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# Parking contractor fined Rs 50k for overcharging

COIMBATORE: Corporation officials have slapped a fine of 50,000 on an erring parking contractor Namachivayam, who had taken a two-wheeler parking contract for Singanallur bus stand in the city, a year back. On a sudden inspection on Friday, officials noticed that he was violating the parking fee norms and was overcharging customers. The incident has exposed the rot in corporation's parking lots. Twelve corporation parking lots in the city were leased out to private contractors and it was found that all of them were overcharging.

According to the rates fixed by the corporation, for the first three to six hours, the contractors are supposed to charge only 5 for two wheelers and for four wheelers, the rate is 10 for three hours. But they have been charging 10 for two-wheelers and 20 for four-wheelers. "They charge just like the private companies," said Devarajan, a frequent user of corporation parking lot.

"There is no point in arguing with these people either. They will come up with multiple reasons to thug us," said Sundar, an IT employee.

Even as this reporter parked her vehicle for just 15 minutes at Cross Cut Road parking lot, the contractor's employee charged Rs 10 instead of Rs 5. On being confronted, the employee said he didn't know the tariff and returned excess fare.

Most of the time as people are in a hurry, these employees use that situation to their advantage. "Those who object would either waste their time or end up parking elsewhere," said Rajesh, who frequents the bus stand parking lot.

TOI noticed that the tariff in the parking ticket was crossed out so that the commuters would not argue with them. In many other places as ticket machines were used, one could not argue as well.

The civic officials said they had been inspecting these parking lots regularly and have also fined them on earlier occasions. "Three months back, we fined Gandhi Puram town bus stand contractor 1 lakh for overcharging customers," said the M M Kanagaraj, central zone assistant revenue officer.

But even after the fine, the charges remain really high. If one calculates for a 300 capacity parking lot, the contractor earns 3 lakh every month. A fine of 1 lakh once a year will hardly affect their revenue in any way.

Generally, each contractor signs a three-year contract with the corporation and then fresh tenders are released.

"We will take action against private contractors if they are found involved in irregularities and overcharging customers, " said a corporation official.

On the other side, the labourers who are engaged by the contractors said their salaries were very low and they get paid based on their collections. "Most of these contractors have political affiliations. The leased land is under the contractor's name but the real owners will be some politician, and even if they are caught hardly there will be any strict action against them," said a source.