

Sound pollution from schools is a real problem

AHMED NUZHA OISHEE

Drowsy and disoriented, I look at the clock. It's 7:30 AM. Students at the nearby high school are singing into a microphone; their voices ringing at a thunderous volume from loud speakers. The tune is what Metallica's rendition of a wailing siren would sound like.

This is how my entire neighbourhood wakes up every morning. Their morning assembly is the least of our worries. The disconcerting issue is the school's outdoor rehearsal and celebrations, which subject helpless residents to deafening speaker music and static, sometimes for days on end.

Residential areas consist of family homes with residents of all ages – babies, teens and ageing grandparents. Personally, living close to a noisy school, studying at home becomes impossible for me. For residents suffering from migraine, anxiety, heart diseases, insomnia or any illness, unwarranted loud noises can have long-term, detrimental consequences on their health. My mother suffers from high blood pressure and loud sounds trigger her headaches and insomnia.

"During assemblies and cultural functions, it gets really noisy and it hampers studies and prayers," says Raiyan Abrar, a final-year student of

MIST. "The local masjid has requested authorities to not play loud music at least during prayer times but nothing has changed."

According to Bangladeshi law, the allowed noise level for residential areas is 55 decibels during the day.

Some institutions have combatted noise pollution by limiting their events to indoor arrange-

ments. Every institution should ideally allot a separate space in their infra-structural planning for an auditorium. Auditoriums muffle out loud music and commotion. Moreover, schools should be established in comparatively spacious areas with lots of trees to help buffer and filter out generated noise.

If you walk around a residential area, you'll find several schools have been set up at leased buildings that were initially constructed to

function as residential apartments. Such schools lack sufficient campus space and any event they arrange can lead to a huge crowd within a tiny radius. There's also this tendency of schools to be established in close proximities.

Where I live, there are four schools within a 2500-foot radius.

"There are several schools around my house. Our mornings commence sourly with horns from students' cars and school buses. In the afternoon and evening, when shift wise classes end, the noise only increases. Event days are worse. No matter which corner of the house I'm in, it's loud and often infuriating," says Zarin Tasnim, 20, a resident of Uttara.

Ironically, street signs read "No horns please. School ahead." to protect students from external noise and then schools go on to allow hullabaloo within their premises, without concern for residents. School staff need to be provided with a clear manual on preventing noise from permeating outside school grounds. There also needs to be strict monitoring of their adherence to standard noise regulations.

Nuzha forgives people for pronouncing her name wrong and wallows in books and anxiety. Suggest her fiction at nuzhaoish-ee1256504@gmail.com



The issues with performative activism

IRINA JAHAN

A case of injustice comes to light and we take to Instagram to share a post about it on our story or rant about it on Facebook in response. We draw attention to the pressing matter and pat ourselves on the back for sharing our opinions. Then, before we know it, there is a new social issue and we unknowingly drift into the current of performative activism again, without being aware that it is actually harming the very causes we are trying to for.

Performative activism is the term that is used to address the act of speaking up for a cause for the sake of garnering attention or presenting a positive public image, instead of doing so out of genuine care.

This isn't to say that every time someone is vocal about a certain issue, they are doing the wrong thing. It is completely within one's right to share their opinions about injustices taking place, but doing so without the intention of properly engaging in this cause for the long haul or without relevant knowledge is not okay.

The primary danger of performative activism is that it hinders activism's objective, which is to recognise the trauma of victims and bring about necessary changes through impactful actions. The culture of minimised efforts in activism has stunted the potential of bringing impact, reducing issues into trending hashtags or 24-hour stories that will only be glanced at for a few seconds.

For instance, a lot of people seemed appalled at the ruthless attacks the Hindu community recently faced in the country, but not many of them were willing to recognise the problematic behaviours and beliefs that are indoctrinated in people by society through stereotyping and other prejudices.

The internet's power to spread important information cannot be questioned. However, a lot of this information is not free from biases and so should never be the primary source of our knowledge. Furthermore, overly sensationalised news that is rampantly spread on social media can turn us away from getting information from reliable sources.

We must remember that such forms of bite-sized, washed-down news and infographics that are rarely cited are never sufficient or reliable when it comes to educating ourselves on important matters. Instead of jumping onto the bandwagon of temporary online based activism, people should incorporate actual work in reading, learning, and educating ourselves about relevant topics if we are to meaningfully advocate for a cause. In doing so, we can hope to be mindful of actions that may perpetuate more ignorance and propel the movement to create impact forward.

Turning real life social issues into an online trend or desensitising the mass to people's sufferings through such con-



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

tent can be frightening. Hence, our goal should be to commit to proper activism which requires people to improve on a personal level and educate those around them so that the results appear on a

broader and social level.

Irina wants everyone to petition for longer weekends. Show your support by reaching out at irinajahan17@gmail.com

THE DEFINITIVE YOUTH MAGAZINE



PHOTOS: ORCHID CHAKMA

Where are our public spaces?

NAHALY NAFISA KHAN & HRISHIK ROY

With a growing population and the ever-increasing pollution, Dhaka has evolved to be an extremely chaotic place to live. It has constantly been ranked as one of the top ten least liveable cities for the past few years – an "achievement" most of us would not be very proud of.

Amidst all of the negative aspects making the lives of the city-dwellers nothing less than the nine circles of Dante's *Inferno*, the lack of public spaces in the city also contributes to making the city unliveable. In various cities across the globe, outdoor recreational public spaces provide the citizens with the opportunity to engage in various activities for amusement. Such activities allow them to better cope with issues such as mental health, as the refreshing and soothing environment outdoors – a break from the fast-paced city life – allows them to gather themselves and function better.

But what qualifies as a public space? Or the lack thereof?

"Any place where people from all walks of life have open access is a public space in my opinion. In that sense, public transportation can also be called public space. So are roadside shops and restaurants, footpaths, playgrounds and parks," says Fahad Al Mahmood, a young professional and recent graduate from Dhaka University.

"However, public spaces, in the most conventional sense, are quite insufficient in the capital to say the very least. Those that qualify suffer from a gross lack of security for the common citizens," he adds.

Echoing Fahad, Radiah Tasnim Khan, a Vigarunnisa Noon School and College student, comments that the very few public spaces which exist in the status quo are particularly unsafe for women due to the harassment and moral policing they often have to face.

"When there are not enough safe public spaces, people eventually start going to restaurants. But, then again, the mental peace and mental development which happens in outdoor public spaces, such as parks, cannot possibly be emulated in small cafes and restaurants. I think everyone deserves to live in a city where they can breathe," Radiah says.

A lack of safe public spaces in Dhaka has aggravated a lot of issues, especially among the youth. From inadequate socialising opportunities to the development of detrimental habits such as consuming unhealthy foods at restaurants, and to even exacerbating class differences to the point of social alienation – the inadequacy of public spaces has taken a cancerous form at this point.

"When we go to a restaurant, we do not go from one table to another just to get to know strangers. But, when you go to a public space such as a lake or a park, you meet lots of new people and you get the opportunity to talk and interact with them. Therefore, public spaces are great socialising spots, especially because there are no distractions in terms of interacting with people – something which you would face if you went to somewhere like a restaurant or shopping mall," explains Maliha Rahman, A Level student at Maple Leaf International School.

When asked about what he and his friends choose for recreation, Tajrian Khan, a grade 12 student of Mangrove School shares, "What we can afford to eat is usually junk food, just for the sake of having a place to sit for an hour. A park and a few benches in your neighbourhood are the least you can expect from a nation's capital."

However, being able to go to restaurants or cafes or amusement parks is something which can only be afforded by people from a higher socio-economic background. This often leaves out the ones at the bottom of the social order due to the unavailability or inaccessibility of public spaces.

South Breeze School student Mahir Mohammad Tazwar illustrates, "The typical hangout spots in our country are restaurants, and everyone is not financially capable of affording a meal whenever someone asks for it. As it is not always possible for people to meet in restaurants, if there were more public spaces, you could stay in touch with people better."

This crisis has put the city planners and authorities into quite a fix as well. Opening up more public spaces is an issue that is becoming increasingly hard for them as well, due to the capital being one of the most densely populated in the world.

"We currently have 12 playgrounds and 26 parks under our jurisdiction in Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC), of which, some are still under construction. We have tried our best to meet international standards while constructing them, with the right amount of greeneries accompanying these spaces," says Mo-

hammad Sirajul Islam, DSCC chief urban planner.

According to DSCC's master plan spanning till 2050, the city corporation will be identifying a space for a playground in every ward. This is a great challenge due to the city's dense population.

"Statistically speaking, 2000 people move to Dhaka every day due to climate-related displacement and other issues. Old Dhaka is one of the major crisis points when it comes to implementing the plan due to its shortage of open spaces," Sirajul Islam elaborates.

"If we come across any such piece of land that can accommodate the purpose but is not under our jurisdiction, we are ready to apply to the government to be able to include that in our plans following necessary legal procedures. RAJUK has made detailed area plans of the capital, following which they make recommendations for opening up such spaces. Proper implementation of these recommendations can prove effective in solving this crisis as well," he suggests.

The law to conserve playgrounds, open spaces, parks and water bodies suggests that no one can change the characteristics of any such space. Proper implementation of this existing law and coordination among all stakeholders can improve the situation in near future, hopes the DSCC chief planner.

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