



PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

WHEELS of CHANGE

RASMA RAHMAN AMREEN

It is not everyday that you come across friendly CNG-run auto-rickshaw drivers eager to make you feel comfortable and safe in the unpredictable streets of Dhaka. While many a driver is still trying to figure out ways to protect the auto-rickshaw ceiling from muggers, who try to cut open the plastic and steal mobile phones and purses, Mostofa Firoz does so much more to look after the comfort and security of his passengers. From small ceiling fan installations inside the vehicle that cools you down, to recharging your mobile phone on-the-go – this CNG-run auto-rickshaw is no less than a wonder on the streets of Dhaka.

The list of features modified and added to this vehicle gets bigger! In his 30s, Mostofa Firoz recently installed heat insulators both on the roof and also below the seat of his vehicle, to save passengers from the scorching heat. A cabin light is present inside. If a passenger decides to read a book in the evenings, "When I pick up students from their schools and universities to take them home, I see how they want to read a book or sometimes read from their mobile phones or other devices, especially when stuck in traffic," says Firoz. "It's difficult to read at night, obviously. So I decided to install some lights for the passengers to read." To

make lives easier, Firoz also has stacks of pens and note pads ready, just in case one would need to jot down a number!

Originally from Madaripur Zilla, Firoz has been living in Dhaka with his family for the last 20 years.

Ever seen one of those trendy Baby-on-Board bumper stickers stuck on the back-area of the car? These stickers usually are very attractive, with sketches of babies and animated drawings of colourful alphabets, trying to catch a driver's attention. Firoz has similar stickers and signs for his auto-rickshaws as well! To make sure that passengers accompanying children have a pleasant ride, Firoz hangs a baby-on-board sign at the back of his vehicle that he has self-designed. "I used the photo of my son to make the sign," says Firoz. "I heard a passenger mention once that in countries abroad, drivers hang caution signs whenever babies are in a vehicle. I don't know English, so I made the sign in Bangla. In future, I hope to make more signs which would help out others as well – like old people or sick patients aboard. Please don't push."

If a passenger is unable to pay the fare, Firoz has even kept an option open for them. He provides bkash and UCash numbers to such riders who actually pay him later. Firoz proudly



declares – none of his passengers have left any bill pending.

Firoz takes special care of the auto-rickshaw that he drives as well – keeping it clean, fuelled up and also looking after its maintenance on a regular basis. In fact, the cost of all the extra installations inside the vehicle is borne by Firoz himself, even though he does not own the auto-rickshaw. "I have been running this auto-rickshaw for the past four to five years now," he says. "Even

though I don't own it, I still think it's my responsibility to take ownership and look after the vehicle. It doesn't matter who owns it!"

The idea to create a user-friendly CNG-run auto-rickshaw came into Firoz's mind about two years ago, once he realised his passengers were bothered by the extreme heat. "The first step I took was to install a small fan for the passengers," he says. "I was praised for my efforts! Gradually, I felt the urge to

modify the vehicle further to make commuting more comfortable."

Firoz is not only anxious about his customer's comfort, but safety as well. He urges the transport authority to build more bus stops on safe platforms so that passengers like mothers, children, the ill, handicapped and the old can get on and off vehicles without hurting themselves. "It's not wise to drop and pick-up passengers from the middle of the road," he says. "Also, hydraulic horns are not safe for health," he adds.

Firoz also praises the government's effort to control traffic, by introducing digital number plates to all vehicles in the country. He believes that this move will definitely see a gradual decrease in crime rates, at least the ones connected to roads and transport, all over.

On inquiring whether he can be contacted via mobile phone, Firoz promptly replies that he is a strict follower of the traffic laws. "I don't use a cell phone when I am at work. It's illegal and might cause accidents."

It might sound too good to be true, but not only is Firoz a law abiding citizen when it comes to road safety, but he is also a compassionate person, thinking about the comfort and safety of his passengers. Or in other words, a one of a kind individual.

OBHIZATRIK Foundation- Redefining the Joy of Giving

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

If you were travelling anywhere around Dhaka on May 21, you are likely to have noticed young orange-clad volunteers collecting and raising donations from pedestrians in the scorching heat. About one thousand volunteers from OBHIZATRIK Foundation worked across 20 points in Dhaka city, aiming to raise funds in order to feed 2,000 underprivileged families iftaar for 20 days. The initiative was called "Joy of Giving." No matter how small the contributions were, the volunteers received them with a smile; and thus, the target was achieved as planned.

This, in essence, is what OBHIZATRIK

home of the particular child who was selling newspapers on the bus. We arranged some money for his father, which was enough capital for him to start a small grocery shop. I felt really happy to be able to help a family in need and since then, I never looked back."

From humble beginnings, with the initiative of just one young man, OBHIZATRIK Foundation now has over 3,500 volunteers in 32 districts working for the betterment of the underprivileged. OBHIZATRIK extends its hands not only to the underprivileged in Bangladesh, but also to the victims of natural disasters in neighbouring countries. "I remem-

OBHIZATRIK Health Care, a sister concern of the foundation, provides free healthcare and medicine every Friday to the ones in need. 'Shokkhom', a 'livelihood' project by OBHIZATRIK, collects zakat funds for the poor and thus endeavours to give a decent means of livelihood to individuals in need via their funding and arrangement of capital. "We want to start an environmental awareness project called 'Green Peace', where we plan to plant more than 6,400 trees in 64 districts of Bangladesh," says Lami. "Moreover, we want to establish OBHIZATRIK schools in all the districts of Bangladesh. This might sound ambi-



PHOTOS: FACEBOOK.COM/OBHIZATRIK

OBHIZATRIK extends its hands not only to the underprivileged in Bangladesh, but also to the victims of natural disasters in neighbouring countries as well.



Foundation is all about. "We always try our best to help the ones in need," says Ahmed Imtiaz Jami, the founder and President of OBHIZATRIK Foundation. "It was in 2010 when I started the foundation. When I met a small child selling newspapers on a bus, something hit me within and it got me thinking about the child labour stories that I would read on the newspapers and how it is fast increasing in Bangladesh. You see, children belong in schools and not in harsh working conditions such as this."

Jami further elaborated, "I discussed this with a few friends of mine, and went to visit the

ber working all night making relief packages for the victims of the horrific earthquake in Nepal," says Ariza Ahmed, former acting head of sponsorship for OBHIZATRIK. "We sent two truck loads of relief to Nepal, and were incredibly happy to help in whatever way we could. When we began OBHIZATRIK, we had to spend money from our own pockets. I am owed to see how far the organisation has come now," she adds.

OBHIZATRIK Foundation currently has two schools, one in Mirpur and another in Pataukhali. Over 250 kids are getting free education along with modern facilities.

tious but we will definitely make it happen!" he adds.

Having started pre-schooling with only 20 children, OBHIZATRIK Foundation has come a long way in helping some of the most neglected people in society. After making notable strides in philanthropic activities, it is now recognised as one of the most earnest and hard-working organisations in the country. All of the founders, volunteers and affiliated people will testify to one thing: OBHIZATRIK Foundation is a family; the family with empathy and willingness to help the ones in need, a family that really takes pride in the joy of giving.

