

Commuters harassed by CNG drivers

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Commuters refrain from complaining to the police control room hotlines of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) as the system has not brought effective reduction in harassment by CNG run auto rickshaw drivers as it supposed to be, said a high official of DMP preferring anonymity.

"We try to take instant action against the auto rickshaw drivers who violates the rules when commuters call the traffic complaint hotline with the registration number of a vehicle," he said.

But, he added that the process is time consuming. When the centre receives a complaint the on duty police sergeant of the area is asked to trace the complainer and the CNG auto rickshaw driver.

"It takes almost half an hour to reach the spot. As a result we find neither the complainer nor the auto rickshaw driver. All our effort goes in vain," he explained.

"As a result most commuters drivers to be arrogant in refrain from complaining," he added

General complaints received are against CNG run vehicles that demand higher fares or fares fixed by the driver. Drivers refuse to budge from their demands and will ply distances only suitable to them and not to the commuter.

A few years back the number of complaints received a day was around 100, which has now reduced by 75 to 80 percent.

When the police control room receives the registration number of the vehicle in question, a case is filed against the vehicle and in most cases, the driver goes scotfree as the police track the owner of the vehicle, who in turn has to pay the fines for the mishap

caused by the driver. Ensuring genuine licences and on-the spot fines can help to reduce the problem said another DMP official. But with certain dishonest sergeants, even such methods cannot be implemented.

Shortcomings of the traffic

department encourage CNG

compelling commuters to pay Tk 10 to Tk 20 more than metered fare and at times fixed fares for trips on grounds that drivers have to pay high daily rents to the vehicle owners. Another excuse is that the metres are out of order.

"It is not possible to pay high fare for daily travel," said Anjuman Ara, a service holder adding that she commutes regularly in auto rickshaws.

Other commuters too, allege that CNG auto rickshaw drivers are openly violating the communication ministry directive, refusing short trips and nearly always demanding a premium over a metered fare. "If this is the rule, why doesn't

the traffic department take immediate action against CNG owners and drivers? Waiting for any complaints will not solve the problem," said Mustafizur Rahman, another regular commuter.

"We don't have the time to make complaints, instead we look for another vehicle to take us

to our destination," he added. Most auto rickshaw drivers refuse to carry passengers with no reason.

In January 2002 the Ministry of Communication detailed a fare chart for taxicabs and CNG-run three wheelers

The ministry fixed Tk 350 as daily deposit for every CNG-run auto rickshaw, but drivers complain that owners charge between Tk 550 and Tk 600.

Imam Uddin, owner of 12 CNG auto rickshaws said that maintenance costs, garage charges and other investment on a vehicle has increased in comparison with previous years. He said the Tk 350 did not cover up these costs.

But auto rickshaw drivers said owners increased the daily deposit of such vehicles in view of the high demand for such modes of transport.

"It is true that driving CNG run auto rickshaws is more profitable than driving other vehicles," said Iddris Ali, an auto-rickshaw driver. "So owners of these vehicles almost doubled their daily deposit, leading drivers to follow unfair means," he added.

Another CNG run auto rickshaw owner attributed the increase to the increase in purchase price of such vehicles.

"Few years back the price of a CNG run auto rickshaw was Tk 80,000 but today it is Tk four lakh," he said. "Ŵhy shouldn't I increase the daily deposit," he asked.

"Our duty is to receive complaints and to take action against the CNG auto rickshaw drivers," said Johurul Haque Khan, traffic inspector-1. He did not want to comment on whether or not it was the right way of reducing harassment of the commuters.

"Taxis are bound to carry passengers by the metre according to the rule," said Firozal-Muzahid Khan, deputy commissioner (DC) Dhaka traffic (north) DMP. "What we could do is issue warnings to the drivers and reject the route permit," he added

Street-dwellers feel the chill

SYED TASHFIN CHOWDHURY

The night was cold, and Matin covered himself with a straw mat (pati) he had, little knowing that the morning would turn out to be the foggiest in recent times.

"I could not see through the fog and it was so cold that I had no choice but to burn the mat to keep me warm," said Matin, a beggar who spends the nights at the Green Road-Panthapath intersection.

Like Matin, thousands of street-dwellers are suffering extensively without warm clothes in the cold and fog.

Although, the 21 people who died due to the cold wave in the last few days lived outside the city, these street-dwellers fear that they too may soon add to the list.

"We cannot afford any sweaters, jackets or mufflers with our limited earnings," said Selim,

street-dweller could not do so Matin's neighbour. Selim sells boiled eggs during the day. He because of the high rent. channels most of his income to

these techniques. The street-dwellers employ a "Passers-by and residents of number of techniques to fight nearby buildings take a lot of the chilling cold. interest in our crude lifestyle,"

"Most of us can hardly afford "We usually light a fire and to rent a shanty in a nearby slum. Therefore, we live on the street," huddle around it during the coldest nights. We collect waste Besides Selim and Matin, products, paper and other flammable objects that we can rickshaw-pullers, vegetable sellers, peddlers, day labourers lay our hands on from nearby and others from diversified dustbins and along the streets to professions, 19 in all, reside in

being of the affluent, who are light up the fire," said Selim. kind enough to give us warm Most cover themselves with clothing, blankets, rugs or simply their lungis, shirts and other some money with which to buy clothing while they sleep. these items to survive the cold, he said.

Some resort to smoking *birri* our daily income," said Matin. and ganja. "These keep the body The group was larger before warm," said one smoker. Street-dwellers in Kalabagan, "Over 12 or 13 others moved to

forecasts predicted another cold wave at the end of this month. Rayerbazar, Shahbagh, Ramna which will further sustain the Park, Bashabo, Badda, Mohakhali, Kamlapur, Segunbagicha and misery of these street-dwellers.

other parts of the city too use

said Latif, a street-dweller of

He said that despite their

"We can only pray for the well-

Though the weather conditi-

ons have improved lately,

interest very few come forward to

offer them any form of help.

Segunbagicha.



his family in Meherpur.

this particular spot.

the cold wave struck.

street-dweller.

"This place is cheap. Each of

us pay around Tk 10 -20 to the

security guards depending on

warmer spots in the nearby

market areas," said another

warmer parts, this particular

Despite his desire to move to

hesaid

