendations of the committee, read the notification.

On August 5, the government increased fuel prices by up to 51.7 percent, the highest in the country's history.

Awami League leader stabbed to death in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A local Awami League leader was stabbed to death and a party activist injured in an attack by unidentified criminals in the capital's Jatrabari yesterday evening.

The deceased, Abu Bakar Siddique Habu, 40, was the president of AL unit 14 in ward 50, AL activists said.

Criminals stabbed the two near a hardware shop on Shaheed Faruk Road around 7:30pm and fled.

The two were rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where doctors declared Abu Bakar dead around 8:30pm, said Inspector Bachchu Mia, in-charge of the DMCH police outpost.

Injured Rubel, 30, was undergoing treatment at the hospital.

Some locals involved in BNP politics are behind the murder, alleged Sumon, who along with some other locals took the duo to the hospital.

The body was sent to Dhaka Medical College morgue for an autopsy.



PHOTO: STAR

Patients wait in a line outside the Dhaka Medical College Hospital to buy Tk 10 tickets to see doctors at the outdoor department of the hospital. A large number of patients from low-income families crowd the department each working day as they cannot afford visiting physicians at private hospitals. The photo was taken around 7:30am yesterday, an hour before the ticket counters opened.

POLICE TRUNCHEON CHARGE ON BCL MEN Barguna ASP withdrawn

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Moharram Ali, additional superintendent (crime) of Barguna police, was yesterday withdrawn hours after the home minister commented on police charging batons on BCL activists in the district on Monday.

"I saw [footage of the incident] on Facebook. A probe committee has been formed. Let the investigation be completed," said Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday.

The footage showed police charging batons on BCL men and ASP Moharram having an argument with Barguna-1 lawmaker Dharendra Debnath Shambhu.

The footage went viral on social media.

Contacted, SM Aktaruzzaman, deputy inspector general of Barishal range, said ASP Moharram was now attached to DIG's office in Barishal.

"This decision has been taken for the sake of a fair investigation. The professionalism of the police will be investigated," he said.

On Monday, a faction of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), comprising those who did not secure any post in the party's recently-announced committee, attacked another BCL group.

The incident happened in front of the district's Shilpakala Academy following a programme observing the National Mourning Day.

To disperse the attackers, police charged batons at the activists. MP



Shambhu and some other Awami League leaders were present there.

Yesterday, a three-member committee was formed, headed by SM Tarek Rahman, additional superintendent (administration and finance) of police, to probe if the law enforcers' response to the clash was inappropriate.

The committee has also been directed to submit its report within three days.

About BCL men vandalising a police vehicle during the clash, MP Shambhu in a press briefing said he urged police to identify the culprits and take action against them.

"In fact, their [police personnel's] intention was to beat the BCL men. I tried to resist them, but there were too many policemen... None paid heed to my

commands," he said.

He said this at Barguna Press Club around 9:00pm on Monday.

He also said that he had informed the highest level of the government about the issue and demanded exemplary punishment of ASP Moharram.

Referring to the district's recently-announced BCL committee, he said it was announced without conducting any council and without any consultation with political leadership.

Meanwhile, after the National Mourning Day programme on Monday, Barguna BCL President Rezaul Kabir Reza thanked the police for dispersing the attackers.

Asked if his comments contradict the MP's statement, he refused to say anything.

Work of BRT project halted

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However, another top BRT official, who also took part in the meeting, said work would be suspended only in places where there are safety issues.

"All of us -- the financier, project officials and consultants -- agreed that we will resume work at the places in question after ensuring foolproof safety measures," he said.

Both officials requested not to be named.

The development came a day after a segment of a box girder fell on a car at a construction site of the project in the capital's Uttara, killing five people, including two children.

Meanwhile, a government probe committee, led by Neelima Akhter, additional secretary of road transport and highways division, in its preliminary report found that negligence on the part of the Chinese contractor, China Gezhouba Group Co Ltd, led to the tragedy, said ABM Amin Ullah Nuri, secretary of the division, at a press conference at the Secretariat yesterday.

Teague Macreem, the lead supervision consultant for the project, informed the probe committee that no work was supposed to be done on Monday, which was the National

Mourning Day, Nuri said, citing the findings.

The contractor is supposed to get a work plan from the consultant a day ahead, but the contractor started working Monday without the plan, Nuri added.

Such work cannot be done without proper safety arrangements in place, he said, adding, "According to him [Teague Macreem], the accident happened solely because of the negligence of the contractor."

He said the contractor also did not inform the traffic department to manage traffic at the site.

Besides, the crane was operated on an uneven surface, which is why it toppled over, he said.

Citing the contractor, the probe report said the number of vehicles on the road rose sharply in late afternoon, making the crane operator anxious, and he suddenly pushed brake causing the accident, he said.

The committee held the contractor, its safety team and the crane operator, who is now absconding, responsible for the incident, said Nuri.

As per the contract, the contractor can be terminated from the project and it can be blacklisted, which will bar it from working in the country. "We will

take action upon receiving final probe report expected early next week."

Probe committee chief Neelima Akhter said the contractor had breached safety rules on several occasions, and the matter should be conveyed to the embassy concerned.

The committee has so far not named any project official responsible for the tragedy that drew widespread condemnation for safety lapse.

Some, however, questioned the appointment of Neelima, who is also the coordinator of the BRT-3 project, as the chief of probe committee.

However, the secretary said, show-cause notices would be issued to all project officials concerned to find out whether there was any negligence when discharging their duties. "We will take action if anyone [of the project officials] is found guilty."

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed serious disappointment over the safety issue, Planning Minister MA Mannan told reporters after an Ecneec meeting.

"She is mightily angry. She has ordered a thorough investigation and action against those responsible," he said.

The project is being jointly funded by the government, the ADB, the

French Development Agency and the Global Environment Facility.

WORK SUSPENSION

Dhaka North City Corporation Mayor Atiqul Islam visited the site and asked officials to suspend the construction work.

Although the work stopped after the mayor's visit in the morning, the formal decision to suspend the work for the entire project was made after the meeting with ADB officials.

Contacted, ADB's Dhaka office shared a statement with this newspaper, saying it was working closely with the Roads and Highways Department to ensure appropriate remedial actions and an investigation into the accident.

The international safety standards have been duly included in the contract that the contractor had signed with the RHD, it said.

Besides, a supervision consultant was also engaged to monitor the implementation of safety standards, it added.

Meanwhile, a member of the victims' families yesterday filed a case with Uttara West Police Station against unnamed officials of the Chinese contractor and the crane operator, police said.

a tree plantation project at Extended Camp 20 and education activities at a learning centre at No 4 extended camp and wanted to learn the education methods of the Rohingya children while interacting with the kids, teachers and others concerned.

Bachelet left at 1:00pm, reached Cox's Bazar town at 2:00pm and held a meeting with the officials of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner. She flew to Dhaka at 4:00pm.

The UN official, who arrived on Sunday on her first official visit to Bangladesh, held meetings with four ministers and civil society groups so far.

Today, she is scheduled to call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, deliver a speech at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies and hold a press conference in the afternoon before leaving Dhaka for Geneva.

‘Ma breathed her last in my arms’

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rescued and rushed to a hospital for treatment. Doctors yesterday said the couple was out of danger.

They went to the morgue around 10:00am yesterday, and waited till 4:00pm, to bid their family members the final farewell.

"I wasn't even able to hear my mother's last words to me. Her mouth, nose -- everything had blood pouring out," she said, unable to contain her tears.

"I couldn't do anything to save her ... How will my brother and I live without her?"

Her maternal aunt, Jhorna, died with her two children Jannath and Jakaria on her lap.

Jakaria was crushed to death while he was peacefully asleep in his mother's arms.

"My aunt enjoyed my wedding so much that even though her husband left for Jamalpur after the wedding,

she did not go. She stayed with us...

"Since the death of my father, she always helped support my family."

Jhorna's husband, Jahurul Islam, could not come to Dhaka to help collect the bodies as he fell severely ill after hearing about the deaths of his wife and children.

"Why did they toy with peoples' lives? We've lost everything. We want the highest form of punishment for those responsible."

Hridoy, who lost his father in the accident, asked, "Who will be held accountable for this sheer negligence?"

"We are pleading [the authorities concerned!] Please take proper steps so that no other family faces such a tragedy again."

The bodies of Fahima, Jhorna, Jannath and Jakaria were taken to Melandah of Jamalpur, while the body of Rubel, father of Hridoy, was taken to the Meherpur for burial.

Draw up plans to buy Russian oil

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products, including fuel. But India's oil import from Russia surged to record levels amid the sanctions due to a hefty discount, according to a Reuters report.

"We need to talk to Russia and make a plan," the planning minister told reporters.

He said that at this stage it is just a policy decision. "It doesn't mean we will buy fuel from Russia tomorrow; we must explore how we can do it. Russia says they will go for currency swap."

Replying to a question, the planning minister said the government would adjust fuel prices again if prices in the international market decreases.

"Now the [international] price is declining, but we are getting those products that were bought at least two months earlier at a higher price. We need some time, a minimum of

two months," he added.

He said, "The prime minister said [the issue of] fuel is getting high priority."

During a briefing at the foreign ministry, Masud Bin Momen said they were trying to find alternatives amid the current crisis.

"We earlier knew that we have no capacity to refine Russian crude ... We need to build the capacity first; foreign experts will arrive soon to visit the refinery."

He said, "We will explore alternatives [other than Russia]. We have good relations with all the Middle Eastern countries, and those will be our first priority."

Asked about potential risks of buying from Russia as Bangladesh has strong economic ties with the countries imposing the sanctions, he said, "Other countries are importing. If we find it to be risky, we will go for other options."