

# Women ride buses free, proof can wait

KINSUK BASU AND  
SAMARPITA BANERJEE

Calcutta: Any woman will be able to travel free on a state-run bus for the next seven days even if she is unable to produce any of the 11 documents required to establish that she is a Bengal resident and an Indian national, the state government has decided.

Beyond the week, women passengers will be asked to furnish one of the 11 documents.

The free-ride facility, announced by the Suvendu Adhikari government on May 12, was rolled out on Monday.

On Day 1, women passengers who could not show any documents were asked to furnish one of the notified documents during a future ride.

The valid documents are Aadhaar, Elector's Photo Identity Card (EPIC), Grameen Rozgar Guarantee Card, Ayushman Bharat Health Card, driving licence, PAN card, Indian passport, pension document with photograph, any government-issued identity proof, and identity cards issued by schools, colleges and universities.

Senior state government officials said the facility would be available only to state residents and that the identity documents would also help



Women on a bus at the Esplanade terminus on Monday. (Sanat Kr Sinha)

establish Indian nationality.

"The facility is available on all state-run buses, including those operated by private franchises, both air-conditioned and non-air-conditioned, on long and short routes," a transport department official said.

The first day drew a positive response from women across strata.

Srinjoyee Das, 27, who commutes daily from Golf Green to Sector V, said she used to spend ₹70 a day on bus travel.

"On Monday, I did not spend anything," said Das, who works for a digital marketing agency and boarded an AC 43L-U bus from

Golf Green. The route connects Golf Green with the airport via EM Bypass and New Town.

Her ticket carried the message: "Free Ticket for Women".

Although pleased with the initiative, Das said the government should increase the number of buses.

"The initiative is good, but the government should also focus on the availability of more buses. What are we supposed to do on days when government buses are not available?" she asked.

Transport department officials said conductors on state-run and franchise-operated buses had been

provided with electronic ticketing machines to record the distance travelled by women passengers on specific routes.

"At the end of the month, the total number of free rides by women on government-run buses across the state will be compiled and submitted to the government for funding support," an official said.

The government has provided ₹12 lakh each to the three state bus corporations ahead of the scheme's rollout, the official added.

Many women queuing for long-distance bus services were pleasantly surprised by the new facility.

Shreya Konar, 22, was at the North Bengal State Transport Corporation (NBSTC) counter at Esplanade on Monday evening to book a ticket on an AC Volvo bus to Siliguri. She was unaware that women could travel free from June 1.

"The person at the counter told me I only had to show my Aadhaar card. I did not have a hard copy, so I showed the soft copy on my phone and it was accepted," said Konar, a second-year microbiology student.

A Calcutta-Siliguri NBSTC Volvo bus ticket cost ₹1,360 on Monday. Konar's ticket showed: "Total Fare (₹): 0.00."