Sudden increase in fuel prices raise complains among Afghans

KABUL: Many Afghans complain over rising fuel prices, saying one-liter fuel have jumped to 63 Afghani in the Oil Stations in Kabul.

Talking to The Kabul Times, some Afghan citizens expressed their concerns regarding the sudden increase of fuel price in Afghanistan, adding that the increase in fuel prices overshadow the economic situation of all Afghans across the country.

Afghan citizens complaining about the taxi fares in Kabul too, saying they have made people pay a high fare. According to them, poor citizens are seemingly unable to afford it as well as facing many other economic challenges in their lives.

Yar Mohammad, one of the taxi drivers who operate in Kabul city, said that the prices went high in the past few days because the fuel prices increased throughout Afghanistan. "I operate from Da Afghanistan Bank to Charahi-e-Qambar and have to take a high fare. When the fuel price is high in the gas stations, I have to take high fare from the passengers too", Yar Mohammad said. "last week the passengers paid 20 Afghani, now it has jumped to 30 Afghani", he added.

Talking to The Kabul Times, one of the Kabul residents, Yasamin, said: "If I have to pay a high fare to the buses or taxi drivers operating in the city, I prefer to walk to my workplace and walk back home rather than going by taxis". She hoped that the Afghan officials to pay more attention to this problem and solve it.

Rahmat, one of the workers in a gas station in Makrorayan area, said: "Violence and the ongoing war in the Afghanistan major provinces and customs are the main reason behind fuel's price, including diesel and petrol's, are increasing recently".

Rahmat, who is working in Ahmad Yar gas station located in Second Makrorayan, added that the gas station burned three years ago and millions of Afghanis were wasted, but from then on, though its tank has fuel, the government is not permitting them to reopen and reactive this gas station.

"At the moment, the gas station's tank is full of 200.000-liter fuel and, if reactivated, the government would benefit from it a lot."

The firing in the Islamqala custom is not the only reason that the fuel prices jumped over the past few days, 60 percent of fuel and other commodities are imported through Hairatan, Aqina, and Sher Khan ports.

In the meantime, the officials of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of Afghanistan accused the Afghan shopkeepers and vendors of hoarding, saying that Afghan shopkeepers and vendors misusing the opportunity and take advantage of the current situation of the country and have increased the prices by their own. They also added that if the vendors and shopkeepers don't stop, they might legally punished.

The Afghan people demand the government to control the food and fuel prices in Afghanistan. The increase in fuel and food prices is a constant problem in Afghanistan that has not been solved by the government so far. The Afghan people also hoped for the day the government finds a solution to this problem.

Shukria kohistani

Seattle's economy cannot recover without a plan for public safety

As we work to get our region's economy back on track, it's about much more than just lifting COVID-19 restrictions. Three weeks after "reopening," there are a record number of jobs open. The Washington Hospitality Association reports that restaurants and bars alone are down 80,000 employees. Businesses are offering higher-than-ever salaries, broader-than-ever benefits and employment perks, but many of our member businesses report that despite such efforts, prospective workers often aren't even showing up for interviews.

With such an overwhelming labor shortage, it means many of our favorite businesses are not actually able to reopen. And there is no doubt that there are societal issues at work here, such as workers' access to child care, especially in the summer. We also need our elected leaders to prioritize public safety. For inspiration, just look to New York City's Democratic nominee, Eric Adams, who argues public safety is the prerequisite to prosperity.

To improve our economy, people must be confident that they will be safe and feel safe returning to work, whether it's on the commute to and from the workplace or while on shift. This issue is especially acute in an area critical to our whole region's recovery: Downtown Seattle is home to 55% of our city's jobs and generates half of our region's gross regional product.

The owners of Pioneer Square restaurant London Plane recently told local NPR station KNKX that people in crisis have negative interactions with customers eating outside "nearly every day." They said their staff members are sometimes able to diffuse the situation on their own but sometimes could use assistance. When staff members call police for help, "They often don't get a timely response."

First, Seattle must act with urgency to provide help to people in crisis. It is wrong not to help those living unsheltered with a safe and secure place to come inside and that those who need behavioral health treatments go without. It is also wrong that due to insufficient actions to help people in crisis, employees at local businesses are by default forced to intervene in situations with which they have no training or resources. I talk to many local business owners who want their neighbors in need to have supports, and they want to see more from the city on a scale that matches the challenge. Actions taken recently by the city working with businesses to help people living in tents on Third Avenue downtown move to hotels and other shelter with services is a great place to start and should be expanded.

Second, Seattle must ensure reasonable response times. This past spring, Seattle Police reported that people calling 911 are waiting longer and longer for officers to show up. They aren't meeting response-time targets for the most serious crimes, and there were 221 days when the police in certain precincts could not show up at all to lower-level complaints. The people working in our city deserve better. They must be assured that if their safety is at risk, police will respond. They must also be assured that leaders will enact critical police reforms, like determining that some situations are better served by someone other than a sworn officer responding. But 911 calls need responses, and city leaders must work with community members, businesses and police as partners in recovery.

Finally, business owners want action — now. Downtown Seattle, our region's biggest job center, is still operating at just 20% capacity as crime continues to rise. We are anxious for a plan from elected leaders to address safety challenges well beyond this recovery period. A plan with goals and accountability measures built in. A plan that recognizes what this community is asking for: A crisis response system that includes deploying some services differently, true reforms and a responsive police force.

The pandemic challenged local businesses in unprecedented ways, forcing hundreds to close for good. Many others struggled through by getting creative — for example, switching entirely to takeout while still serving the community with free meals for health care workers.

As we start to shift from response to recovery, it's time to support local businesses as they seek to reopen or expand hours — including by protecting their workers' safety and clearing major obstacles to attracting workers. Seattle needs a robust economic-recovery plan, and addressing public safety must be a keystone.

Egypt's economy to grow 5% in 2021-22 as rebound continues

Egypt's economy will grow 5.0% in the fiscal year that ends in June next year, a Reuters survey predicted on Monday, unchanged from analysts' expectations in a similar poll three months ago and slightly below the government's target of 5.4%.

Gross domestic product (GDP) of the Arab world's most populous country was seen growing 5.5% in the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2023, the July 5-26 poll showed.

The government has said it expected the economy grew 2.8% in the 2020/2021 fiscal year despite the huge disruption across the global economy, retaining its place as one of the few emerging markets to achieve GDP growth despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic caused tourism to collapse in March 2020 and other parts of the economy to slow, as Egypt maintained a large trade deficit, which rose 9% to $30.6 billion in July 2020-March 2021 compared to the year prior.

Allen Sandeep of Naeem Brokerage said Egypt's high trade deficit was partly a result of lower tourism revenues.

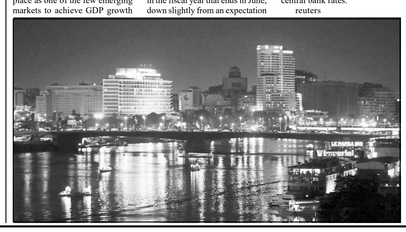
"The hope is that non-oil foreign direct investment picks up, local industry, local manufacturing takes over, and then you have substitution for imports," he said.

Inflation was forecast at 6.0% in the fiscal year that ends in June, down slightly from an expectation of 6.4% three months ago. The headline price index is seen at 6.8% in the 2022/2023 fiscal year, revised up from an April projection of 6.2%.

Inflation has slowed as inventories have piled up after the market was throttled by supply chain disruptions last year due to the pandemic. Lower household consumption has also led to lower inflation.

"Now, if we see this COVID dragging on and tourism being quite weak ... there will be a time when we cannot go on borrowing," Sandeep said, adding that Egypt already pays foreign debt investors a large premium over its central bank rates.

reuters



An economic recipe for unrest ignites in Tunisia

A lack of opportunity, especially for young people. Punishing debt. A broken social contract. Pandemic pressures making it all so much worse.

This economic recipe is nourishing social and political unrest throughout the world this year. South Africa experienced it earlier this month. Cuba, too. Now it's Tunisia's turn.

Each of these countries has its own unique set of circumstances. But in the context of the Middle East and North Africa, the stakes for Tunisia feel very high.

After all, Tunisia is the birthplace of the Arab Spring and has been lauded as its lone success story- a nation that cast off its long-serving, authoritarian president and emerged Phoenix-like from the flames of protest committed to democratic reforms, the rule of law, and an economy that would serve the people and not just corrupt elites.

But the phoenix never soared. Political deadlock and economic weakness have a symbiotic relationship. They feast on one another, and in Tunisia, both have grown stronger in the process.

More than a dozen governments have run the country since the Arab Spring, while the economy has languished.

Average annual economic growth between 2011 and 2019 was an underwhelming 1.5 percent, according to the World Bank. Investments and exports never recaptured their pre-Arab Spring strength. Corruption though remained rampant.

Then the pandemic struck.

Tunisia's economy shrank 8.6 percent last year, and another 3 percent in the first three months of this year on an annualized basis, according to government data.

Tourism, a bedrock of the economy that brings in foreign exchange, was decimated in 2020. Manufacturing – another mainstay – was also badly hit.

Those pandemic disruptions propelled the official unemployment rate to 17.4 percent by the end of last year, compared with a pre-pandemic level of 14.9 percent. In the first three months of this year, it had risen to 17.8 percent according to the National Institute of Statistics.

But that number does not capture the full scope of despair and frustration sweeping the nation's young people.

Youth unemployment was north of 42 percent in 2011, according to the World Bank. By 2019, it had come down to roughly 35 percent, but the International Monetary Fund reckons it climbed back above 36 percent by the final quarter of last year.

It was Tunisia's youths who seeded and nurtured the Arab Spring. This year, a new generation has hit the streets to protest political ineffectiveness, corruption, and a chronic lack of opportunity.

Meanwhile, the country is now on the downslope of its third and most punishing wave of COVID-19 infections that saw its healthcare system this month collapse and more lockdowns imposed. In a stunning example of global vaccine inequality, only about 7 percent of Tunisians are fully vaccinated, according to the latest figures by Our World in Data. The government has tried to lessen the financial blow of lost jobs and income from COVID restrictions by scaling up existing cash transfer programmes to struggling households. That kind of fiscal support has been championed by the IMF and World Bank for blunting COVID economic damage around the world.

But that and other pandemic response measures – along with declining revenues – have worsened Tunisia's fiscal deficit and its debt situation.

Government debt reached 88 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) by the end of 2020, compared with 72 percent the year before, the World Bank noted in April. Economic growth was expected to pick up this year, but not enough to return Tunisia's economy to its pre-pandemic footing.

The country could definitely use an IMF bailout. But negotiations have stalled with the international lending agency for a reported $4bn loan.

IMF packages usually come with painful strings attached to achieve what the agency calls "sustainable" finances. And indeed the agency in the past has nudged Tunisia to slash its public sector wage bill, as well as fiscal support for state-owned firms and general subsidies.

But pulling that support away would inevitably lead to job losses and financial pressure on households - certainly in the short term.

That would be tough enough for the government to pull off if times were good and it enjoyed widespread support among the electorate. But times are terrible right now and the nation's political leadership is fractured. Again.

Credit rating agencies are taking note. Earlier this month, Fitch Ratings downgraded Tunisia to a 'B-' with a negative outlook, citing the failure to agree to a new funding programme with the IMF.

On Monday, Fitch responded to the latest political crisis, writing in a press release: "The Tunisian president's decision to suspend parliament and dismiss the prime minister may add further delays to an IMF programme that would alleviate the country's large financing pressures."

That leaves the country where it has been for a decade – fragile politically, fragile economically, and bereft of a strong government that can deliver on the economic promises of the Arab Spring.

Aljazeera

Europe's proposed A.I. law could cost its economy $36 billion, think tank warns

LONDON – A new law designed to regulate artificial intelligence in Europe could end up costing the EU economy 31 billion euros ($36 billion) over the next five years, according to a report from Washington-based think tank the Center for Data Innovation released on Sunday.

The Artificial Intelligence Act — a proposed law put forward by the European Commission, the executive arm of the EU — will be the "world's most restrictive regulation of AI," according to the center.

"It will not only limit AI development and use in Europe but impose significant costs on EU businesses and consumers," the organization said in the report.

The commission did not immediately respond to a CNBC request for comment.

The Center for Data Innovation argues that a small or mid-sized enterprise with a turnover of 10 million euros would face compliance costs of up to 400,000 euros if it deployed a high-risk AI system. Such systems are defined by the commission as those that could affect people's fundamental rights or safety.

"That designation sweeps in a broad swath of potential applications — from critical infrastructure to educational and vocational training — subjecting them to a battery of requirements before companies can bring them to market," the center said.

It argues that the "compliance burdens" will cost European businesses 10.9 billion euros per year by 2025, or 31 billion euros over the next five years.

"The Commission has repeatedly asserted that the draft AI legislation will support growth and innovation in Europe's digital economy, but a realistic economic analysis suggests that argument is disingenuous at best," said Ben Mueller, senior policy analyst at the Center for Data Innovation and author of the report.

He added: "The rosy outlook is largely based on opinions and shibboleths rather than logic and market data."

AI is already being used to power products for the likes of Google, Apple and Facebook but lawmakers in Europe are concerned about its impacts.

While the technology has the potential to be a force for good in areas like health care and climate modeling, it could also be used in deadly autonomous weapons or to give every person in a population a social "score."

Meanwhile, machines that can learn how to do tasks typically done by humans could potentially eradicate millions of jobs.

The Center for Data Innovation is a part of the nonprofit, nonpartisan Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, which is backed by the likes of Amazon, Apple, Microsoft and NBCUniversal, parent company of CNBC.