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Unfit buses rule city streets

22pc of them running without fitness clearance

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

More than one in five buses of private operators running in the capital have no valid fitness certificates.

According to the data from the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority, 3,974 buses of 75 companies have the required route permits for operating in Dhaka city, but 871 of the buses, 21.92 percent, do not have fitness clearances.

The Daily Star has obtained a document, containing the data, that was placed before a meeting at the headquarters of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) on May 5 where many bus owners were present.

In reality, over 120 operators run more than 5,000 buses in the capital. And many of the vehicles do not have route permits and they ply the city streets allegedly by bribing, say transport sector insiders.

On October 13 last year, Dhaka South City Corporation Mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh said over 1,600 unauthorised buses were operating in the city despite an ongoing drive against such buses.

The issue of unauthorised buses was discussed last month at the meeting of the coordination committee tasked with bus route rationalisation and operating buses under companies.

The government in 2019 formed a committee to rationalise bus routes and have a limited number of bus service providers. So far it has managed to launch the system in three of the 42 reshaped routes.

Member secretary of the committee, Shabiha Pervin, also executive director of Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority, said Hanif Paribahan, which was supposed to operate on route-23, expressed disinterest as many unauthorised buses were running there, meeting minutes show.



A man filling a jar with Wasa water in unhygienic conditions near Tejgaon level crossing. He takes Tk 5 for filling up a jar. Later, the jar water is sold at tea stalls and restaurants in the capital in the name of filtered water. The photo was taken on Wednesday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

- ✓ 3,974 buses under 75 companies are approved
- ✓ 871 buses do not have fitness clearance
- ✓ Transport owners say 5,000 buses ply city streets
- ✓ Many buses in city have no route permit



Route 23 starts from Ghatarchar and ends at Chattogram Road via Shyamoli, College Gate, Asad Gate, Kalabagan, Science Lab, Shahbagh, Jatiya Press Club, Gulistan, Dainik Bangla, Kamalapur, Dhalpur, Jatrabari, Shanir Akhra, Rayerbagh, Matuail, and Signboard.

Transport expert Prof Hadiuzzaman said unfit vehicles are risky for other fit vehicles too.

The former director of the Accident Research Institute at Buet said pedestrians in Dhaka are more vulnerable and such unfit vehicles increase their risk. The vehicles are causing serious environmental pollution, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said drivers of unauthorised vehicles know that they have a strong clout that allows them to run illegal vehicles and that is why they drive vehicles more recklessly.

Khondaker Enayet Ullah, general secretary of the Dhaka Road Transport Owners' Association, admitted that there were buses on the streets without fitness certificates.

"But how will the association know which buses have no fitness clearances? The BRTA has the data and it can take action against those," he told this newspaper.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

LOAD SHEDDING Situation improves as mercury falls

Electricity demand drops; rain brings relief from heat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

People had a bit of relief yesterday after light rain in places across the country, including the capital, brought down temperatures amid the heatwave leading to lower electricity demand and less frequent power cuts.

There was no improvement in power generation. As of 9.00pm yesterday, the average load shedding was 1,500MW per hour against the demand of 15,200MW. The highest generation per hour was 14,655MW.

There was no load shedding in Dhaka after day peak at noon.

The average load shedding was between 2,500MW and 3,000MW over the last couple of weeks.

At least 51 power plants are facing fuel shortages.

Power supply from India's Adani Power Plant was disrupted for at least 13 hours after a part of its transmission line in Chapainawabganj tripped and caused more power cuts between Wednesday afternoon and early yesterday.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

Income tax bill targets wealth stashed abroad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

People with properties abroad stand to face a penalty equal to their fair market value if the tax office can detect those, as per the Income Tax Bill 2023.

Drafted in Bangla, the bill, which was placed in the parliament yesterday by Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, will replace the existing Income Tax Ordinance 1984.

The tax officials will also be able to run enquiries at home and abroad if they have logical grounds to believe that the individuals are stashing their wealth outside of Bangladesh.

Not just that, the National Board of Revenue will be able to realise unpaid taxes by selling the properties abroad even if the assets are owned by another person on behalf of the taxpayer.

The proposed law authorises the NBR to take appropriate actions as it thinks fit and makes it mandatory for those with properties abroad to file assets and liabilities statements.

On paper, the proposed law can deter money laundering. Whether it succeeds depends on the supporting measures taken to make the law robust.

The law has been framed to ease the process of doing business and cut the number of returns that companies need to file from 29 to 12, Kamal said.

"The bill seeks to reduce the discretionary powers of tax officials as much as possible."

The proposed law has incorporated international best practices to ease tax compliance and file tax returns, Kamal said, adding that it will also thwart prevent tax avoidance from taking place through various types of arrangement.

Filing tax returns and proof of submission would become mandatory for availing 43 government services, up from 38 at present.

The draft law has expanded the scope of submission of income tax returns under self-assessment.

Taxpayers will not need to seek additional time should they fail to file returns beyond November 30. But they will face a penalty, said a senior official of the NBR.

The simplified refund process will enhance trust in the tax system since the tax refund will be credited directly

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

BUSINESS

Bill placed in JS to loosen family grip on banks

A maximum of three persons from a single family would be able to become directors of a commercial bank from the existing four, according to the Bank Company (Amendment) Bill 2023.

The draft act has also defined habitual defaulters and set punitive measures against delinquent borrowers, the first such measure in the banking history.

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal placed the bill in parliament yesterday.

STORY ON B1

PESTICIDE POISONING No one should lose children this way

Says father of 2 victims; MD, chairman of pest control firm remanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

"I want exemplary punishment of the people who are responsible," said Mobarak Hossain yesterday, who lost his two sons allegedly from pesticide poisoning.

The boys died after a pest control service provider used unauthorised pesticides in their house in Bashundhara Residential Area on Friday, Mobarak said.

Shayan Mobarat Zahin, 15, a student of class-VIII, and Shahir Mobarat Zayan, 9, a class-III student, died while undergoing treatment at a city hospital on Sunday.

"No parents should lose their children this way," he said with his voice choking.

"I just want to make sure that the criminals are not spared," Mobarak said, blaming the owners of DCS Organisation Ltd, the pest control service, for the deaths.

"The owners are responsible, not the workers. We always see workers being made scapegoats," he said.

Connected through a video call, SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

EC to make nat'l polls free, fair

It'll ensure no govt agency will file any case to harass anyone, law minister tells JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a bid to hold the upcoming general election in a free and fair manner, the Election Commission has decided to ensure that no government agency will file any case to harass anyone, Law Minister Anisul Huq said yesterday.

The commission will send a proposal to the government so that all the political parties can carry out election campaigns unhindered. Besides, immediate actions will be taken as per the law if a candidate or their supporters launch attacks on rival candidates and their followers, or their homes and businesses, he said.

In reply to a question from Gonoforum MP Mukabbir Khan from Sylhet-2, the minister said, "The Election Commission has taken up the challenge to hold the election in a transparent, free, fair and peaceful manner."

In his scripted question, Mukabbir asked the minister whether the EC has any special plan to hold the 12th national polls in a free, neutral and acceptable atmosphere, without "showing allegiance to the government like the previous commissions did".

Anisul Huq, in his scripted answer, said since there is an obligation to hold the national election by January next year, the EC has taken up an action plan to this end.

The minister talked about measures that the EC has decided to take to overcome the challenges of holding a free and fair election.

Illegal arms will be recovered and legal arms will have to be deposited to the authorities concerned before the polls, he said while describing the measures.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

In order to keep the election process transparent, the commission has decided to publish all the activities related to the election on its website for everyone and to invite local and foreign observers.

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