

SHC orders formulation of policy for CNG kits use

The Sindh High Court (SHC) has directed the Hydrocarbon Development Institute of Pakistan (HDIP), the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra), the transport secretary and other stakeholders to formulate some standard operating procedure (SOP) with regard to testing the fitness and clearance of CNG kits and cylinders being used in the public and private vehicles.

The direction came on petitions of Muzamil Mumtaz Meo and Tariq Mansoor that sought directives against the use of CNG kits and cylinders in public transport and school vans, and action against police officials for demanding a bribe from a rickshaw driver who self-immolated in protest at a traffic police office.

A division bench of the SHC, headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar, had directed the HDIP director on a previous hearing to file a statement with regard to fitness and clearance criteria of the CNG kits and cylinders being used in public and private vehicles.

The SHC observed that the issue in question pertained to the functions of the HDIP and asked if any safety and preventive measures were taken before allowing the use of CNG cylinders as the petitioners had cited various examples of accidents that occurred due to substandard CNG kits installed in vehicles, including school vans.

The high court directed officials of Ogra and HDIP, the secretary transport, the chief inspector explosives and representatives of All Pakistan CNG Association to convene a meeting and jot down some SOP so that before plying the vehicles fitted with CNG kits on roads, safety checks may be ensured. A counsel representing the petitioners may also join the meeting, the court said.

The SHC directed a provincial law officer to submit a progress report after the meeting and adjourned the hearing till May 7. The Sindh government had earlier imposed ban on the use of CNG in inter-city public transport in Sindh in 2015 in the larger interest of the public safety.

The SHC was earlier informed by the transport secretary that the basic responsibility in this regard vested in Ogra, which was the controlling authority for the issues raised in the petitions. He submitted that the HDIP was working under the supervision and control of Ogra and it was responsible to check the quality of CNG kits and cylinders.

Meo had submitted in his petition that the rickshaw driver had set himself on fire at the traffic police office in Saddar in protest after he was fined by the traffic police for not paying them a bribe a few days ago. The driver later died at a hospital.

The petitioner stated that the rickshaw driver was forced to commit suicide as money had earlier been extorted from him at least three times. He alleged that it was a routine matter in Karachi that the traffic police demanded bribes from rickshaw drivers and motorcyclists, and imposed undue fines on them if they refused to pay bribes.

The complainant added that substandard CNG cylinders were being used in the public transport vehicles despite clear directions of court and no action was being taken against such vehicles. He requested the court to direct the DIG traffic to take action against traffic cops engaged in demanding bribes from motorists and restrain public transport vehicles from using substandard CNG cylinders.

Jamal Khurshid