

OFF CAMPUS

Decay of law and order is causing growing unease amongst daily commuters

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When night falls, my phone lights up with my father's calls—a ringing of worry that, even without words, imparts his heightened sense of unease. This isn't about curfews; it's about a feeling of perceived insecurity. I reassure him that I'm safe—that I'm nearly home—but even as I say it, a creeping unease steals into my own thoughts, taking up space in some corner of my mind and refusing to leave.

I am scrolling through Facebook, where the headlines, status updates, and shaky videos present another wave of distressing news. The feed is full of repetitive mugging, stabbing, and theft reports. It creates a peculiar sense of unease. For women, the risks are even higher: they have to deal with harassment, catcalls, and unwanted advice, and each story makes them feel a little more vulnerable. The city is always chaotic, yet with every post, it takes on a darker atmosphere, reminiscent of a place where finding safety has become increasingly challenging. Among the interviewees, an unspoken fear pervades their accounts. The erosion of law and order looms large, casting a shadow that shapes their movements, their choices, and the fragile sense of security they once knew. "It's not like I was particularly safe before, but law enforcement would come forward when asked for assistance. That is no longer the case, and the examples of robbery and harassment I see every day on social media aren't helping either," says Noshin Nuha, a fourth-year student of Jahangirnagar University.

She recounts a moment that remains etched in her memory, her voice steady but tinged with frustration. "I was on my way somewhere with a friend when two men, clearly under the influence, started hurling insults at us, demanding we cover our heads," she said. Trapped in traffic on a rickshaw, there was no immediate escape. They looked away, willing the ordeal to end, but the bystanders offered no intervention—silent spectators in the unfolding drama. "When our rickshaw began to move, one of them ran after us and tried to touch us from behind. We screamed," she recalled, the anger palpable. Yet even then, their cries for help went unanswered. Two

volunteers, ostensibly tasked with overseeing the roads, were indifferent, dismissing their pleas with a casual apathy.

The lack of immediate response or visible action from authorities has emboldened criminals, further undermining trust in the system designed to protect them. Since August 5, a palpable sense of insecurity has taken root among the public, with citizens expressing growing concerns about their safety on the streets.

This is her reality, one that leaves little room for retreat or safety. "I don't have the privilege to stay home," she explained. Now, she carries a box cutter—a small but potent act of self-defence in a city where trust is a luxury she can no longer afford. The sharp blade, tucked into her bag, is a grim reminder of the lengths one must go to feel even marginally safe.

Raunaq Jahan Rafa, final-year student of Dhaka University, has to stay out late for tuitions. She states, "Dhaka city's regular commuting itself is a struggle that we go through every day. Added to this, the absence of law enforcement by authorities, increased traffic, recent catcalling incidents, and increasing pickpocketing keep me alarmed and paranoid at all times."

Interviewees shared an overall sense of paranoia that grips them, even when stepping outside for the most mundane tasks. The recent tragic deaths of Kamrul Hasan and Zarraf Ahmed, who were stabbed and killed by muggers, demonstrate the alarming lack of security on the streets. Despite the presence of CCTV cameras, the perpetrators show no hesitation, continuing their attacks in plain sight, further diminishing any sense of safety in public spaces.

Another student of Dhaka University, Hasibul Islam, talks about his anxiety moving around the city. He says, "I don't

actually feel frightened of getting mugged, but I feel anxious about getting pickpocketed or snatched during commuting for university or tuitions, especially when I am using public transport. It feels unsafe walking alone after 9 PM or 10 PM, as these kinds of incidents are happening in my surroundings every now and then."

The growing tally of incidents illustrates the distressing reality of law and order. When asked why they chose not to file complaints, many interviewees voiced a sentiment that has become dishearteningly familiar. "What will happen even if I do it?" one remarked with a resignation that seemed to carry the weight of countless similar stories. It's an answer less rooted in apathy than in a learnt helplessness—a quiet indictment of a system that has consistently failed to respond, much less deliver justice.

Salman Sakib Shahryar, a graduate of the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) now working full-time, shares how life has changed for him. His job often keeps him out late, sometimes until 1 or 2 AM. "I used to feel anxious, but I had faith in the law enforcement and the people around me," he explains. That faith has faded. Now, he says, he can't even trust passers-by to help if he's attacked. "These days, I feel completely alone," he admits.

For Shahryar, the fear comes from the absence of reliable law enforcement. He finds it harder to distinguish between being cautious and simply being troubled. He shares his location with family wherever he goes, but the constant anxiety has taken a toll. "It doesn't feel like living anymore," he says. "It's just surviving."

In a city where survival has taken the place of living, the loss of trust in law enforcement isn't just personal—it's a crack in the foundation of society. Security, once a basic right, now feels like a privilege, leaving communities on edge. Rebuilding faith will take time, but the path forward is clear: the systems meant to protect must be strengthened. Only then can people regain the confidence to step outside each day without fear.

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