

# CNG buses offer no cheap fares

CNG-run buses, five times cheaper to operate than any other buses charge commuters as high a fare as any other city buses.

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Despite big difference between the price of diesel and CNG, fares of diesel and CNG-run buses and other public transports remain identical in the city.

Diesel price is five times the cost of CNG (compressed natural gas) but commuters using CNG-run buses are compelled to pay the same amount of fare.

Passengers said they are the victims of continued irregularities in the CNG sector as the government has failed to bring discipline in the fare structure.

Diesel now costs Tk 40 per litre while each cubic foot of CNG sells at Tk 8.50.

According to sources at CNG conversion firms, one cubic foot gas is equivalent to one litre of diesel, as a bus can travel the same distance with this amount of energy.

"The fare of CNG-run buses should be 5 times lower than that of diesel buses," said Mahbub Alam, a marketing official from Rahimafrooz CNG Ltd.

Moreover, majority of these buses do not have any signs identifying them as CNG buses, leaving no ground open for the passengers to raise questions for the high fares.

Even some bus services charge fares that are higher than those of diesel-run buses. They use fancy tags such as

'counter service' or 'sitting service' to justify the high fare.

Several buses, namely the Myline and Borak operating on routes 53 and 57 charge Tk 10 for a trip from Azimpur to Mirpur while diesel-run minibuses charge the same.

unjustifiable, and that a number of bus owners are making huge profits by claiming high fares," he said.

If the difference of fare between the gas and diesel run buses was big, all the passengers would try to take the CNG-run buses leading to a chaotic situation, Hanif said.

A number of CNG and diesel-run buses, operating from Azimpur to Badda and Natun Bazar, claim similar fare, regular passengers said.

Anik, a CNG-run bus service claims Tk 5 and Tk 8 for a trip from Azimpur to Farmgate and Nabisco respectively, while Winner, a diesel bus service, claims the same fare.

Many CNG and diesel bus services operating from

Motijheel and Gulistan to Mirpur, Mohammadpur and other parts of the city have identical fare structures. These include City Bus, Hanif, Duldul, Rajdhani, Shatabdi, Greenway and Kalmilata.

According to Shakhat Hossain, an operator of Duldul bus service, the current situation can only be improved if all the buses are turned into CNG-run vehicles.

"Declaring different fare structures for different kind of buses would be complicated and problematic," said Hossain. "The best solution to this problem is to completely ban diesel run buses as they are really antiquated and much more costly to maintain."

Abu Bakar Mohammad



CNG buses keep charging passengers much more than expected.

Shajahan, chairman of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), said they

had not thought about the situation earlier.

"As we are now receiving

complaints, we are chalking out plans to ease the situation. We might send a proposal to the ministry about new fare structures soon," he said.



Drivers hardly use meters and charge passengers as they want.

## CNG Meter Calibration: 75 percent companies disappear

RAHMAN SABUKTAGIN

Meter calibration on all CNG auto rickshaws could not be completed as about 75 percent of the companies that sold the meters have disappeared, according to Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA).

Besides, the few companies that did not disappear, violated conditions set by the authorities and churned out lakhs of taka in calibration charges from auto rickshaw owners, claimed owners of CNG-run auto rickshaws.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority on June 6 formed a committee to probe into the matter. The committee is supposed to submit its report within 15 days.

Humayun Rashid, one of the directors at BRTA, told Star City that meters on 10,000 CNG auto rickshaws

were calibrated out of around 13,000 authorised CNG auto rickshaws in the city. Rest of the meters could not be calibrated due to disappearance of 11 meter selling companies, he said adding, there were 15 companies approved for selling fare meters to CNG auto rickshaws in Dhaka.

"BRTA has formed an investigation committee after CNG auto-rickshaw owners' association filed complaints about the meter sellers," he said.

A BRTA source said a large number of companies bagged the approvals in 2002 for being an approved meter seller for auto rickshaws since political influence played a major role at that time. "Political influence was so severe that different companies managed to have different terms and conditions approved. To favour a certain company, BRTA was forced to change a number of clauses in

the general terms and conditions for selling fare meters."

BRTA director Humayun Rashid admitted the existence of different terms and conditions and hoped "the investigation committee will dig out all issues related to fare meters and will recommend possible solutions."

HM Iqbal, general secretary of Dhaka CNG Auto rickshaw Owners' Association, said four companies that calibrated CNG meters illegally realised between Tk 600 and Tk 800.

"The companies are charging us fees although the conditions set by the BRTA assured a one year warranty and free meter calibration once the government changes the fare."

SM Shahzada, owner of SK traders, one of the four companies that calibrated CNG auto rickshaw meters, told Star City that according to a

gadget notification published on October 29, 2002, the meter sellers are supposed to offer free servicing of the meters under a one-year warranty."

As there was a possibility of fare adjustment within six months of installation of the meters, free meter calibration was also mentioned in the gadget, he said adding,

"but the government did not set any time limit for how long the companies would offer free calibrate. Since there was a time limit for free servicing under the warranty, the companies simply followed that time limit. The meters were installed five years back and how can one demand free calibration now?"

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