

‘Israel killed 75 of my relatives in a single strike’

Ibrahim Saleem Kishko, a Palestinian student at Dhaka Medical College, carries with him not just the dreams of healing others, but also the weight of witnessing repeated cycles of violence in his homeland. In a conversation with Mahiya Tabassum of The Daily Star, Ibrahim offers a window into the reality of life in Gaza—a reality marked by both unimaginable loss and unwavering hope.

How has the recent war impacted you and your family?

The shock of October 7 is still fresh in my mind. I was in Bangladesh; I was scrolling through social media when news of the bombings broke. Everything happened with devastating speed. Though I've witnessed many conflicts before, the scale of this one was unprecedented. The first few days were a blur of anxiety and mania; I couldn't eat or sleep, consumed by fear for my family back home—my parents, two sisters, and three brothers.

By October 30, my immediate family managed to evacuate, but fate had other plans for many of my relatives who remained in the city. That day, Israeli forces bombed our area, killing 75 of my relatives in a single strike. The death toll in my family has now exceeded 100. Among them was my uncle, who inspired me to pursue medicine.

When I speak of these losses, I know they might seem like mere numbers to others. But each number represents a person who helped raise me, someone I saw every day growing up. The thought of returning home to nothing but rubble is overwhelming and heart-wrenching. I haven't yet confronted this reality in person, and I'm unsure how I'll cope when I do.

Our family home was among the first casualties, reduced to ashes in the initial bombings in October 2023. Now, like most Gazans, we have no house to return to. The true extent of our losses—both material and emotional—will only become apparent after this genocide ends. During the conflict, people function on survival instincts only. It's only in the aftermath, when they try to return home, that the full weight of the trauma begins to surface.

Were your loved ones displaced during the war?

Our home was in Gaza City. When the Israeli military began their bombing, my family and relatives were forced to scatter, seeking safety wherever they could find it. The strikes were indiscriminate—no area was spared. Initially, my family fled to Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip,

where a stranger opened their home to us. This act of kindness exemplifies the unity we Palestinians have among us. However, safety proved elusive. As Khan Younis came under attack, they fled to Rafah. When Rafah too became a target, they had to return to Khan Younis. In total, they were forced to relocate six or seven times since October 2023.

How did you cope with the uncertainty and fear during the height of the conflict?

Having lived through previous conflicts, I knew what to expect: the power cuts, the internet blackouts. But knowing what was coming didn't make it easier. My biggest worry was about being able to contact my family. During those initial days, words would fail to describe the emotional turmoil I experienced. I was trying to study for my exams, but concentration was impossible. Sleep and appetite vanished. My mind was constantly with my family in Gaza, wondering about their fate, what would happen to them. For two to three months, I had no contact with them at all. Even after that, communication was sporadic, dependent on brief windows when they could access the internet or phone networks.

How did they manage to access basic necessities like food, water, shelter or medical care during the time of displacement?

At first, Gaza had some food reserves. But as Israel tightened its blockade and restricted aid, the situation became desperate. People began rationing their meals—first to twice daily, then once, and eventually going days without solid food. Parents would go hungry so their children could eat something. It was especially heartbreaking because young children couldn't understand why there was no food—they would just cry from hunger. The situation in northern Gaza was particularly severe, where no supplies were allowed in at all. People started dying from malnutrition and starvation.

How did the international humanitarian efforts reach your

community during the conflict?

The humanitarian response was severely restricted. Israel's allowance of aid was both inadequate and inconsistent. To understand the scale of deprivation, consider this: normally, Gaza would receive 60-70 aid trucks daily. Under the blockade, they limited the number of trucks and even then, many of these were bombed before reaching their destinations. We were receiving perhaps one-tenth of what Gaza actually needed. Money became

you go to bed not knowing if you'll wake up the next morning. This isn't just my experience; it's the reality for every family in Gaza.

For instance, my mother and sisters would prepare themselves for bed each night by ensuring they were properly covered, just in case they didn't survive the night. The thought process was, "If we die in a bombing and are pulled from the rubble, at least we'll be covered." Can you imagine living this way? Trying to sleep while drones and warplanes

the war?

The initial international response showed promise. Media coverage was extensive, and there seemed to be genuine concern about Gaza's situation from both Arab nations and the US. However, this narrative soon shifted, particularly in Western media, where Israel's actions were justified even as they continued to kill Palestinians. They managed to portray themselves as "victims" while being the aggressors.

As time passed, the world's attention waned. Israel actively targeted anyone attempting to document their atrocities in Gaza. While global citizens initially showed interest in helping, many gradually became desensitised to our suffering. The massacre became normalised. This indifference was deeply painful for me.

There's an unbridgeable gap between witnessing or experiencing a war and hearing about it. If you haven't experienced a war, you can never understand the true gravity of it. No amount of description can convey the feeling of losing a sibling or watching your community be destroyed. What's been shown in the media represents less than five percent of the actual suffering in Gaza. I've lived through many conflicts, but this one has been unprecedented in both scale and intensity. Nothing in Gaza's history compares to it.

What does the recent ceasefire mean for you and your community?

The ceasefire brings a glimmer of hope that the bloodshed might finally stop. Despite everything we've endured, this possibility brings joy. As a Gazan, it means I might be able to return home. It's a step towards bringing some peace into the lives of Palestinians, and we hope it marks the end of our displacement and oppression.

The impact on my family was immediate: when the ceasefire was announced, I saw them smile for the first time in one and a half years. They were finally able to eat a proper meal. The resilience of our people is remarkable. Despite the massive destruction, where every Gazan

lost their home, people are already returning and beginning the process of rebuilding. They're cleaning bombed-out buildings, trying to make even a single room habitable. This is what freedom means to us: the ability to rebuild our lives, to survive under any conditions. We're hopeful the city's reconstruction will progress quickly.

Do you feel the ceasefire addresses the root causes of the conflict?

The ceasefire alone won't achieve Palestinian liberation—it will require much more effort. However, it's crucial as a first step to stop the bloodshed. I remain sceptical of Israel's commitment, given their history. Over the past 80 years, negotiations between Israel and Palestine have consistently resulted in Israel imposing their conditions without honouring their commitments. Based on this pattern, I find it difficult to trust their promises.

Despite everything, what gives you hope and strength to keep going?

As Palestinians, resilience is in our nature. We adapt to whatever circumstances we face. Yes, there is change, pain, and suffering, but the people of Gaza always find a way to rebuild their lives. We've endured genocide and generations of oppression, yet we persist.

Our faith sustains us through these challenges. We draw strength from knowing we're fighting for justice. When you're on the right side of history, fighting for a just cause, you never truly lose—you either die with dignity or achieve victory. We refuse to let anyone strip us of our dignity. Look at how differently Gazans and Israelis react to the ceasefire; we celebrate with joy despite our massive losses, while they mourn. This contrast speaks volumes about who stands on the right side of history. When you're fighting for justice, even in the face of devastating odds, you find your hope and confidence to move forward.

This is an abridged version of the interview. For the full interview, please visit our website.

Breathing in the apocalypse

Dhaka's descent into the smog age



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Once upon a time, in a city that might resemble Dhaka (but we'll never tell), the air was so thick with dust and smoke that birds forgot how to fly. Instead, they wheezed their way from branch to branch like asthmatic opera singers. Here, the citizens, armed with little more than apathy and makeshift masks, engaged in a strange dance of denial while their beloved metropolises ascended to the throne of "World's Unhealthiest Air"—an accolade, no doubt, worthy of being inscribed on smog-covered billboards.

In this dystopian drama, the Air Quality Index (AQI) routinely surpasses 200 and frequently ventures into the hazardous 300+ range. Need proof? Let's look at February 2025, Dhaka's own "Season of Smog" (a phrase Dickens might have coined, had he lived here). On February 4, Dhaka topped the list of the world's most polluted cities with an AQI score of 251 by 8:31am. Iraq's Baghdad, Kyrgyzstan's Bishkek and Democratic Republic of the Congo's Kinshasa occupied the second, third, and fourth spots on the list, respectively. This comes after February 3, when Dhaka claimed the top spot with an AQI score of 243. Even on February 2, the city managed the first place with an AQI of 374.

If TS Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" were rewritten for

Dhaka, it might open this way: "Let us go then, you and I, where the smog hangs heavy in the sky." But unlike Eliot's wistful melancholy, Dhaka's fog—a sinister blend of PM2.5, PM10, and shattered dreams—doesn't bother with poetry. It claws at throats, coats lungs, and leaves a metallic taste of despair.

Take, for instance, the city's infamous brick kilns. They're the Darth Vaders in Dhaka's air saga—breathing heavy, lethal fumes into the atmosphere. Despite years of governmental "mandates" (a word here meaning "polite suggestions ignored by all"), these kilns continue to operate with all the stealth of a marching band. Then again, if the kilns are the main villains, Dhaka's vehicles are the bumbling sidekicks. Picture a scene straight out of *Mad Max: Fury Road*, with the city streets overrun by decrepit buses belching black plumes of despair and rickshaws navigating a post-apocalyptic maze of honking chaos. Unlike the sleek, chrome vehicles of *Mad Max*, these are rusting tin cans that seem to run on pure spite.

Dhaka boasts over 1.6 million registered vehicles, many of which operate without proper emission control. Studies show vehicular emissions have major contribution in the city's total air pollution. Singapore, a city once plagued by

vehicular chaos, solved its problem with strict emissions standards and congestion pricing. Dhaka, on the other hand, seems to operate on the principle of "Let's see how much worse it can get." Why ban old buses when you can keep them as mobile history exhibits?

Then there's the construction industry, Dhaka's answer to a live-action reenactment of *The Great Gatsby*. Just as Jay Gatsby's extravagant parties masked his inner emptiness, Dhaka's relentless construction boom masks an underlying neglect of urban planning. The result? A city that grows taller but breathes shallower. Policies are drafted, but enforcement is a ghost that haunts bureaucratic corridors, much like Banquo's ghost in *Macbeth*. Consider the recurring promises to plant trees, introduce electric vehicles, or modernise industries. These vows are like Frodo's journey in *The Lord of the Rings*—long, arduous, and seemingly destined never to reach their destination. Only, instead of battling orcs, the government battles... well, themselves.

If the government is Hamlet, the citizens are the townsfolk of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. When faced with existential threats, their response is often, "It's just a bit of bad air. I've had worse." Armed with the latest TikTok filters but no actual air filters, they navigate the streets as if oblivion were a fashion statement. Even as AQI scores climb higher than the number of Dhaka's unfinished megaprojects, many remain resigned. Perhaps they've embraced Scarlett O'Hara's mantra: "I'll think about it tomorrow." But tomorrow, as we all know, never comes.

The numbers paint a grim

picture. According to the fifth edition of the State of Global Air report, air pollution was responsible for over 236,000 deaths in Bangladesh in 2021 alone. Respiratory diseases, heart conditions, and strokes are on the rise, with children and the elderly bearing the brunt. Bangladesh recorded over 19,000 deaths of children under five due to air pollution-related conditions in 2021, UNICEF reports.

What if Dhaka's air pollution crisis could inspire its own cinematic universe? Imagine a Marvel-style team-up: the Enforcers (government inspectors), the Innovators (green tech companies), and the Avengers (citizens armed with petitions and asthma inhalers). Together, they fight the ultimate villain: "the Smogster."

In the final act, Dhaka's citizens storm the streets, demanding change. Industries comply, vehicles

are upgraded, and construction sites become paragons of cleanliness. The city's skyline emerges, not as a hazy silhouette, but as a beacon of hope.

Of course, this is just a fantasy, but so was the idea of humans walking on the Moon. If Neil Armstrong could take one giant leap for mankind, surely Dhaka can take one small step towards breathable air. Let's just hope it doesn't require a spacesuit.



Dhaka South City Corporation
Office of the Executive Engineer
Zone-1 (Nagar Bhaban)

Memo No.: egp/dscc/zone-01/14/2024-2025
Date: 04/02/2025

e-Tender Notice

This is online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in e-GP portal and offline/hard copies will not be accepted. To submit e-Tender, please register on e-GP system portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>).

e-Tender is invited in e-GP portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) by Executive Engineer, Zone-1, Dhaka South City Corporation for the procurement of:

Sl. No	Tender ID & Package No.	Name of works	Publishing Date & Time	Last Selling Date & Time	Tender Opening Date & Time
1.	1071807 WR21/Z_1/Religious_Eid_ul-Fitre/2024-25	Construction of Pandal with triaryl & awning along with other ancillary works at National Eidgah Maidan for the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitre/2025.	04/02/2025 21:00	19/02/2025 13:51	19/02/2025 17:00



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