

The Indian Express 20.08.2013

PMPML takes first step towards women's safety, commuters call it half-hearted

Pune Mahanagar Parivahan Mahamandal Ltd (PMPML) has finally taken the first step to make travelling safe for women commuters on its 1,500 buses that ply in Pune city, Pimpri-Chinchwad and beyond. The transport utility has now started allowing women and girls to board buses through the front door at starting points besides ensuring reserved seats for them.

However, the move that was implemented last week without much fanfare and women commuters actually knowing about it, has not gone down well with the commuter groups who are describing it as a "half-hearted" move.

Activists argued that PMPML administration is not concerned about the safety of women commuters. "Instead of allowing women commuters to board buses from front door at all the bus stops, PMPML is providing the facility only at starting points. This is simply ridiculous," said Jugal Rathi of PMP Pravasi Manch.

Slamming PMPML officials, Rathi said the administration led by CMD R N Joshi and Joint MD Pravin Ashtikar do not seem to

be serious about augmenting the popularity of PMPML buses. "PMPML should be going all-out to make its service popular. If women commuters feel safe, why would they travel by two-wheelers and autorickshaws? A large number of women commuters avoid buses because of the rush and inconvenience of getting inside," said Rathi.

Rathi said Ashtikar has the will power but he is not ready to confront the lower ranked officials who are not enthused with the move.

Sanjeevani Pandey, a homemaker from Chinchwad, said if the PMPML administration wants to really make women commuters feel safe, they should allow them to board from the front door.

"It is clear that PMPML administration does not understand the hardships women face while travelling. While boarding the bus, there is a mad scramble. Men push women aside and youths behave in objectionable manner. At times, women are also injured in the melee," she said.

Corporator Seema Salve said it is difficult to understand why PMPML is hesitating to make the bus service safer for women commuters. "People have developed a habit of avoiding buses and travelling by two-wheelers and cars. PMPML officials should try to find out why is this happening."

Rathi said it seems only Shrikar Pardeshi, the PCMC chief and one of the directors, would be able to turn things around. "During his short tenure as CMD, Pardeshi tried his best to improve the service. After his short tenure, it seems PMPML has again run out of ideas. But we have hope as Pardeshi is still the director of the transport utility," he said.

However, Prashant Inamdar, convenor of Pedestrians First, said, "We welcome the PMPML's small initiative. We are sure PMPML will do more to ensure safety of women commuters." Inamdar said he has received a message from Ashtikar saying that PMPML has taken a first step in ensuring safety of women commuters and would introduce other steps in phases. "I think officers down the line are not enthused. They are citing meak reasons which is why Ashtikar has not been able to implement all the measures. But they have made a good beginning."