

INSIDE UBER'S OPERATIONS IN BANGLADESH

A chat with Nashid Ferdous Kamal

Since its launch in Bangladesh in 2016, the global ride-sharing platform Uber has significantly influenced the country's mobility landscape. A recently unveiled report, compiled by UK-based research firm Public First, highlighted Uber's overall contribution of BDT 5,500 crore to the country's economy last year.

ZARIF FAIAZ

The Daily Star sat down with Nashid Ferdous Kamal, Country Head, Uber Bangladesh, and Amy Price, Director - Head of Tech, Media and Telecoms Practice at Public First, to discuss Uber's economic and social impact, responses to safety challenges and debates facing the gig economy, and the future of ride-sharing in Bangladesh.

THE DAILY STAR (DS): Uber recently launched an economic impact report in Bangladesh. Can you share some key highlights from the report?

AMY PRICE: We were really excited to take on this project because it's important to assess not only the consumer benefits of Uber but also its broader economic impact. The report estimates that Uber contributed BDT 55 billion to the Bangladeshi economy in a single year.

DS: What's next in this transformation journey? Are there plans to introduce new services like Uber Bus, which has been launched in many other cities around the world?

NASHID: Innovation remains at our core. Right now, our priority is strengthening our existing services and expanding into more cities beyond Dhaka.

We have introduced multiple ride categories to cater to different consumer needs, and our next steps involve enhancing the customer experience and scaling our operations. Bringing in new services like Uber Bus is something we're always evaluating, but our current focus is on improving reliability and safety.

DS: Many users have raised safety concerns about Uber rides these days, with reports of drivers behaving inappropriately. How does Uber

Uber?

NASHID: It depends on the situation. If a security issue or a serious incident occurs, then yes, we provide relevant data to assist authorities. But in general, our role is to balance safety, privacy, and compliance with legal

be classified as employees or independent contractors. Do you see this debate happening in Bangladesh?

NASHID: The gig economy thrives on flexibility. Our drivers are free to choose when and how much they want to work, which wouldn't be possible if they were employees with fixed shifts.

Rather than focusing on classification, I think the bigger discussion should be on improving working conditions and benefits for gig workers, ensuring they get the best possible earnings and protections while maintaining their independence.

DS: In Bangladesh, competition in ride-sharing is still relatively low. How does Uber prevent monopolistic practices?

NASHID: We encourage healthy competition because it benefits the entire ecosystem—riders get better services, and drivers have more opportunities. The ride-sharing industry is still growing, and we welcome more players to drive innovation and service quality.

DS: Cash payments remain dominant in Bangladesh, even though Uber supports digital transactions. Do you have plans to shift towards cashless payments?

NASHID: Digital payments are an important focus, but adoption has been slow because many drivers aren't comfortable with the adjustment process. We're working on solutions to make digital transactions easier and more accessible for them.

DS: The report mentions that 89% of riders feel that Uber is the safest way to travel home. Is there similar data for drivers?

AMY: While we didn't ask that exact question in our survey, we did find that over 60% of drivers prefer driving through Uber over street hailing. They see benefits in terms of security, reliability, and steady earnings.

NASHID: Also, the safety features that protect riders—like GPS tracking and trip insurance—apply to drivers as well. Unlike offline rides, where neither party is covered, Uber ensures that both riders and drivers are protected in case of an incident.

DS: Despite Uber's efforts, we still see many drivers engaging in street hailing, bypassing the app. How does Uber address this issue?

NASHID: We actively discourage offline rides because they compromise security for both riders and drivers. When trips are tracked on the app, there's a record of the ride, the fare is transparent, and both parties are protected.

We conduct training and awareness programs for drivers to highlight the risks of offline trips.

But addressing this issue requires a collaborative effort—from drivers, riders, and policymakers alike.

DS: Speaking of safety, does Uber collaborate with authorities to share data for security purposes?

NASHID: Yes, we do. If law enforcement or regulatory bodies request information, we comply within legal and regulatory frameworks. However, we don't share data indiscriminately. Each request is evaluated, and we only provide relevant information as required by law.

DS: Do government agencies frequently request data from

NASHID: Safety is a top priority for Uber. Our app has several built-in safety features, including GPS tracking, emergency buttons, and trip sharing options that allow riders to share their location with family and friends.

Additionally, we have a dedicated team that investigates complaints. If an issue is flagged, we immediately contact the rider and driver and take appropriate action, including suspensions or bans if necessary.

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