

Taxicabs, CNG three-wheelers always defiant

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Authorities' efforts to streamline the public transportation system in Dhaka have done a little to ease public sufferings as drivers of taxi and CNG-run three-wheelers continue to defy rules, charge outrageous fare and refuse to take trip as per passengers' request.

Although the government recently introduced new structures of fare and drivers' daily payment to the owners, there are no rules to oblige the drivers to follow them.

"As there are no specific laws on the violation of the rules of meter use in CNG-run vehicles, we have to penalise the offenders by applying existing general traffic regulations," said Jashim Uddin, joint commissioner of traffic department.

With rickshaws, city commuters' favourite mode of transport, banned on several important thoroughfares of the city, commuters are left helpless and have little choice but to virtually beg the taxi drivers for taking them to destinations.

Nurul Islam, a student of Independent University and a resident of Dhanmondi road-6, was getting late for his exam and was desperately looking for

transportation to his university on Wednesday.

After requesting more than a dozen autorickshaw drivers to take him to his university at Utara, one CNG autorickshaw driver finally agreed to take him for a fare of whooping Tk 180, three times the regular fare.

An infuriated Islam approached the nearby police sergeant who ignored him saying that he would look into the matter later. "I had a midterm exam that morning and I virtually begged to them (CNG drivers) to take me in," said Rashid.

"The meters are meaningless and even if the drivers ask for the extra fare nobody is bothered by that and just complies with it," he added.

Like Nurul Islam, thousands of commuters face the problem every day. Given the dimensions of the transpiration problem, travelling within the city is nothing sort of a nightmare for the thousands of helpless commuters, which is getting worse by the day.

CNG-run vehicles carry the telephone numbers of the police control room on their back for the convenience of the passengers to report complaints, but commuters alleged that com-

plaints comes to little use and is more of a nuisance.

"Filing complaints is more of a wastage of time as nobody seems to do anything. It seems more logical to just comply with the increased fare," said a commuter.

However, officials at Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) control room told this correspondent that they that they receive around 10 to 15 complaints each day and take appropriate actions.

"We inform the nearest on-duty sergeant to deal with the reported matter and take action," said Jamaluddin at the DMP control room.

"Usually it takes quite a bit of time for the on-duty sergeant to locate the spot, and may lose the complainant or the accused driver. Therefore, it may not be possible to take actions against the rule violators all the time," he added.

Mohammad Selim, an on-duty traffic sergeant at Sonargaon intersection told this correspondent that they have to penalise the offenders by using section 159 of the traffic act that is applicable to all kinds of general traffic offences.

Citing an example, some drivers alleged that a section of

are usually charged with a fine of Tk 50 to 500 for violation of traffic rules. Some vital cases require bail from the traffic courts in exchange of a fine of around Tk 1,000 to Tk 1,500," said Sergeant Selim.

"It would have been valuable if we had individual laws tailored just for the CNG fare related issues, then we could ensure public convenience more effectively by giving a bold message to the offenders," he added.

While the city dwellers continue to suffer, the CNG-run vehicles drivers and owners blame each other for the exorbitant fares.

General excuses used by the drivers to defend their errant behaviour include high amount of daily deposits they pay to the vehicle owners and price hike of essentials, while the owners said the maintenance costs of the vehicles are very high.

Several CNG-run autorickshaw drivers said they are being compelled to pay an amount of Tk 550 to Tk 600 as daily deposit to the owners even though the government fixed the new ceiling at Tk 450, raising it from Tk 300.

Citing an example, some drivers alleged that a section of

owners maintain two daily ledgers - one showing Tk 450 as daily deposit from each driver while the other reads Tk 100 under miscellaneous heads.

"They (owners) threatened us not to disclose the actual amount of daily deposit we pay, otherwise they would not let us drive the vehicles," said Mamun, a taxicab driver.

Nazmul Hasan, owner of 10 CNG three-wheelers from Utara said, "Maintenance cost of the vehicles has increased tremendously and we do have to make profit after bearing all the expenses. Therefore it's not possible to reduce the daily deposit."

According to Jashim Uddin, DMP joint commissioner (traffic), although traffic officials are doing their best to ease the commuters' sufferings, the fact that powerful associations of drivers and owners of the public transport vehicles tend to override the normal enforcement of laws makes it immensely difficult.

"As it is not possible for the police alone to improve the entire system, the owners' associations should come forward and offer some assistance to the traffic department to ease public sufferings," he added.



STAR PHOTO

DCC TRANSPORT POOL

Over 20 percent vehicles out of order



Waste management work of DCC, like many other services, is hampered due to shortage of vehicles.

RAHMAN SABUKTAGIN

About 20 percent of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) vehicular fleet is out of order, which is seriously disrupting day-to-day municipal services.

Services like waste management, street lighting and pavement maintenance are greatly hampered due to shortage of vehicles, different DCC sources said.

They said corruption, mismanagement and mismanagement in the DCC transport department have put the city corporation authorities into a helpless situation.

According to the DCC transport department, 393 vehicles of the city corporation are now in operation and 88 are at workshops for servicing.

However, DCC's documents of April 2007 show that the city corporation has 547 vehicles. DCC sold 68 old vehicles in auction since 2002, sources said.

BM Enamul Hoque, who recently joined as the head of the transport department, said about 75 vehicles are used for carrying DCC staff but they need at least

100 vehicles for this purpose.

For carrying wastes the DCC needs at least 300 vehicles but the transport department has only 150 such vehicles in operation, Enamul added.

Apart from the shortage of transports, DCC is also facing a shortage of drivers. DCC has 348 drivers against 355 positions while the requirement of drivers is not less than 400.

Enamul said shortage of vehicles and drivers hinder waste management of the city as well as the other municipal services that DCC provides.

He said DCC might get some vehicles from Japanese donor agency Jica for waste management of the city, which would ease the crisis. "But now it is hard for the corporation to maintain all the municipal services."

Interestingly, an information guide of DCC shows a list of 662 vehicles. Enamul said at least 141 equipments have been shown in the list as vehicles but equipment like generator, concrete mixer machine or stone crusher are not vehicles at all.

Telltale accounts of negligence

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Generally, a construction site may require tests of three to four borings involving around Tk 1 lakh if done at Buet, and only Tk 10,000 if done elsewhere.

Mayor of DCC Sadeque Hossain Khoka said the contractor did not do piling properly and the engineers responsible for the work did not monitor the construction.

"No we have to know the lapses through investigation of the expert team and then take action," he said. "I hope to remove the collapsed building and begin construction of a new one within a month or two."

Meanwhile, the DCC suspended three of its engineers following the incident. They are executive engineer Mezbahul Karim, assistant engineer Mojibur Rahman and deputy assistant engineer Nirmal Chandra Dey.

Payment of the contractor Atiquallah Khoka of Atiq Construction Limited has been held up and the firm would be blacklisted, the mayor said.

Chairman of Rajuk KAM Haroon said though any person or organisation has to obtain approval of building plan from Rajuk within its jurisdiction, according to building rules of Rajuk, it has become a tradition not to obtain approval.

It is a public knowledge that the government agencies have not complied with the rules so far, he said.

The city mayor said in response that

there is no need for DCC to obtain approval of building design from Rajuk because it is not in practice.

Meanwhile, the existing old five-storey building of the colony has developed multiple cracks due to 'forced vibration' caused by the collapsed building.

Shabita, whose tin-shed house is within three to four yards of the collapsed building, narrated the Friday night incident. It was around 10:15 pm. Electricity went off. It was very dark all around. Within a few minutes, we heard a frightening big bang. Soon we discovered the newly built building had broken down."

Panicked residents of the sweepers squatters raised a hue and cry and started running to and fro with a storm of dust and darkness all around.

Dulari, one of the sixty families who were supposed to occupy the building on June 3, said, "I cannot even imagine what would have happened had it collapsed after we occupied the building."

The new building is divided into two blocks with 30 rooms at each of them for 60 sweeper families. The north block collapsed.

The south block of the building is of same design, materials and on same soil. Swapan Das, another resident of the colony said that the contractor has not yet visited the site ever since the incident occurred. Construction began in May last year.

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