

There's still time to save Gazipur

The city corporation needs to be developed in a planned manner



NAWSHAD AHMED

THE Gazipur City Corporation (GCC) area has seen a fast population growth over the last two decades. The city's present population is estimated to be more than four million. With an area of 329.53sq-km, it is bigger than Dhaka North and Dhaka South combined. The GCC was established in January 2013. The city is one of our main centres of employment, industries, business, and entertainment partly as a result of its proximity to the capital city, which contributes about one-third of the country's total GDP and has about 30 percent of the country's total urban population.

Due to a wide range of economic and social activities, and a fast-growing job market, Gazipur city has attracted people from adjacent districts—especially from the rural areas. Therefore, in-migration is a major factor behind the growth of the city population. With the population growth, the demand for public utilities and services has grown manifold, but the city's infrastructure and services have failed to keep pace with that demand, resulting in a great deal of suffering for the residents.

About one-third of the ready-made export-oriented garment factories of the country are located in Gazipur. There are many other industries in the city as well: aluminium, textiles, leather, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, ceramics, packaging, and others. The garment factories are employing hundreds of thousands of people—mainly women. Two export processing zones and the Tongi industrial area are located in the GCC area. A number of important public offices and facilities—including Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI), Dhaka University of Engineering and Technology, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural

University, National University, Islamic University of Technology, Bangabandhu Safari Park, Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory, and Bangladesh Ordnance Factory—are also situated there.

There is a large number of brick kilns on both sides of Turag and Bangshi rivers, and in the western and southern parts of Gazipur city, which are polluting the environment severely. Illegal encroachment of rivers, canals, and wetlands is also rampant there.

Millions of garment workers, rickshaw pullers and other low-income workers and their families live on the outskirts of the city, which are very crowded and have limited access to services and facilities. Besides, thousands of people who commute to the city on a daily basis face a tremendous traffic problem. Thousands of air- and water-polluting factories, workshops, vehicle repair shops and brick fields are located in and around these places, posing a risk to public health.

The GCC authorities, in recent years, have been putting in increased efforts to improve the condition of the city roads and drains. But the challenges of maintaining domestic water supply, street lights, sewerage, and garbage



A modern city is equipped with a functioning, commuter-friendly road system. Gazipur needs that desperately.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

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collection and disposal are enormous. There is also a lack of hospitals, schools, community centres, parks and shopping facilities. The city corporation's total budget was Tk 5,007 crore in 2020-2021 fiscal year, which has gone up four times to Tk 20,986 crore in 2021-2022.

To provide quality public services, first and foremost, a proper plan for land use is required, based on which the development of transportation network, civic services, appropriate environmental protection, and more healthy living options—such as greener surroundings, educational institutions, healthcare facilities, economic zone, parks and playgrounds, etc—should be undertaken. Since there is no master plan, the city's development along with its services and

facilities is taking place in a haphazard manner. Most of the internal roads are very narrow and not maintained properly, and drains are mostly open. Many residents of the city travel to Dhaka to obtain basic services, such as medical treatment, shopping, schooling of their children, etc. In a city where it is difficult to move around due to traffic congestion, people waste inordinate amounts of time on the road to meet their day-to-day service requirements.

Some parts of the city have densely developed residential and commercial areas. Many land owners found it quite lucrative to build multi-storey buildings with the help of real estate developers. The vertical growth of the city, on the one hand, made it possible to house the upper middle-class

families with affordable accommodation in developed areas; on the other hand, it exerted severe pressure on the existing infrastructure and services. The number of private vehicles, trucks and buses on Gazipur's roads increased manifold over the years, adding to the traffic gridlocks in the city.

Four national highways and six regional highways pass through Gazipur city, providing a crucial transportation network to connect to other parts of the country. The existence of a good road system has been the main attraction for investors in Gazipur. However, the transportation network needs further improvement to cater to the growing needs of people, and to transport products throughout the country. The work on the planned metro rail and elevated expressway projects should be expedited.

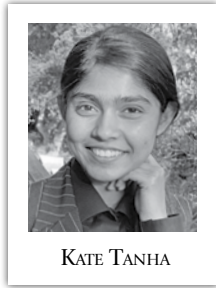
The GCC has recently taken an initiative to prepare an urban development plan that will take into account land use, drainage, and environmental management, traffic and transportation management, and industrial and recreational facilities. This plan should be comprehensive and drawn up to build a healthy city. A team of town planners, transport engineers, urban economists, geologists, hydrologists, water and sanitation engineers, environmentalists, agriculturists, waste management experts, civil engineers, architects, and sociologists should contribute to developing this plan.

The city still has a large geographical area under agriculture and forest coverage, which is highly likely to be transformed for other uses in line with the growth of population and establishment of new industries and businesses in the future. But the forest lands and water bodies should be preserved at all costs to keep Gazipur as an environmentally balanced city. If properly planned, there is a good prospect of developing Gazipur city in an aesthetically beautiful manner.

Dr Nawshad Ahmed is an economist, urban planner, and a former UN official.

Ghosts in the classroom

As schools reopen, are we paying enough attention to the culture of bullying?



KATE TANHA

IT was the best of times, it was the worst of times," wrote Charles Dickens at the beginning of "A Tale of Two Cities." No other quote in the literary canon captures my experience in the Bangladeshi education system as succinctly as Dickens'. School

changed my life for the better, but it also nearly took it away. I titled this piece "Ghosts in the classroom" because, in fourth grade, that's what I thought every time my stationary went missing and the contents of my pencil box were scattered outside my classroom window. Spooky! I couldn't even consider the possibility that the "ghosts" were my classmates who began to bully me and damage my possessions to punish me for my strong academic performance in our class.

Apart from my academic strengths, multiple axes of my identity set me apart. I am from Dhaka. In Dhaka, I grew up in a single-parent household as a child of a Hindu-Muslim couple. After my father left, my mother and I struggled to make ends meet, with no assurance about how we would afford next month's rent and school fees. Yet, my mother insisted that I have the best possible education available in town. Due to her efforts, I was eventually admitted to one of the premier English medium educational institutions in the country. Let's call it "School Y."

I received an excellent primary education at School Y. I studied in an interdisciplinary curriculum, which placed self-inquiry and social action at the centre of my learning. In class, I explored ancient civilisations, the solar system, different religious customs around the world, human migration, the environment—the list goes on. Every day was an adventure. However, I felt weighed down by a pile of secrets, such as the whereabouts

of my father, my religious identity, and the poverty in which we lived. Then, in the fifth grade, my class teacher kept me back during lunch to ask if anything was bothering me, and immediately I broke down in tears as all the pain inside my heart welled up and escaped my lips. Her presence made the classroom feel safe.

On the other hand, my classmates threw my stationary, which I could barely afford, out the window. Additionally, a barrage of comments

a single woman in our society possibly do to afford to send her daughter to a private school? My classmates found a particularly unflattering photo of me taken after a dance performance. In an anonymous Facebook group, that image was posted over the name of a male student in my class.

Looking back, what surprises me the most is that no mature adult in the school intervened. No one ever confronted my abusers. I suppose a scholarship student who



The culture of bullying that plagues our schools needs to be dealt with properly.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

circulated in the classroom about my weight. During report card days, my mother, who felt defeated at every other aspect of her life, proudly entered the school grounds to learn once again that I had topped the class. After classes resumed, the bullying got worse.

When I cut my hair short (described in Dhaka as a "boy cut"), the comments became more hurtful. My classmates called me a "hijra." During the winter, I wore a sweater made out of jute (once a dominant industry in our country), and they called me "bosta" (sack). Rumours went around about the exact nature of my mother's profession; what could

paid half price wasn't worth the trouble of angering students and parents who paid the full price. After all, School Y often suspended me for weeks on end when my mother couldn't pay tuition fees.

My mental health deteriorated. I became a Unicef statistic: one in three children globally experience bullying (including leaving children out of activities, making inappropriate sexual remarks, and cyberbullying). Subsequently, I developed an obsessive desire to lose as much weight as quickly as possible. Over three months, I went from 67 kilograms to 45. But I wasn't ready to stop dieting or exercising. I

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continued with week-long fasts. I ate only a few carrot sticks and ran on the elliptical for five hours every day. Eventually, my family and I realised that I had an eating disorder called anorexia nervosa. As a result of my condition, I was hospitalised and force-fed, because the psychiatrists didn't know how to treat me.

When I returned to school, the taunting continued. Then, the head of our school threatened to expel me because I reflected poorly on the school's reputation! School Y was no longer a safe haven.

We know about Samin, a 10th grader who was bullied about his weight, who wanted to die from the humiliation, and who developed anorexia, like myself, but unlike me, who passed away.

Who is responsible for Samin's death, for my painful childhood experiences? The bullies? The families that fostered a sense of unhealthy competition and judgemental attitude about weight? The teachers and school authorities who failed (or refused) to intervene? The school board for not enacting responsible policies to deal with bullying incidents, and prioritising profits before students' lives? The country which is yet to develop the legal framework to create and implement effective anti-bullying laws in schools? Or a world where violence and domination reign and the weak suffer?

Notwithstanding my difficult childhood experiences, things worked out fine. After changing schools, I received numerous awards in my high school years, including a US Department of State-funded exchange

programme and a summer camp opportunity in Mahindra United World College in India. In 2017, I joined Minerva University in San Francisco, where I pursued a dual undergraduate degree in computer science and politics on yet another full scholarship. As a college student, I had the opportunity to travel worldwide, and I worked in different sectors, including education, public policy, and computational social science, at some of the world's preeminent institutions. In October, I will begin my graduate degree in development studies at the University of Cambridge on a fully funded scholarship. It's not been easy, but these accomplishments would not have been possible were I stopped in my tracks in the seventh grade.

We need bold and urgent action in Bangladesh to end bullying, which haunts our educational institutions and the society at large. Besides legal policies and changes at the school administration level, we need honest and rigorous education in anti-bullying for students and teachers alike. Additionally, bullied students should be empowered to seek help, and schools must develop systems to support them with adequate counselling services and other interventions.

If we come together, I know that we can ensure a safe, dynamic, and best-of-times experience in school for every child in Bangladesh.

Kate Tanha grew up in Uttara, Dhaka, and is currently pursuing her MPhil degree in development studies at the University of Cambridge in the UK.

QUOTABLE Quote

LAURENCE STERNE
Irish novelist (1713 – 1768)

Respect for ourselves guides our morals, respect for others guides our manners.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Group of actors
- 5 Informal farewell
- 9 Tall boot
- 10 Make ashamed
- 12 Battery end
- 13 In itself
- 14 Goal
- 16 Buddhism branch
- 17 Fencing sword
- 18 Chances to hit
- 21 Crimson
- 22 Empties out
- 23 Release
- 24 Pilfers
- 26 Fall mo.
- 29 Snoopy, for one
- 30 "Gone with the Wind" plantation

DOWN

- 1 Party nibble
- 2 Found darling
- 3 Grassy plant
- 4 Grove growth
- 5 Keg need
- 6 Lincoln nickname
- 7 Lord of the jungle
- 8 Good qualities
- 9 Bottled buy
- 11 Coop group
- 15 Small pie
- 19 Gift attachments
- 20 Life story, for short
- 22 Bargain
- 23 Table part
- 24 Tennis star Williams
- 25 Kilt pattern
- 26 Try out
- 27 Makes blank
- 28 Shows nervousness
- 29 Pleads
- 30 Barter
- 33 Stepped down
- 35 Luau instrument
- 36 Chapel seat

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BEETLE BAILEY

THE BASES ARE LOADED IN THE BOTTOM OF THE NINTH, AND THE CROWD STARTS TO CHANT.

HAM-MIE! HAM-MIE!

AND IT'S A GRAND SLAM!

WHIFF!

REALLY? IF I CAN IMAGINE THE CROWD, I CAN IMAGINE THE HOMER!

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

REBA EPIC SALEM STOWE KIT PUT BAN SLICES CART SCORECARD COLON SHOREWARD WHOA SPLEEN ARRUSO APE LINE KAPOW KNEAD EVERT SETTO ARTS

BABY BLUES

DON'T TURN RIGHT! GO STRAIGHT AHEAD!

WHAT'S SARGE YELLING ABOUT?

HE'S TRACKING THE PIZZA DELIVERY GUY ON HIS PHONE

WHY IS HE GOING SO SLOW?!

BY MORT WALKER

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT