

Business

No Uber, no problem: Brazil app drives into Sao Paulo's no-go zones

Daughter joins hands with da Silva to run new ride-sharing service

SAO PAULO: When Alvimar da Silva realized Uber did not reach some of the more dangerous, far-flung areas of Brazil's biggest city Sao Paulo, he saw an opportunity: if the popular ride-sharing service did not go there, he would. After six months of driving for the US application in the gridlocked city, da Silva launched his own rival service JaUbra in the sprawling northern district of Brasilandia in 2017.

Since then some 50 drivers have registered and da Silva hopes to expand to other no-go areas of the metropolis of 12 million—the city with the highest number of Uber users in the world.

Uber and other ride-sharing apps “started to veto the neighborhoods considered risky and difficult to access. But as we are already here, we don't have any trouble,” says da Silva as he drives down the street where he was born 50 years ago, tooting his horn to greet residents.

Few outsiders dare to enter parts of Brasilandia where many of its 265,000 inhabitants live in favelas made up of precarious multi-storey constructions squeezed into a labyrinth of streets covering the hills 15 kilometers (nine miles) from the center of Sao Paulo. Rampant crime and poor internet access mean many Uber drivers do not accept journeys to the district.

And for those living in Brasilandia, the app is

impossible to access from various points as AFP discovered during a recent visit. Other ride-sharing apps do not venture there at night either, complained a resident, who depends on public transport.

Life changing

As soon as word got out that JaUbra entered the neighborhoods of winding streets without numbers, da Silva noticed that the majority of his clients were residents who called him to take them to the doctor, the fresh food market or funk dances at the weekend. As the business grew, da Silva started to bring in other drivers in the area to help meet demand. “There are places here that are difficult for public transport to access and that's made us the only option for many people who were missing doctor appointments,” says da Silva's daughter, Aline Landim, who gave up a bank job to dedicate herself full-time to JaUbra.

Seeing the business's potential, Landim invested the pay-out she got from her former employer into JaUbra, which her father was running out of a garage and recording bookings on pieces of paper.

Now they have their own app and are on the verge of migrating to a more sophisticated platform for which they have 500 drivers inter-



SAO PAULO: Brazilian Alvimar da Silva (right), with daughter Aline Landim, created JaUbra (Uber of slum) to serve poor Sao Paulo communities that Uber avoids. Alvimar da Silva (right), with daughter Aline Landim. — AFP

ested. “The people think that to start out you have to have a lot of money, but we started with nothing,” says Landim, 29, sitting in JaUbra's new location, a modest office they rented with the help of 32,000 reais (\$8,300) funding from

the local government and 20,000 reais from a start-up investor.

“We only had a computer, a telephone, the idea, the creativity and the physical space loaned by a friend,” she says. —AFP

As end looms for coal, German mining region shifts right

SPREMBERG, Germany: A German far-right party is using a simple message to attract voters in a mining region threatened by government plans to phase out coal: jobs are more important than the environment.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's aim to wean Europe's biggest economy off fossil fuels is the main issue in a September election in the state of Brandenburg, where the Alternative for Germany (AfD) is almost neck-and-neck with her conservatives.

“People are counting on us to stop this nonsense,” Steffen Kubitzki, an AfD candidate seeking a seat in the Brandenburg assembly, told supporters at a campaign event last month in Spremberg, a town of 23,000 near the Polish border. “We won't get a second chance. We will go from village to village, door to door, and tell people to vote for us,” he added, drawing applause from the 50 men and five women gathered at a restaurant in the mining town. “Jobs are on the line.”

As the migrant crisis that propelled it into the national parliament two years ago fades, the AfD has positioned itself as the only party opposed to Germany's switch to renewable energy.

It is organizing town hall meetings with supporters and leading protests against the phase-out of fossil fuels in the 58 towns and villages that make up

Brandenburg's brown coal region of Lusatia, or Lausitz in German, south of Berlin.

Merkel's conservatives and the center-left Social Democrats (SPD) - who rule in a loveless coalition at the national level - are expected to lose support to the AfD on Sept. 1 in Brandenburg, one of three eastern states voting this Autumn. The SPD, which governs Brandenburg with the far-left Die Linke, could face calls from its own ranks to quit the federal coalition with Merkel if it loses control of the state.

The AfD is expected to almost double its share of the vote in Brandenburg to around 20 percent, putting it level with the SPD and Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU).

The AfD is polling on 25 percent in Saxony, where it is expected to emerge as the second-biggest party behind the CDU in an election there on the same day as in Brandenburg. Germany's major political parties refuse to work with the AfD, accusing some of its leaders of racism and playing down Nazi crimes.

Coal or die out

But in a region where many fear the economy will collapse without the more than 16,000 jobs dependent on coal, the AfD's climate change skepticism seems to be winning more voters than government pledges of funds to help the Lausitz exit from fossil fuels. “My father was a miner, my grandfather was a miner and they both told me: ‘coal brought the Lausitz to life and without coal the Lausitz will die out,’” said Uwe Neumann, 58, the owner of a landscaping business who was at the AfD event. A long-time CDU supporter, Neumann voted AfD in a national election two years ago and will do the same in the regional vote in September. Many of the million people living in the Lausitz fear the end of open-cast mining would be disastrous in a region where unemployment is almost twice the national average. — Reuters

Commerzbank chief dismisses ‘irresponsible’ reports on CEO

FRANKFURT: Commerzbank's supervisory board chairman yesterday dismissed reports of board dissatisfaction with its chief executive as irresponsible and unfounded.

Chairman Stefan Schmittmann was reacting to reports in recent days that some board members were pushing Commerzbank to end merger talks with rival Deutsche Bank and push CEO Martin Zielke from office. “Rumors and speculation on personnel changes are made up out of thin air,” Schmittmann said in a statement emailed to Reuters. “Such allegations are irresponsible and unworthy of discussion.”

Germany's Manager Magazin was one of the news organizations that reported on a rebellion, writing on Wednesday that the push was coming from board members who represent employees.

Schmittmann said that Commerzbank “must explore” the option to merge with Deutsche. “I think that's right and it's their duty,” he added. Deutsche Bank CEO Christian Sewing has told his counterpart at Commerzbank that he wants more time to consider a merger.

The two banks announced merger talks on March 17. If successful, they would create Europe's third-largest bank from Germany's top two lenders, which have struggled to recover since the financial crisis.

Government officials, led by Finance Minister Olaf Scholz, have pushed for a merger to create a national banking champion and end questions over the future of the two banks.

A tie-up between the lenders is an enormous undertaking because both are already in the midst of restructuring, some bankers and regulators have said, adding that a merger would not necessarily solve Deutsche's core weakness, its sprawling global investment bank.

From the start, some major investors have expressed skepticism about a deal, while unions have warned of 30,000 potential job losses. Days after the talks were announced, Zielke promised the bank's employees a quick decision on whether to go forward with a merger, according to a memo seen by Reuters.

The Commerzbank workers' council then sent a letter to board members to protest against the merger, saying the idea lacked support among workers, customers and society. “We are of the opinion that you will fall into an uncontrollable adventure without a solid plan, without a vision and without support,” the letter said.

Zielke subsequently met seven employees on the 47th floor of the bank's Frankfurt tower to quell concerns and explain his stance. “The alternative of doing nothing is not an option,” he said, according to comments posted on the bank's intranet and seen by Reuters. — Reuters