

# Passengers protest 'unfair' fare hike by pvt bus workers

SYED TASHFIN CHOWDHURY

On September 9, a conductor of a Route 9 bus that travels between Mirpur to Gulistan, demanded Tk three from its passengers who had boarded the transport from Kalabagan and would be getting down at Asad gate or Lalmatia. As the existing rate for the same distance was Tk one, most passengers naturally protested. The conductor returned Tk 2 of one passenger with an impressive build but with the others, he continued to argue. He roughly ordered a student of Ideal College to sit down and threatened to rough up another passenger if he continued to make a fuss. Some more threats later, most passengers gave up and the conductor had his way. The very next day, a local bus on route 12 was on its way to Mohammadpur from Farmgate. Near Manik Mia Avenue the conductor of the bus began collecting the fares. One pas-

senger handed a Tk 2 note as that had been the fare for the last two to three years. The conductor asked for Tk 3 and the passengers protested. "The BRTA (Bangladesh Road and Transport Authority) has not approved any increase in bus fares and therefore what you are demanding is illegal," said a passenger. The conductor with support from the driver and another assistant, stood his ground. The argument soon turned nasty and at one point the conductor shoved a passenger who replied with a slap. The incensed conductor then ordered the helper to close the only door of the bus and the driver speeded like crazy towards the Mohammadpur bus stand. Once there, they signalled to helpers, conductors and drivers of other buses at the stand and soon around 25 bus workers were attacking the unfortunate passenger who had slapped the rude conductor. The rest of the passengers got down quickly and left the spot. The victim was finally able to run

away with a broken nose and bruises all over the body. The two incidents are not isolated ones and have been occurring throughout the city ever since the increase in fuel prices about a week ago. Despite the Communication Minister's assurance of adjusting bus fares in view of the fuel price increase by September 15, some bus drivers and conductors have raised fares at will. Regular passengers are suffering the most from this situation. Passengers pointed out that fares have been increased by 50 to 150 percent on certain routes. Inter-district bus fares have also gone up by Tk 10 to 30. Fares of sitting service buses in the city, however, have not increased. Leaders of the Bangladesh Road Transport Association, Bangladesh Bus-Truck Owners Association and Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation are demanding a 25 percent increase in bus fares. When asked a bus helper claimed that some bus conduc-

tors and helpers are increasing the fares without the knowledge of the owners. "We have to support our own families, which is quite difficult nowadays with the price spiral of essentials. The extra Tk 1 or 2 collected from each passenger help balance the shortage," he said. "Buses, which have increased the fares in this way are breaking the law as we have not approved any new rate," said Nazmul Huda, the Minister for Communications. Huda urged the citizens to come forward and report such illegal activities to the police. "City dwellers should just down the registration numbers of buses which are demanding extra fare and hand them over to the concerned police authorities." He hoped that the problems would be solved by September 15 with a new fare chart in place.



Strong exchange of words between bus conductors and passengers over the undue hike in fares along all routes in the city is a commonplace scenario.



CNG-run autorickshaws and taxicabs make use of the price hike of fuel to charge passengers at will.

## CNG-run vehicles also turn costlier after fuel price hike

IMRUL HASAN

Badal Roy just arrived at Sadarghat from Barisal by a launch and was looking for an autorickshaw or a cab for a trip to Mohammadpur. He found one, but the autorickshaw driver charged almost double the normal fare. Then he called a taxi but the driver also demanded the metered fare plus an extra amount of Tk 20. "I asked them why they were charging high fare. They replied that transport fares have increased after the latest hike in fuel prices. I had to pay much more than the normal fare as the driver did not agree to take the trip without the additional amount," said Badal. "I don't find any reason for increasing fares of autorickshaws and cabs which are driven by CNG (compressed natural gas) as the government has not increased

the price of gas. The commuters are helpless and they are compelled to pay the high amount charged by the CNG and taxi drivers illogically," he added. Although each and every cab and autorickshaw has meter, the city commuters have to bargain with the drivers to fix a fare. "The drivers charge at will and that rate is so high. We have to pay more as we do not have any alternative," said Rabina Alam, who goes to her office at Motijheel from Mirpur every day by CNG autorickshaw. "Unless the authorities take effective action, the cab operators will continue to charge such a high fare ignoring the fixed rate. The situation is going beyond control," said Rahimul Hasan at Gulistan bus stand. "This is illegal and the authorities must take action now to protect the commuters," he noted.

When asked, some cab operators admit that they charge extra amount from the commuters. "But we are also helpless. Though the price of CNG has not been raised our daily expenses have increased after the latest fuel price hike," said Mohammad Matin, a CNG autorickshaw driver at Farm Gate. "I know it is illegal. But we are compelled to do that," said a black cab driver at Moghbazar. "We have to pay the taxi owner Tk 700 daily and it is very difficult for us to earn a moderate amount after paying the daily charge and the fuel cost," he said. The government-fixed fare rate for autorickshaw is Tk 12 for the first two kilometres and then Tk 5 for every kilometre. The rate for black cabs is Tk 15 for the first two kilometres and then Tk 6 for every kilometre. The air-conditioned yellow cabs can charge Tk 20

for the first two kilometres and then Tk 8 for every kilometre. "A few cabs are run by petrol and their drivers can charge extra fare due to the increased fuel price but the number of such taxis is very limited," said Emdadul Haque, deputy manager of Shohagh CNG Conversion Unit. "If the drivers of CNG-run cab and autorickshaw charge high fare, passengers can complain to the police or the cab company about this illegal practice," he added. An official of Anudip Cab Private Ltd at Moghbazar said they have received such complaints from the passengers. "But it is very difficult to take action," he added. "We take action against the accused drivers if specific complaints are lodged," said Communications Minister Nazmul Huda.

## Fake attestations an open secret

Stamps and seals available at groceries even!

ERSHAD KAMOL

From a grocery near the BRTA (Bangladesh Road Transport Authority) Abdus Selim had his papers attested not by any first class government official but by paying Tk 50 to the shopkeeper for the seal and signature before going for his driving test. Such fake attestation is common practice near the BRTA or the passport office. "It is forgery and punishable under the criminal act. I believe some officials are involved in this and the concerned government employee is responsible for any misuse of the attestation," said M Alamgir, senior assistant secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs. "We have taken steps against thousands of forgers under the criminal acts 466, 467 and 420. We have even recovered fake stamps of officers in charge of police stations and other important government officials," said a Detective Branch (DB) official. But these drives by the law enforcers have proved insufficient for controlling the crime. Nowadays official stamps of professors, secretaries and other high ranking government employees can be found in the possession of students even. Didarul Alam, a college student, attests documents of his friends and relatives using a fake stamp of an assistant professor of a government college. Didar claimed he had been compelled to take help of such illegal means. "I had gone to some government officials for attestation but was refused. Once I went to one of my lecturers for urgent attestation with original copies of my certificates but he also avoided me saying that he could not recognise me. Then I went to a shop at Khilgaon and had a stamp made of an associate professor of a government college in Noakhali." Shiblee Sadiq, an unemployed graduate shared an interesting experience. "I had requested a professor of a government college, who is my neigh-

bour, for attestation but he told me that he could give his signature but his stamp was not with him. I had to pay his peon, who keeps the stamp, Tk 75 for stamping five copies of my certificates. I have also heard that many peons of government employees take bribe for using the stamps. "The Government should either abolish the requirement of attestation or they should give proper instructions so that government officials are bound to attest if someone comes to them

with authentic documents," added Sadiq. A government official on condition of anonymity said that sometimes they refuse to attest in the fear that the signature and stamp could land them in trouble. "A close relative of mine had used my attestation while purchasing a disputed land. In the end I had to face the judiciary," said the official.



Government officials' rubber stamps can be made by anyone and used for attestation.