

CAREER AND EDUCATION

Centralisation of opportunities in Dhaka

What impact it has on students and young professionals

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Dhaka is currently the fourth most populous city in the world, with around 2,000 people moving to the country's capital every single day. This influx is largely driven by the fact that many opportunities are still heavily concentrated in the capital, leaving those in other parts of the country with limited access.

Salsabil Imam, a software engineer based in Rajshahi, highlighted the challenges faced by job seekers outside of Dhaka, "Most job sectors are based in Dhaka, and the written exams for many reputed organisations are held there as well. For those of us without close connections in Dhaka, the stress of managing accommodation discourages many from applying to these jobs that would otherwise be a perfect fit."

She added that this issue disproportionately affects women due to safety concerns, giving Dhaka-based job seekers a significant advantage. "Those living in Dhaka can apply to multiple job openings which increases their chances of securing a decent job," Salsabil explained.

Echoing Salsabil's concerns, Tajrian Haque Laira, a student at East Delta University in Chattogram, remarked, "Just as job seekers outside Dhaka are discouraged from applying to multiple openings, university students from other cities are also often hesitant to participate in extracurricular activities and events, many of which are based in Dhaka."

Laira explained that business students often participate in various types of business competitions which employ practical applications of classroom lessons. However, she pointed out a major challenge, "The organisers of these competitions often expect us to travel

back and forth between rounds, which is both physically and mentally exhausting. It's difficult to balance our health, academics, and personal lives when we have to make six to seven-hour-long journeys so frequently."

When asked whether virtual participation could help bridge the opportunity gap for students and employees residing outside Dhaka, Laira expressed doubts. She said, "I think these competitions are valuable networking events for university students. Online interactions don't offer the same opportunity to build meaningful connections."

Adding to this, Salsabil suggested, "Creating more remote job opportunities for people outside Dhaka could be a temporary solution. It would be beneficial for those who don't want to leave their families or the city they've lived in all their lives."

Salsabil added, "However, I wouldn't necessarily prefer working remotely. I've learned a lot from my colleagues during my time at my current workplace, and they've inspired many positive changes in me. I doubt that would have been possible if I worked from home."

University students aiming to pursue higher education often have to move to Dhaka as well. Mahjabeen Al Hussaini, a fifth-year medical student at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital, said, "Government hospitals in Bangladesh are structured across several levels to provide healthcare services nationwide. At the primary level, community clinics offer basic healthcare in rural areas. District hospitals provide secondary care, including surgeries and specialist

services. At the tertiary level, medical college hospitals offer specialised treatments, while specialised hospitals focus on specific fields like cardiology, orthopaedics, and mental health."

Mahjabeen continued, "Medical college hospitals and specialised hospitals in Dhaka offer a wider variety of postgraduate courses compared to those in district hospitals. As a result, students studying in medical colleges attached to these hospitals often have no choice but to move to Dhaka after graduation, and patients frequently have to travel to the capital for better treatment."

University students and job seekers alike face significant challenges due to the centralisation of resources, often having to relocate to Dhaka for better educational and career opportunities. This exacerbates the city's already strained infrastructure and pushes it toward an unsustainable future. To tackle these problems, a well-planned decentralisation strategy is essential, focusing on expanding development and facilities to other regions of the country.

References:

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OFF CAMPUS

CITY OF DREAMS AND STRUGGLES

Students on coping with the dread and demands of Dhaka

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For students living in Dhaka, the urban nightmare that the capital has morphed into is frightening. Blaring, relentless traffic turns every commute into a battle, broken roads compromise safety and breed discomfort, and the rampant air pollution is a slow poison – these are aspects we are all familiar with unfortunately. Yet, none of us have really become accustomed to it.

So, what then happens to the students who are new to the city? The ones who have left their hometowns behind to pursue an education and make their dreams a reality. How do they perceive the Gordian mess, which is Dhaka?

Abbar Jahan Arpita, an undergraduate student at the Department of Law at North South University (NSU), hailing from Mymensingh, recalls her first time visiting Dhaka as a child, "I have fond memories of my childhood in Mymensingh, where I'd spend most of my afternoons playing in fields with my friends. I learned how to swim and fish in a nearby pond with my father. In Dhaka, however, there wasn't much space for kids to play except for cramped garages or rooftops. Everywhere I looked, it was just one building after another and never-ending construction."

Having to live in the capital as a student has become a series of decisions that compromise Arpita's immunity. "My physical health has clearly deteriorated since I moved here. Dhaka's air pollution is the most stressful as it triggers my asthma, to the point where I have to miss classes."

Even food – a basic necessity – poses difficulties for students to access due to its lack of affordability and quality. Shrabonty Deb Ina who is from Sylhet and a student at the Department of English and Humanities at

the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), notes, "In my hometown, everyone prefers home-cooked meals as opposed to dining out. But in Dhaka, I have observed that dining out or ordering in is a common practice, even if one lives with their family. I live in a hostel where the food served is hardly ever good. I rarely have time to cook either. So, I almost always have to opt to dine out as well."

"However, the meals aren't affordable. If the meals are affordable then the place itself isn't very inviting. Nice cafes or restaurants that serve good food come with expensive prices. As a result, food takes up most of my expenses, which is why I often have to forgo doing or buying other things," she says. "Moreover, the quality of food here is bad, especially the fruits and vegetables. Depending on my monthly budget, I don't even buy them sometimes."

For many students, especially those without the comfort of family members, the housing conditions of Dhaka, too, present challenges.

Shayonto Hasan of Rajshahi, a student at the Department of Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) at BRAC University, currently living in a house for bachelors, reveals, "I live close to my university and the rent here is very high, around 20,000 taka or more for a two-bedroom house but the living conditions are very poor. There is no proper drainage system, the roads are narrow and broken, and there's no gap between the houses. We often tell each other that even the worst street in Rajshahi is better than Badda's best street."

Moreover, the capital's frustrating traffic and road conditions do not make things easier. Shayonto states, "In Rajshahi, I can travel to the farthest of places in just 20 to 30 minutes. In Dhaka, it can take one to two hours just to travel the smallest distance. Also, despite being the capital

city, the footpaths of Dhaka are the worst. In most places, you cannot even use them as they are either entirely broken or half covered by hawkers."

Coupled with the pressure to succeed and secure their well-being, students are always on the edge, worsening the mental strain of having to adjust to such a cluttered and demanding city.

Shrabonty shares, "There is no guarantee that once I leave my house, I'll return home safely. From mugging and reckless driving to random acts of violence, often targeted towards women, there is no way to distinguish between good and bad people. I am constantly on edge regarding everyone. Having to be vigilant all the time is draining. Thoughts about my future and its uncertainty are always on the back of my mind as well. Everyone comes to Dhaka with a dream and there is a constant unrelenting pressure to fulfil it."

Yet, the very thing which brought these students to the capital city seems to be free of stains for some. Arpita remarks, "Unexpectedly, Dhaka's environment has positively influenced my academic performance. Since I live close to my university, it spares me from the exhausting traffic and saves me time and energy. Everyone around me is quite dedicated to their education and future aspirations, which motivates me to perform better academically as well."

The rapid urbanisation of Dhaka has constructed a landscape brimming with promises and challenges alike. With each day appearing to be an endless grind, it's plain to see that dreams come with a cost. Yet, waiting around for much-needed solutions – which are often talked about and seldom implemented – cannot be an option. With no way around the overwhelming urban demands of Dhaka, newcomers are forced to accept such a city.



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