CNG-run vehicles won't lower fare

THE government's had recently made an attempt to lower the fare of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) run passenger vehicles but that has faced a lot of opposition from the transport owners. Communications Minister Nazmul Huda had made the proposal to the CNG run bus owners at a meeting, saying that they are charging fare similar to diesel run vehicles though the cost of CNG is much lower than that of diesel. But the bus owners rejected the proposal stating that there is a limited number of CNG buses currently running on test basis, and such a move might discourage the bus owners from introducing more such buses. The bus owners further stated that only China and India produce such CNG-run vehicles and it's troublesome to collect such vehicles. The owners of CNG run three wheeler auto-rickshaw owners were not present at the meeting though they were invited. Though there is a fixed rate for a three-wheeler at Tk 300 per day, the vehicle owners charge Tk 500-600 per day, forcing the drivers to demand extra money above the meter bill. The drivers too cannot complain as their number is higher than the number of vehicles, and hence, the owners get the scope to exploit the drivers. The minister decided to sit separately with the CNG run auto-rickshaw owners on the issue.

Text Recording and the role of the cellphone Firms

IN a revised directive the government has asked the cellphone firms to record all text messages. Experts, however, divulged that the directive was "grossly inconsistent." As for the operators they are bracing for a legal battle against the directive.



Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) asked the mobile phone operators to record all conversations as well as archive all texts and multimedia messages and to make them available to the government whenever it expresses the need. Muhammad Omar Farooq, BTRC's chairman, sent confidential letters to the operators on March 16 ordering them to install "lawful interception" system without outlining the details. He also asked the operators to "maintain call related information and have provision for maintaining call content, so that on request of the requiring bodies, this can be made available to them forthwith."

Before the issuance of the directive, BTRC had a series of meetings with the operators on the eavesdropping issues and the operators on those occasions agreed to link their respective networks with the government's recording facilities. Sources revealed that in all previous meetings it was decided that the relevant government authorities will record calls and messages. That is why the directive came as a surprise.

"How can we install 'lawful interception' system when it is unlawful at the first place?" commented a mobile phone operator's high official requesting anonymity. He termed the directive as "grossly inconsistent" as recording the conversation of any customer preserving clients' messages is totally illegal for any operator and the telecom law as well as the license strictly mandate them to maintain customers' privacy.

It was the realisation on the government's part that they are ill-equipped to maintain and process a mammoth database of fast growing tens of millions of mobile users that led to the issuance of the directive. Officials of the operators expressed fear that this may lead them to a legal minefield. Sources said that all the operators have forwarded BTRC's letter to their legal departments and all the CEOs are likely to meet soon to stretegise a unified legal warfare against the telecom regulator.