

Traffic-clogged Jakarta tests rush-hour carpooling

By Niniek Karmini and Stephen Wright
The Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia — Lines of people from women holding babies to school-age children, with a hand held up to show they're for hire, are a ubiquitous sight on the Indonesian capital's busiest roads during rush hour.

But not earlier this month. Traffic-clogged Jakarta suspended its peak-time rule of three people to one car. And the passengers for hire, known as jockeys, who helped drivers cheat the traffic controls, were out of a job.

By lifting the 3-in-1 rule, city authorities tested what happens to congestion. If there's no difference to the number of cars on the road, they'll know that a system in place for more than a decade is broken.

Abandoning the policy will be bad news for the poor in a city where maddening traffic produces numerous novel ways to eke out a living. Apart from jockeys, there are self-appointed U-turn police and parking wardens who are tipped by drivers despite sometimes hindering more than helping.

"I want the authorities to extend the 3-in-1," said Muhammad Asmin, a 27-year-old who dropped out of school to become a jockey more than a decade ago to earn money for his family. "It is good for us, the poor, even if it's not working," said



Asmin, who earns up to \$15 per day by hopping in and out of cars.

Jakarta is one of the world's most congested cities, according to a study of how often vehicles brake during a commute. Officials estimate Jakarta's traffic jams cause economic losses of about \$3 billion per year.

The 3-in-1 rule was introduced in 2003 and the jockeys appeared soon after. Since then, the traffic has only gotten worse, mainly because more Indonesians can afford cars, which has overwhelmed a road

network that has hardly grown. The carpooling policy has a particularly bad image since it's widely regarded as ineffective and also involves children, who take huge risks by getting into the vehicles of strangers.

"We have been blamed for worsening the gridlock, but the government didn't provide sufficient jobs for us," said Alfa Wahyudi, a 21-year-old who came to Jakarta from Borneo six months ago. "Don't blame our presence if the government is unable to provide us jobs."

JAKARTA ROAD JOCKEYS. A woman carries her baby while signalling to show she's for hire as a "jockey" to help drivers cheat a peak-time traffic rule of three people to one car during rush hour, at the main business district in Jakarta, Indonesia. Traffic-clogged Jakarta suspended the peak-time traffic rule, raising concerns among the jockeys that they could lose their way to eke out living. (AP Photo/Achmad Ibrahim)

The convenience of travelling on a 3-in-1 road is such that some drivers have arrangements with two or three regular jockeys.

Repeated crackdowns on the jockeys, who quickly scatter into side streets at the sight of police, failed to wipe out the profession. If caught, they are taken to a detention center for a couple of weeks and asked to sign a letter promising not to work as a jockey again. But many say they return to the roadside as soon as they can.

Wulandri, who was twice caught and sent to a detention center, said it was no deterrent compared with the \$10 she could easily make in a day. As the mother of a one-year-old boy, she was popular with drivers because it meant they could get two passengers for the price of one.

"I purposely brought my child because usually a single driver does not have to pay for two jockeys and they are often sorry for the woman who was carrying a baby," said Wulandri, who goes by one name.

Uber starts motorbike taxi service in Indonesian capital

By Stephen Wright
The Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia — Ride-hailing app Uber has launched a motorbike taxi service in the Indonesian capital where Southeast Asian rivals Go-Jek and Grab are already battling for dominance.

Jakarta is one of the world's most congested cities and motorbike taxis ordered from a smartphone app have exploded in popularity in the past 18 months as a way to beat snarled traffic.

Uber said that its "UberMotor" service would provide cheap and reliable transportation for hundreds of thousands of people.

The company used a local social-media and YouTube star, Arief Muhammad, to launch its service, saying he was the first person in Jakarta to use an Uber motorcycle taxi.

Both Go-Jek, an Indonesian startup, and Grab, which operates in several Southeast Asian countries, claim to be the biggest provider of motorbike taxi rides in Indonesia.

The popularity of motorbikes and



regular taxis ordered from a smartphone has provoked a backlash in the taxi industry.

In March, thousands of taxi drivers caused traffic chaos in Jakarta in a violent protest against what they believe is unfair

FIERCE COMPETITION. Taxis line up during a protest against competition from ride-hailing apps such as Uber and Grab at the main business district in Jakarta, Indonesia. App Uber has launched a motorbike taxi service in the Indonesian capital where Southeast Asian rivals Go-Jek and Grab are already battling for dominance. (AP Photo/Achmad Ibrahim, File)

competition. Drivers say the apps, which are using funding from venture capitalists to offer heavily discounted fares, have severely reduced their income. The app companies say the transport industry should adapt to new technology.

The Indonesian government is drawing up new regulations to govern transport apps, but has so far resisted calls to ban Uber and similar services.

Officials estimate Jakarta's traffic jams cause economic losses of about \$3 billion per year.

In Australia, surfing soothes asylum-seekers' fears of sea

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collide, and they belly flop more than they stand. But more than anyone else in the water, they laugh.

This kind of joy is exactly what the staff at Settlement Services International hoped to achieve when they launched the surf program last year. They knew their clients were grappling not only with the trauma associated with their boat journeys and the wars and persecution they had fled, but also with the anxiety of settling into a new country.

Sandra Oehman, a case manager at the not-for-profit organization and a surfer herself, researched the concept of ocean therapy, which has been used to help everyone from sexual assault survivors to war veterans. Many find that being in the water and focusing their energy on riding the waves produces a calming sensation that helps clear the mind. Maybe, Oehman thought, it could do the same for her clients.

Her manager, Robert Shipton, thought it was a brilliant idea. After all, their organization's goal is to help asylum-seekers adapt to their new culture — and what could be more Australian than surfing?

Conscious that students might harbor fears of the ocean, instructors took a gradual approach, said Miley, the surf school

director. First, they encouraged the men to go in the water just up to their hips, then helped push their boards onto the waves, and calmed any jitters along the way.

The technique worked wonders for the dozen or so participants, who quickly gained confidence and became so enamored with the sport that many of them now surf on their own, using boards donated by locals and the surf school.

"We just found that once we just encouraged people and got them in and gave them that safe space to be in the water, that very quickly those worries about anything that had to do with the water — that just disappeared," Shipton says. "And it's now to the stage where they're like, 'Let's go to the beach, we want to go surfing, let's do it more!'"

Danny, an asylum-seeker from Iran who was part of the pilot group, said surfing helped clear his head of the horrors he left behind.

"It was very different from my (boat) journey," says Danny, who like the other students spoke on condition that their last names be withheld to protect themselves and loved ones in their home countries. "My worries when I was in the ocean were gone and I had the feeling of freedom. And I was happy."

Back at the beach, Kumar, an

asylum-seeker from Sri Lanka, hops off his board after riding a wave into shore. He can't stop grinning. In his former life as a fisherman, he spent a lot of time on the water. But it was nothing like Bondi.

"I will never forget this," he says. "Ever." The waves are growing along with the students' fatigue. Amin's muscles are tired, but he isn't ready to quit. Bigelow pushes his board onto a wave. Amin stands up for a brief moment — then pitches face-first into the water. He emerges from the whitewash, claps victoriously at his progress, and paddles back out for more.

Another wave is coming. Bigelow counts it down: "3-2-1 ... Go!"

And this time, Amin has it. He stands up, steady on his feet, coasting atop the water and whooping in glee. "AHHH!" he screams. "It feels good!"

In the shallows, he pauses to catch his breath, face lit by a smile and the warm Australian sun. Today, that miserable boat trip — and the fear that went with it — feel a world away.

"I took a chance in my life," he said of his journey to Australia. "I have to win or lose my life. I didn't lose, I win — because I was stronger than the ocean."

Then, surfboard slung under his arm, he turns and trudges jubilantly back into the sea.

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