

Take steps to curb Eid fare irregularities

Passengers being forced to pay extra amid weak monitoring

Just the other day, we talked about the highway safety concerns and traffic hassles leading into the extended Eid holiday. An estimated 1.5 crore people may leave Dhaka for their hometowns by Eid day, with similar movements expected nationwide. Amid this massive exodus, one problem that can rival the severity of other travel challenges is the widespread fare irregularities across various transport sectors. According to an estimate by Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity, 98 percent of transport operators are overcharging passengers in the name of "Eid tips." This extortion—which may total a staggering Tk 832.30 crore—is an unfair burden neither deserved by travellers nor expected under the interim government, exposing the failure of existing oversight mechanisms.

Jatri Kalyan Samity has also presented figures for how much would be extorted through each mode of transportation, with long-distance buses and minibuses taking Tk 90 crore extra from 30 lakh passengers and city buses taking Tk 12 crore extra from 40 lakh trips. Between March 20 and 31, it says, approximately 22.74 crore trips are expected across road, rail, water, and air transport in and around Dhaka for Eid-related purposes. On average, an extra Tk 200 is being charged per passenger. These findings are consistent with our own, with a report published on Wednesday highlighting the miseries of passengers on AC buses.

As per the report, passengers travelling on AC buses, with the exception of a few, are having to pay more than usual. After visiting various ticket counters and talking to passengers at Sayedabad and Arambagh bus terminals, our correspondents found that the extra fares being charged range from Tk 200 to Tk 1,000. Although the fare hike is not as steep for non-AC buses, most operators, particularly lesser-known ones, are overcharging by taking advantage of the Eid rush. According to the Road Transport Act, 2018, the BRTA is responsible for determining fares for public transport with government approval. Although AC coaches and public transport with special amenities are exempt from this regulation, the authorities can still regulate fares if there are allegations of overpricing—something they have not done.

All this shows how unregulated, and unmonitored, Eid fare practices remain. Several factors have been attributed to this, including inflation, a culture of extortion in transport sector, employee Eid bonuses, and owners' profit motives. While this trend has persisted for years, this year it prompted a sense of heartbreak with one passenger saying, "I thought things would be different this time given that a new government came to power following a mass uprising." The government must take stern action to prevent these irregularities. As experts have recommended, it should introduce digital fare collection for better control, use CCTV for fare monitoring, and improve transport governance in general.

We must save forests for our own sake

Firm action needed to stop forestland grabbing

It is quite disheartening that the fate of life-saving forests in our country does not change regardless of whether there is a political or non-political government in power. Somehow, influential locals and unscrupulous businesses always manage to get the backing of someone in power to destroy and loot our natural resources for their own gain. The encroachment of the reserve forest in Majher Char in Patuakhali's Rangabali is a glaring example of this.

According to a report in this daily, a local named Jewel Sikder has allegedly been expanding his fish enclosure encroaching upon the forestland. During Awami League's rule, he had its backing, and now, he is allegedly using BNP's banner although the latter has denied any affiliation. Jewel's list of alleged illegal actions includes not only felling trees to occupy deforested areas for expanding his business but also constructing a dam, digging drainage canals, and installing culverts inside the forest to facilitate water flow to his fish enclosure. Though evidence of forest grabbing was found, and an inquiry launched, no action has been taken against him yet. We hope that the inquiry process will not get stalled in bureaucratic delays, but the question remains: why did the forest officials not notice these activities beforehand? Why no action at all was taken? Surely, the dam and the culvert were not built overnight, nor could those be hidden away at will.

Unfortunately, forestland grabbing, felling trees, and illegal logging are too common all over Bangladesh. These crimes continue happening right under the noses of authorities, and often with their help. There hardly seems to be any proactive supervision or patrolling to prevent such activities. Beyond their significance in maintaining ecological balance, forests, particularly in the coastal belts, have time and again shielded local residents from the severity of devastating storms. It is beyond comprehension why anyone would want to take down these protections. We urge the authorities, including local administrations and forest officials, to take firm action so that individual greed, political shelter, negligence of duty, and bureaucratic red tape do not lead to further loss of forestland in Bangladesh.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



Constantinople renamed Istanbul

On this day in 1930, the Turkish city Constantinople, founded as Byzantium and later renamed after Emperor Constantine, was officially renamed Istanbul.

EDITORIAL

Stability is the need of the hour

Contrary actions are very worrisome



THE THIRD VIEW

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Several recent developments have forced us to fear that we are on a self-defeating course. The most damaging development refers to the armed forces, especially the army chief. For quite some time, a section of social media influencers have been attacking the army chief and demanding his replacement because he was appointed as the chief of army staff (CAS) by the past regime. Institutional appointments are an integral part of the governance process, and that should not be questioned just because it happened before the July uprising, especially if it had to do with the armed forces, which are tasked with the vital function of ensuring national security.

The latest controversy started with a Facebook post by one of the student leaders of the uprising, Hasnat Abdullah. He wrote on March 21 about a meeting with the CAS on March 11, in which the army chief allegedly suggested that a "refined" Awami League, which would renounce the atrocities committed against the students and the people and purge all those guilty of being involved with crimes, corruption, abuse of power, etc., should be allowed to participate in the upcoming general election. Hasnat renounced the suggestion and triggered a social media controversy.

Several questions arose as a result. Why raise it 10 days after the meeting? Why on Facebook and not on the party platform? Why without first discussing with his party colleagues? Hasnat may be young, but he is a political figure of considerable stature and must be aware of the consequences of creating controversy around such a vital institution as the army as well as the person who heads it. Taking advantage of the situation, some others made some vicious, dangerous and outright insulting remarks against the army, the aim of which could only be to create chaos.

Whatever our armed forces' past mistakes were, their role in giving crucial support to the interim government and the round-the-clock work they are doing to maintain law and order should be highly appreciated. We must realise that without such support, the interim government wouldn't have been able to perform as it did. The accusation

that our armed forces are trying to take power and that the CAS has his eyes on the takeover has no basis in ground reality as of now, and there are no facts or even remote actions to support this allegation. These are products of deliberate attempts to instigate. Gen Waker Uz Zaman has repeatedly stated that the army is eager to go back to the barracks and is reluctant to stay even a day longer than necessary in aid of the interim administration.

So, why attack this vital institution that has been and is serving us so well? If the army really wanted power, then

Bangladesh government was "lying on the ground," so to speak, which was a perfect opportunity for any CAS interested in power to make the crucial move. Gen Waker Uz Zaman passed the test of his and his institution's belief—that armed forces should not get involved in the running of a government—with flying colours.

The chief adviser, in his address to the nation on Tuesday, indicated that attempts were being made to create instability and warned us about rumours and false information that are being circulated—most likely by the ousted forces. That is not to be unexpected. But what worries us more is that rumours, false information, and distorted facts are being circulated by people who profess to be activists and supporters of the July mass movement. It becomes far worse when people in the leadership of that movement do the same.

What we need most at this stage is stability, followed by accountability

year-on-year in the July–February period despite political unrest and severe production and supply chain disruptions. A particularly bright spot was the 23.8 percent surge in inward remittance year-on-year during the same period.

However, public safety issues continue to worry citizens.

Right now, there are two major issues: progress of reforms, and the prospect of election. About the debate as to whether we need reform or election, our position—as we have repeatedly stated—is that we need both and can have both by December this year. By that time, we should have our first fully free and fair general election after 2008—after a gap of 17 years. Much valuable work has been done by the respective reform commissions, and the follow-up work is now in progress to bring about a consensus on them, which will form the basis, as Prof Yunus declared, of the July Declaration, which is expected to give us a direction for future transformation.

The BNP, as the biggest political party in the country at the moment, seems to feel that talking too much about reforms is a ploy to postpone the election. While we also want the election as early as possible, we cannot underestimate the importance of reforms. BNP has already agreed to: i) a caretaker government with a tenure of 90 days only to hold a free and fair election; ii) a bicameral legislature with 400 seats in the lower house, National Assembly, and 105 seats in the upper house, the Senate, and a four-year term for both; iii) raise the women's reserved seats to 100; iv) two speakers for the assembly with one from the opposition; and v) limiting the prime minister's tenure to two continuous terms, with a possibility of re-election after a gap. On many others, there are partial agreements.

Most other important political parties have expressed similar views on the above-mentioned issues. These reforms are very important and consensus seems already in hand. On proposals of other commissions, similar points of agreements exist and the prospects of reaching consensus are quite high as well.

We strongly feel that consensus on reforms are well in hand and there is no reason not to hold the election by the year's end. Here, the interim government is guilty of creating confusion. It repeats December and then suddenly brings up June as a possible option. The chief adviser did so in his last speech. Time is ripe for a definite position on the election date. The Election Commission has said it is ready for December. So what is the reason for the ambiguity?



Army soldiers with general people in Shahbagh, Dhaka on August 5, 2024.

FILE PHOTO: AMRAR HOSSAIN

the best time for them was between the time Sheikh Hasina fled (August 5, 2024) and the day Prof Muhammad Yunus returned home from Paris and took oath as the chief adviser (August 8, 2024). For three days, there was a total power vacuum, which was the perfect moment for them to make their move. But they did no such thing. I think very few armies in developing countries would have forsaken such an opportunity, and fewer army chiefs would let such an opportunity slip through their fingers, especially when they would not have been blamed for ousting any sitting government. This reminds me of the famous saying by Napoleon Bonaparte, "I found the crown of France lying on the ground and I picked it up with my sword." For those three fateful days, the

of the killing of students and others and a path towards restoration of democracy. The sudden power vacuum created after Sheikh Hasina fled to India and the instant disappearance of not only the existing government but practically the whole governmental structure—particularly the law enforcement agencies—made the situation unstable. The inevitable impact of that on the economy and public safety further contributed to lack of public confidence.

But after seven months of rule, Prof Yunus's government can be credited with having brought a sense of stability in the economy. Inflation eased during December 2024–February 2025, dropping below 10 percent over the last two months. Export earnings grew by around 10 percent

How China's green energy strategy can inspire Bangladesh



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China has emerged as a global leader in the green energy sector, making significant strides in transitioning to renewable and sustainable energy sources. This is a crucial part of China's environmental goals and commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2060.

Over the past decade, the country has invested heavily in green technologies, such as solar, wind and hydropower, while reducing its reliance on coal. In 2024, China became home to the world's largest solar and wind energy capacities as well as the largest electric vehicle market.

Additionally, it is a major player in the manufacturing of solar panels, wind turbines, and energy storage systems. China's leadership in addressing domestic environmental challenges is positioning the country as a key influence in global environmental policies and technologies.

A central strategy behind the success in green energy is aggressive investment in renewable energy infrastructure. For example, tax breaks and low-interest loans for solar and wind energy companies have spurred

innovation and growth. Alongside investments in energy production, China has developed an extensive electric vehicle network to reduce emissions from transportation, one of the largest sources of pollution in the country.

Sichuan Shudao Equipment and Technology Co., a leading company in the renewable energy sector, has made significant strides in promoting green technology, especially in wind and solar energy. The company develops and manufactures advanced equipment for clean energy generation. Its expertise in wind turbine production and solar panel efficiency has positioned it as a prominent player in China's green energy transition, contributing to the country's goal of reducing carbon emissions.

Sichuan Shudao excels in the development of high-efficiency wind turbines, with innovations that increase energy output and lower operational costs, making wind energy more competitive. Its turbines are designed for both onshore and offshore applications, expanding the potential for wind power generation. This technology could also serve as a

valuable model for Bangladesh, as we are looking to diversify the energy mix and reduce our environmental footprint.

The company has also advanced solar energy solutions by developing high-performance solar panels using innovative materials and production techniques. These are now deployed in large-scale projects, including solar farms that power entire regions.

Sichuan Shudao is also exploring energy storage solutions to ensure solar energy availability even when sunlight is scarce. This combined focus on generation and storage is key to creating a reliable renewable energy supply.

For countries like Bangladesh, which experience high sunlight levels but face energy access challenges, taking a leaf out of Sichuan Shudao's book on solar technologies could be crucial in meeting the growing demand for clean energy.

With deteriorating environmental conditions, China's green energy methods could provide significant guidance to Bangladesh, which has long struggled with poor air quality, particularly in Dhaka, where pollution levels rank among the worst in the world. This has caused public health issues, including respiratory diseases, cardiovascular problems, and premature deaths.

Additionally, Bangladesh's reliance on coal and fossil fuels significantly contributes to its carbon footprint. Shifting to renewable energy could reduce pollution and decrease dependence on fossil fuels. By taking inspiration from China's green energy

strategies, Bangladesh could design measures to reduce its reliance on coal and natural gas. With abundant sunlight and wind resources, the country has the potential to harness these renewable sources.

China's model of incentivising renewable energy infrastructure development could be replicated in Bangladesh, encouraging private and public sector investment. Offering tax incentives for solar panel installation or wind farm development could promote the widespread adoption of these clean energy sources. By investing in energy storage, Bangladesh could ensure renewable energy availability even during low production periods. Shifting towards green energy would significantly improve air quality, with a reduction in coal-fired power plants and the widespread adoption of electric vehicles.

Furthermore, Bangladesh could learn from China's "green manufacturing" initiatives, where industries are retrofitted with energy-efficient technologies to reduce emissions.

In short, China's leadership in green energy offers a model that Bangladesh could follow to address its air quality issues. By investing in renewable energy, energy storage, and green technologies, Bangladesh could reduce its environmental footprint, improve public health, and build a sustainable energy future. Through targeted policies, incentives, and long-term investments, Bangladesh could not only address air quality problems but also contribute to global climate change efforts.

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