

Metro fares go up, commuters react sharply

New Delhi, Oct 10 : Delhi Metro on Tuesday steeply increased its fares — the second time this year — despite opposition from the Delhi government, igniting mostly negative responses from commuters amid some confusion over the hike.

Barring the minimum fare of Rs 10 for a distance of 0-2 km, which will remain the same, fares were hiked for all other slabs.

Accordingly, the fare now is Rs 10 for up to two km, Rs 20 for 2-5 km, Rs 30 for 5-12 km, Rs 40 for 12-21 km, Rs 50 for 21-32 km and Rs 60 for a ride beyond 32 km.

A Metro official said the minimum hike was Rs 5 and the maximum Rs 10. Smart card users will continue to get 10 per cent discount, so would those who use Metro during non-peak hours — between start of the metro service till 8 a.m., between noon and 5 p.m. and from 9 p.m. till the close of service. Commuters IANS spoke with said they paid more than Rs 10 on the first day of the hike.

For example, Ravi Ranjan, who travels daily between Malviya Nagar and Noida Sector 16, used to pay Rs 32 for one-way ride. "But today I ended up paying Rs 45 which is Rs 13 more," Ranjan told IANS. Similarly, Aroonim Baruah, who travels daily from Noida City Centre to his office in Sector 16, used to pay Rs 13.5 during peak hour travel. And on Tuesday, he said, Rs 27 were deducted from his smart card. This is the second hike by Delhi Metro in the last six months when DMRC raised the fare by Rs 20 in May and announced that fares will be revised again in October. The latest increase drew strong reactions from commuters, with some saying they would consider alternative public transport. "The hike is not fair. Who will be happy with such a steep rise, that too twice in a year," said Ajay, a 40-year-old finance sector

employee who commutes from Paschim Vihar to Rajiv Chowk.

"It has almost doubled. Till yesterday, I was charged Rs 27 and today I shelled out Rs 40 for the same distance," he said.

Arvind Tripathi, 28, who works for a Japanese firm, said: "I paid Rs 60 today from Bata Chowk to Rajiv Chowk. This is not a good thing. Metro may be incurring losses but who isn't?"

Another commuter, Sushant, a theatre artist, was also unhappy. He said the hike was not justified as there is no improvement in the services.

The fare hike was approved by the Fare Fixation Committee of three members, one each from the Delhi and central governments, and the third, a retired High Court judge. Delhi's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government staunchly opposed the move calling it anti-people. It declared a 'Metro Fare Satyagraha' at all Metro stations at 4 p.m. on Wednesday that would continue on Thursday and on Friday at 12 noon when AAP workers will lay siege to the Union Urban Development Ministry housed in Nirman Bhavan here. Delhi AAP convenor Gopal Rai said the fare hike will benefit only the cab aggregators, like Ola and Uber, whose services will become cheaper than Metro. Asked how this was possible, AAP MLA Saurabh Bhardwaj said the cabs provide point to point connectivity while Metro commuters hire cycle rickshaws or auto rickshaws to and from Metro stations.

"In some cases, the fare difference between Metro and shared cab rides would be minimal but people may not mind paying a bit more for cab rides," Bhardwaj told IANS. The Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the RSS-student wing, staged a demonstration outside the Metro Bhawan here, demanding the roll back of the hike or the issuance of a metro pass on lines of DTC bus pass for students.

CPI seeks high-level probe into Amit Shah son-owned firm

New Delhi, Oct 10 : Accusing the BJP-led central government of increasing involvement in corruption, the CPI on Tuesday demanded a high-level probe into the allegations of abrupt growth of a company owned by BJP chief Amit Shah's son Jay during the Narendra Modi regime.

"We are hearing about the company of Amit Shah's son Jay Shah, whose turnover increased from Rs 50,000 to Rs 80 crore in a year. Why don't they inquire into it? Why is the party and the central government supporting his claims of being clean?" CPI General Secretary S. Sudhakar Reddy said at a media meet here.

"Corruption in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is increasing. They say no one can accuse their party of corruption but we have been saying regularly that this a cor-



rupt government. "There has been Vijay Mallya case, Lalit Modi case and the alleged involvement of Rajasthan

Chief minister Vasundhara Raje and their leader Sushma Swaraj in corruption. There are no inquiries

against these cases," he alleged. A recent report in a website The Wire claimed that filings with

the Registrar of Companies (RoC) have revealed that Temple Enterprises, the company owned by Jay, first made

a profit in 2014-15 and in the next financial year its turnover reached Rs 80 crore, swelling by 16,000 times.

Calling it a serious allegation, CPI National Council Secretary D. Raja said his party had demanded a high-level probe into the issue under the supervision of the apex court.

"These are serious allegations and there should be a thorough inquiry. We have a simple and straightforward demand - we want a high-level probe to be conducted by the apex court into the matter," Raja said.

He also criticised the BJP President and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for being silent on the issue till date.

"We also want to know why is the Prime Minister silent when there is allegation against his own party President and his son?" he said.

Kerala Police probe 'canards' about migrant labourers

New Delhi, Oct 10 : The Kerala Police is probing who is behind videos urging migrant workers in Kerala to leave the state following the death of one of them, police chief Loknath Behra said on Tuesday.

Behra said preliminary findings showed that the "canards" were meant to portray Kerala in a poor light.

The campaign followed the alleged suicide of a West Bengal youth working in a hotel in Kozhikode. A video that has gone viral, however, shows the worker being beaten to death.

Muhammed Suhail, President of the Kerala Hotel and Restaurant Association in Kozhikode, told IANS that the 26-year-old youth committed suicide due to family issues.

"On Saturday, pictures of the dead youth were circulated on WhatsApp

with an audio in Hindi saying he was beaten to death and that migrant labourers should return to their home state. We immediately brought this to the attention of the media and police," said Suhail.

Behra said the Cyber Police had started an investigation and that District Collectors and police

chiefs in all the districts would meet and discuss this issue

"to instil confidence in the minds of the migrant labourers". Another hotel owner said that many of the migrant workers were returning to their home states on account of Diwali. An estimated three million workers from

West Bengal, Bihar and the north-east work in various sectors in Kerala, including in the hospitality sector.

On Monday, Chief

Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said a particular lobby was spreading canards about migrant labourers in Kerala.

"A north Indian lobby is trying to propagate a false campaign through the social media against the migrant labourers in Kerala.

This is meant to create unrest," he said

"This has been done on purpose to damage peace in Kerala and project it in poor light," he said in a statement here.

"The truth is Kerala has extended special schemes for them,

including insurance cover for health and accidents.

Over the years, on numerous occasions, the state government has extended a helping hand to families of those who died working here.

"No other state in the country has done what we have been doing for them."

BJP top guns attack Rahul in Amethi

New Delhi, Oct 10 : BJP leaders including party President Amit Shah on Tuesday launched a concerted attack on Rahul Gandhi, questioning his work for the development of his constituency Amethi and asking voters to defeat him and the Congress in the next Lok Sabha election.

Addressing a public meeting, Shah spoke for around half hour but made no mention of the charges levelled against his son Jay Shah, whose company reportedly recorded a turnover of Rs800 million (Dh45 million) in 2015 after recording an amount of just Rs50,000 the previous year.

"You have trusted the Gandhi-Nehru family for 60 years. You put your trust for once in the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, you will not regret," he told the people of Amethi, where the BJP won four of the five assembly constituencies in the last Uttar Pradesh assembly polls.

Gandhi on Tuesday stepped up his attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the alleged business dealings of Shah's son Jay, asking him if he was a "partner" in the "theft".

He also criticised Union ministers and BJP leaders who defended Jay Shah, saying they should change the name of the government's flagship scheme for the girl child — "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" — to "Amit Shah ke bete ko bachao".

"A theft has taken place in front of the eyes of the chowkidar [watchman], but you are silent. The question is are you a watchman or a partner?," Gandhi said, attacking the PM.

The Congress leader was addressing a

gathering here in central Gujarat on the second day of his campaign tour of the BJP-ruled state, where the assembly polls are due by the year-end.

At his public meetings during the 2014 Lok Sabha campaign, Modi used to say he did not want to become the prime minister but 'chowkidar' of people's wealth.

News portal 'The Wire' has reported that a firm owned by Jay Shah saw a huge rise in turnover after the BJP came to power at the Centre in 2014.

"The company was formed six to seven years ago. Modi ji came [to power in 2014] and launched 'Start up India', 'Make in India'. He then introduced demonetisation and GST. This destroyed small businesses and farmers," Gandhi told the gathering as he continued his assault on Modi and Shah for the second day running.

"From this fire, one company comes up. It was nothing in 2014, but in a few months the company became so big that its worth [turnover] rose from mere Rs50,000 to Rs800 million," he said.

"Who gave loan to it?" Gandhi asked and then himself replied, "It was a Central government department under minister Piyush Goyal ji."

The company closed down in 2016, the 47-year-old Congress leader said.

He also wanted to know why has the prime minister not spoken on the issue so far. Jay Shah has filed a criminal defamation suit against the web portal over the report in a court in Ahmedabad.

The Congress has demanded a judicial inquiry into the matter and ouster of Amit Shah as the BJP chief.

INTERNATIONAL

Turkey's Erdogan blames U.S. envoy for diplomatic crisis

Istanbul, Oct 10 : President Tayyip Erdogan blamed the U.S. ambassador to Turkey on Tuesday for a diplomatic crisis between the two countries and said Ankara no longer considered him Washington's envoy.

In a blunt and personal attack on outgoing ambassador John Bass, Erdogan suggested Bass acted unilaterally in suspending visa services in Turkey after the arrest of a U.S. consulate worker, and said "agents" had infiltrated U.S. missions. The dispute has plunged already fragile relations between the two NATO allies to a new low after months of tension linked to the conflict in Syria, last year's failed military coup in Turkey, and U.S. court cases against Turkish officials.

The U.S. embassy said on Sunday night it was suspending visa services while it assessed Turkey's commitment to the safety of its missions and its staff, a message reiterated in a video released by Bass late on Monday. "An ambassador in Ankara taking decisions and saying he is doing so in the name of his government is strange," Erdogan said. "If our ambassador did this, we wouldn't keep him there

even a minute."

The embassy said allegations that the arrested employee had links to Fethullah Gulen, a U.S.-based Muslim cleric blamed by Ankara for orchestrating the failed coup against Erdogan last year, were baseless. But Erdogan said the arrest, and a police request to question a second consulate employee, showed "there is something cooking in the U.S. consulate in Istanbul... How did these agents infiltrate the U.S. consulate?" He said Bass, who is due to leave the country within days to take up a posting in Afghanistan, had been making farewell visits to government offices.

"But our ministers, parliament speaker and myself did not accept and will not accept his request because we do not see him as a representative of the United States," Erdogan told a televised news conference during a visit to Belgrade. Turkey's currency and stock market were both hit on Monday by the dispute. On Tuesday, the main BIST 100 stock index .XU100 rebounded, rising 1.94 percent by 1320 GMT, and the lira was also up 1 percent at 3.6675 to the dollar. Prime Minister

Binali Yildirim said the visa suspension had punished citizens of both countries, and accused Washington of taking an emotional and inappropriate step against an ally.

"You are making your citizens and ours pay the price," he said. "We call on the United States to be more reasonable. The issue must of course be resolved as soon as possible," he said, describing U.S. behavior as "unbecoming" of an ally. In a speech in Ankara to ruling AK Party parliamentarians, Yildirim also defended Turkey's decision to retaliate with its own visa suspension after the U.S. embassy announcement. "Turkey is not a tribal state, we will retaliate against what has been done in kind," he said. Relations between the countries have been plagued by disputes over U.S. support for Kurdish fighters in Syria and Turkey's so far unsuccessful calls for Gulen's extradition. U.S. courts have also indicted a Turkish banker and a former minister for conspiring to violate U.S. sanctions on Iran, as well as 15 of Erdogan's security guards for attacking peaceful protesters during his visit to Washington in May.

Trump may visit DMZ between North and South Korea: Yonhap

Seoul, Oct 10 : U.S. President Donald Trump may travel to the heavily fortified demilitarized zone (DMZ) separating North and South Korea when he visits South Korea next month, the South's Yonhap news agency said on Tuesday, citing a defense source. The White House sent an advance team of working-level officials in late September to check candidate sites for Trump's "special activity" in South Korea, the source was quoted as saying.

Trump was expected to send a significant message to North Korea, either verbally or "kinetically", during his first trip to the peninsula as U.S. commander-in-chief, the source said. The truce village of Panmunjom and the observation post, both inside the DMZ, were among locations Trump was considering visiting, the source said. Yonhap did not elaborate and the White House did not comment.

Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un have been engaged in an increasingly bellicose exchange of rhetoric, with Trump suggesting the military option was the only way to halt the North's missile and nuclear programs.

A trip to the DMZ, following in the footsteps of his predecessor, Barack Obama, and Vice President Mike Pence, would bring Trump within yards of North Korean soldiers, who stand eyeball to eyeball with their South Korean enemies, and likely be regarded by the North as highly provocative.

In recent weeks, North Korea has launched two missiles over Japan and conducted its sixth nuclear test, all in defiance of U.N. Security Council resolutions, and may be fast advancing toward its well publicized goal of developing a nuclear-tipped missile capable of hitting the U.S. mainland.

Trump repeatedly has made clear his distaste for dialogue with North Korea. Last week, he dismissed the idea of talks as a waste of time, a day after Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said Washington was maintaining open lines of communication with Kim Jong Un's government. "Our country has been unsuccessfully dealing with North Korea for 25 years, giving billions of dollars & getting nothing. Policy didn't work!" the U.S. president said in a Twitter post on Monday.

Catalonia nears possible independence proclamation despite Madrid warnings

Madrid, Oct 10 : Catalan police tightened their guard on the region's parliament on Tuesday where secessionists have threatened to adopt a unilateral declaration of independence from Spain despite warnings from Madrid of swift counter-measures.

Regional leader Carles Puigdemont held a meeting of his cabinet to decide how to press an independence drive that has stirred powerful emotions across Spain and raised concern in European Union partner states.

Catalan police armed with automatic rifles stood guard at Barcelona's Parc de la Ciutadella which houses the elegant 18th century building. Spanish national police, decried by separatists over their use of force to hinder an Oct. 1 referendum, were not to be seen.

A declaration of independence would deepen Spain's biggest political crisis since an attempted military coup in 1981 and would almost certainly draw tough counter-measures from Madrid, possibly including suspension of the regional government. The parliament and other buildings, such as the regional high court building, could become a focus of contention between Spanish and Catalan authorities. Thousands of national police reinforcements sent by Madrid for the referendum remain in the area, many of them in two cruise ships docked in Barcelona harbor.

Pro-independence demonstrators were due to gather before the parliament building under the slogan "Hello Republic" to mark Puigdemont's speech at 6 p.m. (1600 GMT).

Hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated in Barcelona against independence at the weekend, waving red-yellow Spanish flags through the city center. That rally fell a week after some

900 people were injured when police fired rubber bullets and stormed crowds with truncheons to disrupt a referendum ruled illegal in Madrid. Puigdemont has said he is determined to apply a law passed by the Catalan assembly which called for a declaration of independence within days if Catalans voted 'yes' in the Oct. 1 referendum.

The government of Spain's wealthiest region says 90 percent of those who voted backed independence, but turnout was only 43 percent as many opponents of independence stayed at home.

The Madrid government has said it will respond immediately to any unilateral declaration.

Puigdemont could ask the parliament to vote on a motion of independence, which lawmakers say would start a period of up to six months during which Catalonia would write a new constitution and negotiate a divorce with Spain; or he could make a statement of intent on a future independence declaration. Catalan government spokesman Jordi Turull refused to disclose what Puigdemont would say but told a news conference after the cabinet meeting he would be "clear and explicit" and Tuesday would be an historic day.

Ruling party lawmakers say Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy is considering taking the unprecedented step of dissolving the Catalan parliament and triggering new regional elections, the so-called nuclear option.

The European Commission repeated its call for dialogue in Spain to end the crisis in Catalonia. Puigdemont has also called for talks and international mediation, but Rajoy has said he will not negotiate with the Catalan leaders unless they abandon plans to declare independence.