

GOVT PLANS TO INTRODUCE 3,000 MORE AUTORICKSHAWS

Long-term vision needed to ease commuters' sufferings, say experts

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Plans to introduce more CNG-run auto rickshaws in the city, where an effective public transportation system is absent and its limited streets are already crammed with small vehicles, promise commuters little respite from their unrelenting sufferings.

Although the scheme, taken by Bangladesh Road Transport Authorities (BRTA) to bring in around 3,000 more auto rickshaws, is intended to ease the rising demands for more public transportation, it lacks any cohesive and coherent long-term vision to resolve the crisis, said experts.

The experts said bringing in additional auto rickshaws is not a tangible solution to the transportation crisis at all. To facilitate a palpable solution to the public transportation crisis, authorities should review the existing fare policies and make necessary adjustments to better serve everyone concerned -- the owners, the drivers and the commuters, they added.

"While bringing in more auto rickshaws may seem like an apparent solution to the problem, it would be more fitting to look for a more tangible approach to tackle the whole situation," said a BRTA official requesting anonymity.

Earlier, the BRTA recommended the government to phase in another 3,000 CNG three-wheelers in the fleet of

around 13 thousand CNG auto rickshaws that are currently plying the city streets.

Following constant persuasion by owners and drivers associations, the communication ministry agreed in principle that the city requires more auto rickshaws.

"The topmost reason for the alteration between drivers and passengers is that there are very

the actual number of auto rickshaws plying the city streets are far more than just 13 thousand.

According to a survey conducted under the Strategic Transport Plan for Dhaka -- a World Bank funded transport project of the government, the actual number of auto rickshaws operating in the capital is around two and a half times higher than the number of authorised vehicles

that no duplicate document was provided to the auto owners over the last 7 months.

"We provide a special tri-colour sticker to the authorised auto rickshaws, but later the unscrupulous owners forge the special stickers to use on unauthorised vehicles," said Humayun Rashid, director of operations of BRTA, adding that the BRTA is conducting regular drives through mobile courts and removing unauthorised auto

run auto rickshaws after phasing out around 40,000 petrol-run two-stroke auto rickshaws that were largely blamed for air pollution. At that time, the government put the cap in the number of auto rickshaws at 13,000.

In 2004, the government added 1,000 more auto rickshaws. Uttara Motors sold most of the auto rickshaws, sources said.

According to Amit Bhattacharjee, general manager of Uttara Motors, the company ceased selling auto rickshaws in 2004 after the BRTA stopped giving registration to the new vehicles.

Bhattacharjee suggested that the best way to curb the number of unauthorised auto rickshaws would be to strengthen the fitness tests for the vehicles. Introduction of additional mobile courts could also be an effective solution to this problem, he added.

Meanwhile, for the thousands of helpless commuters, getting around the city is getting increasingly difficult day by day. Many housewives, office goers and school children say the rickshaws used to be a transport alternative for them, but since many city roads are now off limits to rickshaws, they have no choice but to practically beg the auto rickshaw drivers to take them to their destinations.

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little number of auto rickshaws plying the city streets. Because of the high demand, drivers often charge extra," said Moazzem Hossain, chairman of Bangladesh Auto-rickshaw Drivers' Cooperative Federation.

"If the number of auto rickshaws increases, it will ease the transportation problem and bring an end to the commuters' sufferings," he hoped.

While steps to bring in more auto rickshaws was taken with the understanding that the existing 13 thousand auto rickshaws can barely cope with the demand in the city, statistics suggest that

the survey suggests that a whopping 32 thousand auto rickshaws are plying the city streets as opposed to the 12 thousand auto rickshaws registered with BRTA.

The unauthorised auto rickshaws are using the same number plate and documents of the authorised ones.

According to sources at BRTA, a group of unscrupulous auto rickshaw owners 'mange' to collect 'counterfeited' documents from BRTA.

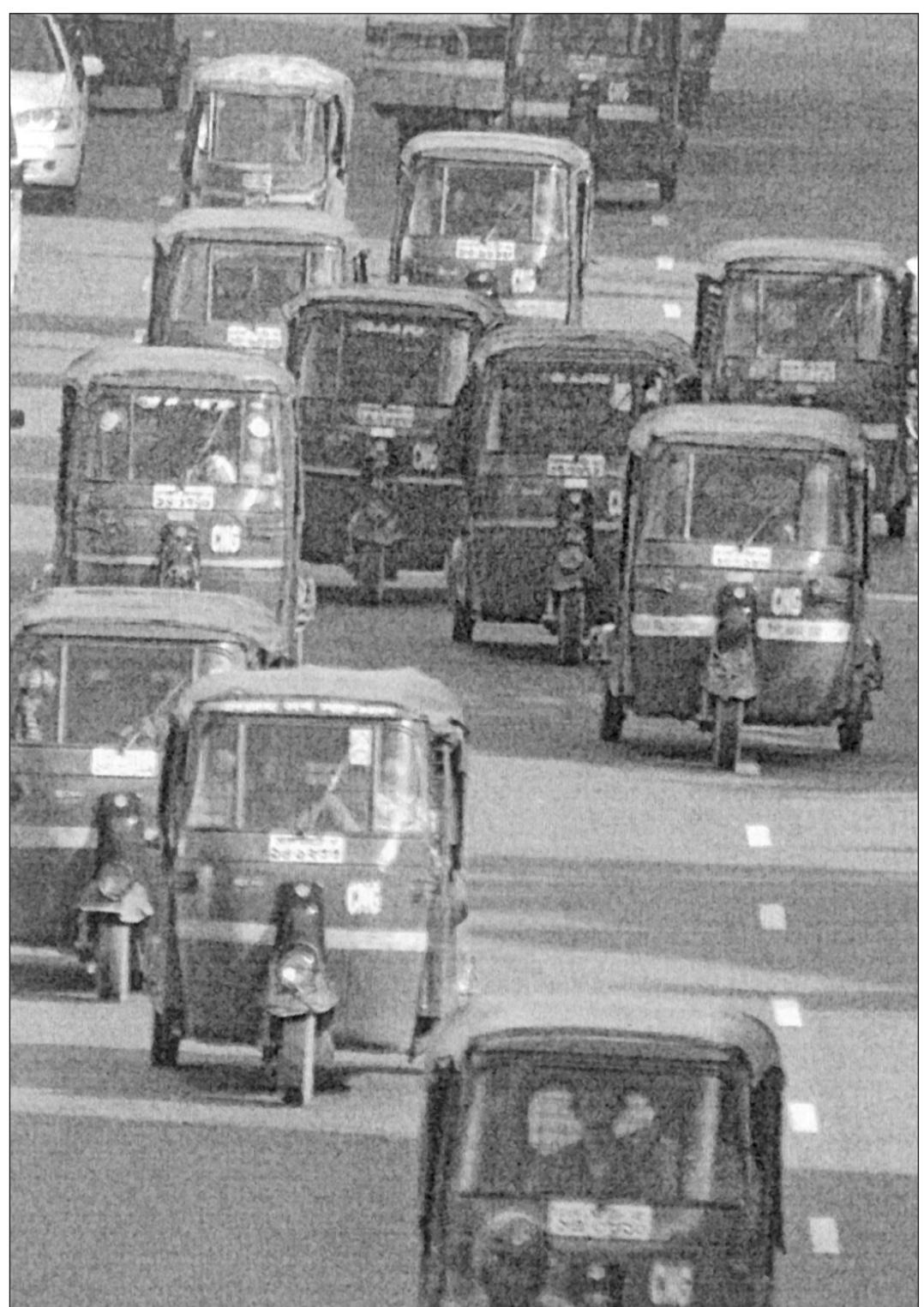
BRTA officials, however, denied the allegation and said

rickshaws from the streets immediately.

Earlier, a 5-member committee, formed by the government to study the city road infrastructure, suggested that the city would require around three to five thousand additional auto rickshaws for a better transportation system.

According to BRTA officials, the new auto rickshaws would be distributed to applicants through a lottery system to ensure full transparency.

Earlier in 2002, the government introduced 12,000 CNG



STAR PHOTO

Will additional CNGs solve commuters' sufferings in the already crammed streets?

PUNITIVE ACTION



A traffic surgeon threatens to slap a rickshaw-puller while a constable punctures the tire of his van. This is a common scene in many city streets where unruly non-motorised vehicles often create traffic jams in busy thoroughfares.

STAR PHOTO

No Rajuk approved plans

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BC Act, Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC) also requires approval from a building official for construction of a building.

Professionals including civil engineers, architects and planners involved with any construction work will remain legally liable and answerable for any lapses in their professional responsibility, according to BNBC.

The Building Construction Act of 1952, through amendment in February 2006, clearly provides for

penalty for the violators of building codes and rules.

It provides that whoever commits an offence by contravening the provision of section 3 of the act or by failing to comply with any directions given by an authorised officer or a committee under relevant sections shall be punishable under this section with fine no less than Tk 50,000 or with both.

PWD Chief Engineer Abdulla-Al-Safi said they just act upon the architectural plan prepared and approved by the Department of

Architecture (DoA) for any project of government buildings. "We just play the role of a builder."

Chief Architect of DoA ASM Ismail said the department prepares architectural design of any project in compliance with the existing planning rules and building code.

"If required, it is the owning organisation or individual concerned that has to obtain approval of planning and structural design for construction of a building," he said.

Streetside iftar may be tempting

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"The cooking oil, which is standard in the first place, is carefully preserved for recycling. Reheating the oil gradually increases its acidity and it eventually becomes toxic. An item deep fried in that toxic oil might taste good, but it is in fact poisonous for the body," he added.

Consumption of these foods over a long period of time can cause serious illnesses. "The unhygienic practices contaminate the food with germs, dust and other unwanted materials. It can cause diarrhoea, typhoid and jaundice

after ingestion," said Prof Dr Mobin Khan, head of liver disease department, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU).

"The oil which becomes toxic after too much use also cause irritation in the digestive tract that eventually turns into peptic ulcer," Dr Khan explained.

"We heard the news of using burnt engine oil to fry the food. It is extremely harmful for the body. It seriously damages the liver. The liver fails to process the food and its function is hindered, eventually causing liver failure," Dr Khan said.

Cholesterol levels, chest pain,

acidity and other such ailments usually rise during the month of Ramadan, said experts.

Magistrate Rokon Ud-Doula told Star City that to curb the unhygienic practices of food preparation and sale, 31 mobile courts are operating in the city since 1st Ramadan under his supervision.

The court has been, however, concentrating on confiscating counterfeit brands only while the Iftar sellers continue their unhygienic practices, alleged a number of Dhaka residents.

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