

In crowded Cairo, ride-hailing apps leave cabbies fuming

March 10 2016

For 32-year-old banker Hani, it was always a nightmare riding in Cairo's battered taxis through traffic gridlock and thick exhaust fumes that sputter out of rickety vehicles.

But with the arrival of ride-hailing apps Uber and Careem, Hani now travels with ease across the vast city of 25 million—notorious for its dusty streets and polluted air.

The use of the smartphone applications has taken off in Cairo, so much so that Uber says the Egyptian capital is one of its fastest growing markets.

But not everyone is happy. Taxi drivers have been protesting against them for weeks as they lose more and more clients to the rival services.

Many commuters have taken to social media to share their experiences.

"I took a taxi with my children, and the driver lit a cigarette. I asked him to stop, but he said there is pollution everywhere and made us get out on a bridge," Egyptian singer Samia Jaheen tweeted.

Commuters like Hani say they are tired of conventional taxis and see the new options as a welcome change.

"I think and my friends also feel that these apps have made life easy," said Hani, who uses Uber or Careem at least twice a week.

"Some use Uber even to send their children to school."

Hani's frustration with taxis is common in Cairo, where a typical ride in a traditional black or white cab tests the patience of most people.

Journeys often start with the driver ruminating over whether to take the trip, and then they often suggest a price or ask "how much will you pay".

'They've snatched our bread'

The suggestion of turning on the meter is often a non-starter for drivers. On the other hand, many of them are rigged to make fares more expensive.

After a deal is agreed, a hair-raising ride ensues as the taxi accelerates past trucks and minibuses, swerving at the last moment to avoid potholes and bumps.

In summer, when temperatures soar around 40 degrees Celsius (over 100 Fahrenheit), most drivers refuse to turn on their air conditioners, and some ask for more money to do so.

At the end of the ride, many drivers will say they do not have change after taking their payment.

Taxi drivers are up in arms as commuters unsurprisingly flock to Uber and Careem.

For weeks they have been demonstrating against the two ride-hailing services.

"They've snatched our bread. We roam for hours without finding customers," said Adel, 48, who drives a taxi to supplement his earnings

as a technician.

The father of three said he spent about 6,000 euros (\$ 6,600) just to get a taxi licence.

He said most cabbies avoid using meters because of low prescribed fares.

"A car that runs daily costs money... we need to increase the meter rate. It's unfair to the driver," an agitated Adel said.

Mahmoud Lotfy, who drives his brother's taxi, said conventional cabs should be operated by companies in a similar way to ride-hailing services.

"In this way, a driver who commits a mistake can be held accountable," he said.

Uber, which began operations five years ago in San Francisco and is now operating in about 60 countries, and the United Arab Emirates-based Careem are meanwhile winning new customers daily.

Safety, comfort, cleanliness

"Safety, customers' comfort and cleanliness is what Uber brought," said Ahmed Mahmoud, an Uber driver.

Mahmoud makes more than 8,000 Egyptian pounds (\$1,022, 940 euros) per month, an earning well above the average monthly salary of 3,000 pounds for a mid-level government employee.

"Uber in Egypt offers work opportunities for over 2,000 drivers a month. More than 40 percent of [drivers](#) were unemployed prior to

joining Uber," said Abdel Latif Wakid, director of operations of Uber in Egypt.

Careem, which operates across 20 cities in the Middle East, has also made inroads in Egypt.

But the apps have met opposition.

In February, two videos published by newspapers caused a stir.

The footage shows [taxi drivers](#) posing as passengers hailing Uber cars and then handing them over to traffic police on allegations their vehicles were unregistered.

A senior traffic official told AFP the two companies were operating "illegally" as their cars were not in the category of passenger transport vehicles.

Hossam Ossama, an owner of a limousine service that partners with Uber, said 70 percent of his fleet of about 500 cars is privately owned.

Three of his cars were briefly confiscated, he said, arguing that his company was legally entitled to work since it paid taxes.

"We are in contact with the authorities to explain our mode of operation," he said.

On Wednesday, a cabinet statement said a ministerial panel had been formed to look into the status of the two ride-hailing services.

© 2016 AFP

Citation: In crowded Cairo, ride-hailing apps leave cabbies fuming (2016, March 10) retrieved

11 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-03-crowded-cairo-ride-hailing-apps-cabbies.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.