

MUSING

CNG all day, everyday!

One deals with CNGs whether one is going short distances or long. The one I had to deal with coming to office detoured four times, going the wrong way, claiming I had turned him loco and so he headed for the Red brick house of the "Pir", and went off to the dead end of Dhanmondi!

However, the wrong way is not the worse case scenario. Often the driver may take the wrong turn and threaten to offload you, especially when there are no other CNGs about. The driver says that you are the big dolt who took the wrong turning to Farmgate.

Once I asked a CNG to drop me to Dhanmondi 4A. While coming from Dhanmondi 5, I twisted, turned, heckled and ripped off some money in the process. And all this happened in the 2pm heat, even though the usual traffic jam had abated somewhat.

Of course, I can think of even bleaker occasions. If there is a baby in the vehicle, one has to beg and plead to mind the speed-breakers, and you can count your lucky stars if you all do come home in one piece.

Foreign riders have a more hazardous time, it is reported. One internee was sob-

bing when her camera was snatched whilst travelling via a CNG. Unfortunately, she initially resisted and was injured in the process.

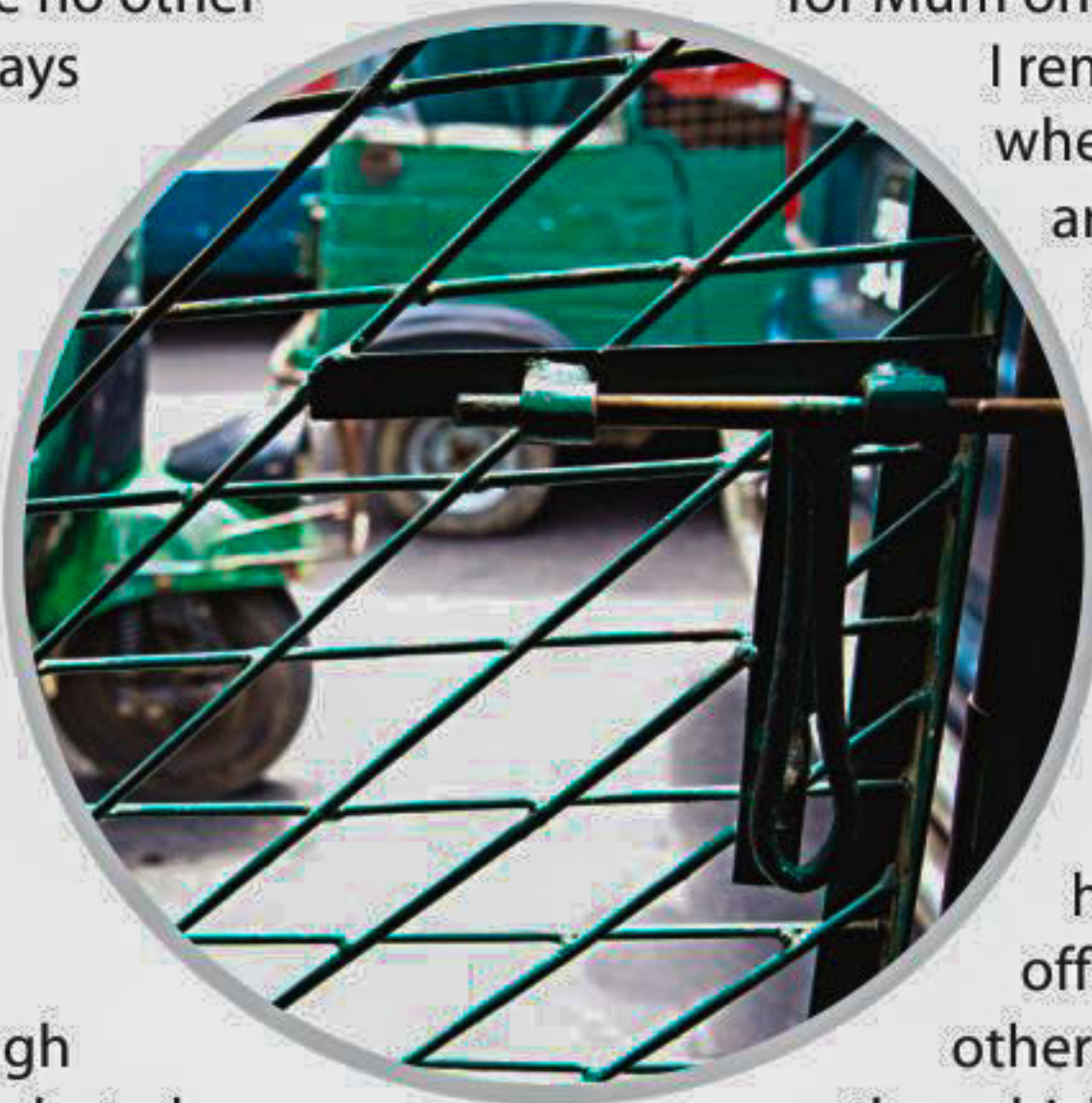
Another CNG-walla asked me to wait, at Dhaka Art Centre, Dhanmondi Road 7 A, and exploited my naivety, buzzing off with my expensive packet of Chess set – which I was sending to friends in Australia, plus a gorgeous coffee cup, which I had destined for Mum on her 90th year.

I remember an occasion when I had to report on an art exhibition at Banani. I asked the chap who drove my CNG to wait. Somehow he took a strange 'fancy' and wanted me to visit his home and children. I raced back to be in time to do the page, paying him off heavily, to let me off. Sharing the CNG with others, whether I am sharing the vehicle with someone else,

going the same way, I realise that one has to scream and shout at times as if the driver was doing us a favour.

If one is alone, the driver can be more rude and rough, not pausing at speed breakers and driving hazardously.

Catching a CNG in places like Banani can be difficult as one is expected to dish out



more as Gulshan, Baridhara and Banani are places where the embassies are, and where the rich and the privileged care to reside.

One knows that the rickshaws are cheaper and better, but one cannot lug all one's bags and baggage in a rickshaw and rickshaws are not allowed to ply on all roads. One has little choice as a result. When it rains, the CNGs often get waterlogged and their engines stop working, thus adding yet another headache.

The CNGs in our city have to be coaxed and cajoled as it is the travel means for most of the people. There are many reasons to go out, especially shopping for essentials. Thank God for home delivery then!

People are somewhat suspicious of any technology or progress that makes things too convenient, so do not expect the CNGs to go away anytime soon!

By Fayza Haq

Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed

FICTION

Never say "Goodbye"

It was ten minutes past nine, however, the populace outside Shahjalal International Airport showed no signs of lateness of the night. The moon was abnormally large and bathed the earth in its luminous glow. The huge crowd at the entrance was a mundane scene though, although not for the lack of diversity in its members.

My eyes caught the stream of people at the corner coming to say goodbye to a man in his twenties. His arms were wrapped tightly around that of a silver-haired woman. The dim lights outside the airport reflected in the tears that were pooled in her eyes. Her sagging skin showed signs of old age - but everything else appeared trivial to the fear that was evident in her eyes.

In the brief moments that I spent outside the airport gate, I watched her say short prayers for the young man who was possibly her son. The man however was quite unruffled by her actions. He continued attending his calls and smiled at the group of people who accompanied him. Occasionally, he wiped the sweat that

dotted his brow.

More than half the men there were around his age, clad in worn out suits that marked the lack of sophistication, eyes that betrayed both excitement and fear, embarking on a journey to countries such as Qatar, UAE, and Saudi Arabia to earn their livelihood.

I strolled inside, past a few security checks. A few minutes later, a mechanical voice rung out loud over the speakers: "Flight JK6785T to London will be delayed for two hours due to..."

I heaved a sign of impatience and sat with the boarding pass in my hand.

Two hours. Two hours in addition to the six months I have waited to meet my daughter, Aria! Coincidentally or not, I found a girl who looked quite like her near the airport gate. Long hair braided to one side; a nose pin that glittered even from a distance. She was encircled by friends that were both laughing and crying.

A few feet away, a middle-aged couple had their eyes fixed on their daughter and the group that surrounded her. She was too

deeply occupied with spending her last minutes mustering the courage to say goodbye. She had a smile plastered across her face but her eyes portrayed a wave of sadness that she tried too hard to hide.

Goodbye. The syllables echoed throughout the airport. One can have a well-rehearsed speech prepared although it never really eases the difficulty of delivering it. At that very moment, it seems that oxygen has seeped out of the room and you are left alone, gasping in your own little airless bubble of atmosphere, and forced to say aloud that one word that you do not want to. Goodbye!

My thoughts were interrupted by the sound of laughter from a young couple that sat closely. The girl had a long streak of vermilion across the center of her forehead; red and white wedding bangles adorned both her hands and her smile reflected pure joy. She bathed in excitement and an undefined bliss, enwrapped in his protective arms while he spoke about their honeymoon destination, Goa. I could not help but smile at the sight of young love. It is

beautiful. It is beautiful.

Aria was ten when she wanted to be a pilot. Deeply mesmerised by the remote controlled aeroplane that she received from her father on her tenth birthday, she wanted to fly one on her own.

Over the years, her dreams changed. While she struggles in her second year in medical school, I still reminisce about her face every time I see a pilot.

From where I sat I could see a large group of flight crew. Small luggage in tow, walking out of the airport engaged in light conversation with each other. The lifestyle they chose always appeared outlandish to me.

Of course, to be able to travel around the globe was tempting but I could not imagine being condemned to such a nomadic life. But that was just the insight of a forty-five year old single mother. I looked at the wrist watch again. It displayed fifty minutes past ten. My wait was almost over.

By Mayesha Raidah