Transportation Woes Back to Stone Age!

By Mahdin Mahboob

EVERYONE in Dhaka hailed the immediate past government's decision to remove the pollution causing, boisterously loud, 2-stroke auto-rickshaws from the city streets and replaced them with the 'cleaner and greener' 4-stroke CNG(Compressed Natural Gas) driven auto rickshaws. These environmentally friendly vehicles also came with the blessing of fare meters, which meant that you only have to pay for the distance you traveled, not a paisa more. These vehicles, although from the same manufacturer, had a better design and riding it was a somewhat more pleasant experience. But all good things come to an end and this was no exception. Over the last few months, the CNG (that's what the CNG driven auto-rickshaws are popularly known as!!) drivers' reluctance to go in accordance with the fare meters has gone to such an extent that these days it seems completely impossible to ride a CNG auto-rickshaw without 'kontacs' (contracts). This is the term the drivers use to hike the exorbitant fares for a distance and this can well be double the normal fare during rush hours For example, the actual fare between my home and university ranges between Tk 30-35. But during rush hour, the driver can hike a price of 60-70 and there really is no other option than to comply with them. The only other alternative to this is the 'Mishuk' (an 80 cc 4 stroke 3 wheeler), which, though much more noisy, unstable and with much less room than the CNG auto-rickshaws have a higher fare rate! What an irony! And no Mishuk in Dhaka would travel on meter (although something that vaguely resembles one can be seen inside almost all of them) and the drivers claim since they have to run their vehicles on petrol (which is much more expensive than CNG), they rightfully deserve to hike a higher price. Of course, The CNG auto-rickshaw drivers have their share of excuses as well they claim that they have no option but to charge higher prices since they have to pay a very high daily charge to the owners of the vehicles.

Whosoever is in fault, it is us, the passengers, who suffer and I almost feel like we've gone back to the Stone Age!

