

Ridesharing roundups

With the increasing number of vehicles on the congested streets of Dhaka, getting from one point to another has become quite the struggle. In this scenario, mobile ridesharing apps have gained massive popularity over the last three years, especially amongst students and the working class. These apps include the ever popular Uber and Pathao, as well as Obhai, Lily, Shohoz and so on. These apps not only provide quick and efficient transportation (cars, micro-buses, motorbikes, CNGs etc.), but are also quite affordable. A few of these services also cater to women exclusively, so that they can feel safer and more comfortable during their journeys.

In March 2015, Pathao was launched in Dhaka, focusing on the requirements of the locals that require a quick ride from one point to the other. According to users, the Pathao app is comparatively more user friendly, and offers a range of promo codes, which cut downs on travelling fares. Users have the added benefit of deciding between motorbikes and cars, depending on their convenience, however, there is no separate option of picking between male and female riders. After each journey, the users are able to rate their journey with a rating system that determines the quality of the drivers and riders in the service, but it does not allow any additional comments that might add further insight to how the riders are working. Being a local business, Pathao also allows users to pay via bKash, along with other local digital payment methods.

In 2016, Uber launched in Dhaka with the intention of providing city dwellers with more options for convenient travelling. This app not only provides the usual assortment of motorbikes and cars, but also has vehicles that are suitable for a maximum of 6 pas-

sengers to travel comfortably. Similar to Pathao, this international franchise provides promo codes which cut down on the fare, but does not have options for local payment methods like bKash, and nor do they have a local customer service centre. However, in case of reviewing the trips, users have the added benefit of making additional comments, which other users can view before confirming their rides. Many users claim that the Uber app is not as user friendly as that of Pathao's, and requires a little bit of tinkering. In America, Uber also provides a food delivery service, Uber Eats, which is not available in Bangladesh yet. Pathao easily gets the upper hand here, with their food delivery and courier services. Both apps have the added feature of "location sharing" that enables the user to share their real-time location with a trusted contact of their choosing. All in all, these two services are saving people more time, money and energy, along with making commuting in the city more convenient and secure.

In 2018, Obhai launched its business, and unlike their Pathao and Uber counterparts, had a separate venture aimed squarely at the security and comfort of women during their commutes with their side project called Obon. The overcrowded local buses in the busy streets of Dhaka can become quite rowdy and too hectic for female passengers. Not only that, but some women do not feel at ease sharing a ride with a male rider. Obon, a motorbike service, was created to address these issues with their female riders. Other than that, Obhai also allows its users to book rides even when they cannot access the app by contacting their call centre. The company provides CNGs and 10-seater air conditioned micro buses, along with cars and motorbikes. If Obon is not to your liking, no need to fret as there are other options for women as well,

such as Lily, which ensures that their female riders are well trained and undergo proper training to handle their vehicles safely. Lily is only focused on female commuters rather than target both genders. This business is more concentrated in areas like Gulshan, Banani and Motijheel official areas, and provide working women with convenient transportation during the rush hour, operating between 7AM-8PM. The women-only bike sharing service is the first in Bangladesh to ensure the safety and comfort of women by eliminating the unease that some face while travelling with men. Lily is still a growing business but the fare is just as reasonable as that of Obhai and Obon.

Prioritising the situation of women, Shuttle has taken the extra step of providing transportation for female only students. It was launched back in July, 2018, initially targeting private university students. Shuttle is yet to launch a mobile app, but the service allows female students to book a seat in an all-women vehicle through their hotlines (open between 6AM and 9PM daily) or registration booths (located in university campuses), with each bus operating between 6:30AM-7:30PM. The service has verified and trained drivers and trip managers, who overlook every ride, making sure the bus reaches its destination on time safely. University students claim that this service is more dependable due to the presence of the trip managers, as they are constantly aware of the route and keep the passengers updated. Parents are also more comfortable letting their daughters travel through Shuttle due to these precautionary measures being taken. The fare of each ride is also affordable for university students.

Shohoz, which has been around since 2014, came to public attention in 2018, when they introduced a new feature in their

app that would allow users to call and directly communicate with motorbikes and car drivers in the city. The website was initially used to purchase bus tickets online, and later expanded its services to providing ridesharing, and ticketing service, not just for buses, but also launches, various events and even movies, along with a food delivery service. The app-based firm emphasises customer loyalty, and tries providing additional services such as, clean application interface and an active customer care service. Also, to keep the riders incentivised, the company provides them with added benefits, maintains a cordial relationship with each rider, and pays their dues on time. This ensures the riders' loyalty and dedication to the job, providing a pleasant journey for their customers. Similar to other ridesharing apps, Shohoz also provides its customers with promo codes and coupons, but not as extensively.

There's no denying that ridesharing apps have become more and more attractive and convenient as more and more users get onto their various services. The services are no longer confined to Dhaka, but have expanded towards other districts. For instance, Uber has an intercity option which reaches out till Savar and Gazipur, and Pathao covers Sylhet, and all three services (Uber, Pathao, Obhai) cover Chittagong. The on-demand services look to save time and money for busy city dwellers by battling the heavy traffic. Each app caters to different categories of people, and even attack social issues such as, unemployment and women empowerment. It can easily be said that these local and international companies are making our daily lives safer and more efficient.

By Puja Sarkar

NEWS FLASH

Styline celebrates World Hijab Day 2019

Styline, a modest lifestyle marketplace of Bangladesh, organised a round table dialogue on 1 February, 2019 with people followers from various fields and occupation on the event of World Hijab Day. This dialogue was aimed to fight against bigotry, prejudice, and discrimination to Muslim women, and to promote their freedom in wearing the hijab.

World Hijab Day is celebrated every year, on 1 February, worldwide to create a more peaceful environment where global citizens respect each other. Styline celebrated this day in such a manner for the very first time.

Hanium Maria Chowdhury, founder and CEO of Tahoor; Razia Haque Konok, owner of Elegant Event Solutions and Blissful Bites; Sharna Maria Mrittik, owner of JK Foreign Brands; Anzum Ifat, owner of Sparkly Closet; Dr Chowdhury Saima, professor of Department of International Business at Dhaka University; Barrister Jahrat Adib Chowdhury, Chef Legal Officer of Banglalink Digital; Dr Tanjila, popular blogger and influencer Mim Sabiha Sabrin, Anjuman Turin, Afsana Rakhi and many more joined on the discussion to share their thoughts and

journey to a Islamic lifestyle. The dialogue was held at Araaz Restaurant & Banquet.

This year, the motto of World Hijab Day was "Breaking Stereotypes. Shattering Boundaries" with the hashtag #FreeInHijab. So, to start the proceedings of the evening, the first question which arose at the table was if women actually feel free in a hijab.

There were varied responses to this question.

Dr Chowdhury Saima stayed very firm to her answer, saying, "In my point of view, free in hijab means the chances to do the things I want to do. And if I have that competence, if I have that quality, if I have that much courage and confidence, I can do it anyway. I did not let people humiliate me for wearing the hijab; it is not a bar for me."

During the discussion, the one thing which kept coming up was the journey. Why did they choose to embrace this garb, or what exactly influenced them?

Barrister Jahrat Adib Chowdhury made a true confession, saying, "Back in 2006, in the UK, I saw women covering their heads with pretty and beautiful coloured scarves. It

attracted me, and I started wearing the hijab, not even from any spiritual devotion. My family respected my freedom. If I wore sleeveless, my father would not stop me. But I chose the hijab, and gradually, it changed me. I performed Hajj, I researched more about Islam. Actually, hijab is not a piece of cloth, it's a way of life."

On the other hand, things were quite difficult at first for Sharna Maria Mrittik. She was very much interested in showbiz and media. She loved fashion, makeup and jewelry. But just to adjust with her in-laws, she started wearing the attire saying, "Now, Hijab is like my skin. I can never get it off in public. A top leading brand came to me for modelling on hair-care products. But I refused without thinking twice."

On that note, Hanium Maria Chowdhury, owner of Tahoor, said some very powerful words. From her experience she saw many girls start wearing hijab just because they saw someone else wearing it and found it beautiful.

"By wearing Hijab, we are actually the ambassadors of our beautiful religion. We are

opening doors for a brighter side. Women who used to criticise me are now my customers," she added.

Accompanied by a hot cup of coffee, the discussion kept on illustrating the visions of women. There were more stories about the hardships and struggles of their journey, but all of them were successful stories, because by the end, this was said as a conclusion, "Hijab is my personal choice. There is nothing to judge. The way I present myself is not what I wear."

Styline arranged a review writing contest about free in hijab. All the winners were present at the event to share their stories too. Styline congratulated them with a gift hamper as a small token of love. And then, right after the dinner session, the blissful evening came to end.

The Hijab Day has surely had a lasting effect on the minds of all the guests at the event, with the diversity of their stories and experiences.

By Fabiha Hossain