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At eight in the morning, the university gates open to a stream of students, faculty members, and staff. Among them is a young woman, hurriedly pushing a stroller with one hand while balancing a laptop bag on her shoulder. She kisses her child goodbye—hesitantly—and rushes to her classroom. This scene, while increasingly common in our academic spaces, is also deeply revealing. It tells the quiet story of working mothers in Bangladesh, one rarely acknowledged in institutional policy, yet urgent and emotionally resonant. The question is no longer whether we need daycare centres in educational institutions, but how much longer we will deny their necessity.

In Bangladesh, as of 2023, women accounted for 65.5 percent—roughly 252,000—of primary school teachers. In lower secondary and secondary education, women made up 23.5 percent and 25.4 percent of teaching staff, respectively. At the tertiary level, the figure stood at 27.76 percent. While this progress is commendable, it uncovers an institutional paradox: women are encouraged to enter education, but the support systems necessary to retain them—such as on-campus daycare—remain grossly inadequate.

In a country where over 42.68 percent of women participate in the labour force, the absence of institutional childcare support forces many to underperform, take extended leave, or leave the workforce altogether. This is not just an economic issue; it is a question of social justice.

When a new mother returns to work after maternity leave, her most daunting challenge is not academic performance or professional capability—it is childcare. Who will hold her baby while she lectures? Who will feed her child when she is busy grading papers?

Extended families, the once-trusted support system, are no longer a viable option, especially in urban nuclear households.

Domestic workers are both hard to find and, more importantly, often untrained and unsupervised. As one working mother shared, "Since I have no relatives in Dhaka, it was extremely difficult for me to take care of my child during office hours. I was constantly anxious at work until I found a reliable daycare." Her story is echoed in thousands of households.

While workplaces must adapt to the changing contours of the workforce, universities carry an added moral burden. They are institutions of enlightenment, equality, and future-building. Yet, they are often the last to adapt to gender-sensitive infrastructure. A university without a daycare centre is an environment that punishes women for choosing both motherhood and career. It sends a message, deliberate or not, that the ideal academic is childless or male. For student-mothers and faculty alike, this results in missed classes, disrupted research, and emotional stress.

Moreover, universities are uniquely equipped to provide quality daycare facilities. With departments in psychology, early childhood education, or nursing, many campuses could develop high-standard, supervised centres that double as experiential learning labs. It's a win-win: educators can teach, students can learn, and children can thrive.

Let's be clear: daycare is not just a holding room. It is a place of cognitive, social, and emotional growth.

High-quality daycare centres are structured around a child's needs. Trained caregivers follow regimented schedules that include nutritious meals, story time, group play, arts and crafts, and basic literacy work. A growing body of research shows that children who attend structured daycare are more emotionally resilient and perform better academically in their early school years. In Bangladesh, this is especially important, given the rampant inequalities in early childhood education

access. Moreover, daycare centres, when well-regulated, play a preventive role in child abuse. They reduce the dependency on untrained domestic help or leaving children unattended, both of which are common risk factors for neglect and trauma.

Section 94 (1.2) of Bangladesh Labour Act mandates that every institution with more than 40 female employees must provide a daycare facility for children under six.

a symbol of parental failure or laziness. Others believe young children must remain in familial settings. But these myths are increasingly out of touch with urban realities.

The truth is, even stay-at-home mothers can benefit from daycare facilities. Children need socialisation with peers. They need space to run, explore, and engage. No amount of screen time or solitary play can

public institutions. Every university, college, and school must have a functioning, safe, and affordable daycare facility.

This is not just about mothers. It is about the next generation of Bangladeshis—whom they grow up to be, how they socialise, what opportunities they receive, and whom they trust. A society that refuses to hold its children with care cannot claim to hold a future worth striving for.



Daycare is a place of cognitive, social, and emotional growth.

FILE PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

However, enforcement is lax, and compliance is more the exception than the rule. Many institutions offer a "sick room" or a single nanny in an empty office room, which is a far cry from what children or their mothers deserve. The few quality daycare centres that do exist remain expensive and inaccessible to most middle- and lower-income families. The market cannot solve what policy refuses to address.

There remains significant stigma around daycare use in Bangladesh. Some see it as

replace the developmental advantages of structured group interaction.

Moreover, with proper training and regulation, daycare workers can offer a level of specialised developmental care that most homes cannot. From speech therapy to emotional support, their role is indispensable.

If we are serious about building an inclusive, equitable Bangladesh—one where women can thrive as mothers and professionals—we must reimagine our

As a nation, we have spent years trying to increase women's participation in education and employment. Now, we must complete the loop. We must invest not only in women's work but also in what makes their work sustainable: comprehensive childcare.

Let us remember the wisdom of Kahlil Gibran, who once wrote, "Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself." If life longs for anything, it is care, continuity, and compassion. Let us not fail it at the gate.

## Why Dhaka has become unliveable



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Picture this: you're standing in the middle of Shahbagh at 8:30am. The sun is already a vengeful orb, the air tastes like exhaust fumes and unfulfilled promises, and the traffic—oh, the traffic—is a fossilised river of cars, rickshaws, and humanity. A man in a sweat-soaked shirt argues with a CNG-run autorickshaw driver over a fare increase of Tk 10. A schoolgirl hops over a sludge-filled pothole, her uniform skirt flapping like a surrender flag. Somewhere, a protest slogan echoes, muffled by the honking symphony. Welcome to Dhaka, the city that never sleeps, because it's too busy being stuck in traffic, dodging waterlogged streets, or wondering if today's political demonstration will be the one that finally tips the collective sanity into the abyss.

A recent editorial by *The Daily Star*, titled "This is not how a city can survive", is a primal scream into the void. It catalogues Dhaka's daily crucifixion: protests that gridlock entire neighbourhoods, infrastructure that crumbles faster than a biscuit in *cha*, and a government that seems to treat citizen welfare as an afterthought in

its grand political opera. But how does one survive here? Not just exist, not just endure, but carve out a sliver of dignity—or at least a functioning Wi-Fi connection—amid the chaos? Let's muse.

Dhaka operates on a unique principle: maximum effort, minimum progress. You leave home at 7am to reach your office five kilometres away by 9am, only to discover that a spontaneous protest has turned the road into a car park. The protesters, bless their democratic hearts, are exercising their right to dissent. The traffic police, meanwhile, are exercising their right to vanish. You sit. You sweat. You contemplate the existential irony of a metro rail gliding overhead while your CNG-run autorickshaw dies.

The editorial nails it: this isn't just inconvenience, it's systemic erosion. When protests metastasise into daily blockades, when VIP movements reroute entire neighbourhoods, when monsoon rains turn roads into Venetian canals (sans the romance), the city becomes less a habitat and more a stress simulator. The elderly, the sick, the parents hauling toddlers through

sludge—these aren't extras in a dystopian film. They're us. And the tragedy isn't just the suffering, it's the normalisation of it. We have mastered the art of shrugging, "Ki ar korar? Eita to Dhaka."

But here's the twist: Dhaka's chaos is also its alchemy. The same streets that trap you for hours host impromptu tea stalls where strangers bond over shared misery. The protests that infuriate you also remind you that dissent, however disruptive, is a heartbeat this city refuses to silence. Survival here isn't about avoiding the chaos; it's about learning to dance in the rubble.

Let's be honest: optimism in Dhaka feels like bringing a parasol to a tsunami. The just-revealed Global Liveability Index 2025 ranks us 171st out of 173 cities, below even Kyiv, a city currently hosting an actual war. Our air quality rivals industrial chimneys. Our infrastructure budget seems to evaporate faster than rainwater in July. And don't get me started on the mosquitoes—*Aedes aegypti*, the unofficial mascot of our public health nightmares.

Yet, cynicism is a luxury this city can't afford. The editorial's plea to prioritise citizens' well-being isn't just a policy suggestion; it's a survival manifesto.

The government's inertia—whether in tackling air pollution, fixing roads, or addressing inflation—is a masterclass in absurdity. The new metro rail? A Band-Aid on a bullet wound. The real solution—disciplined traffic management, green spaces, functional public transport—remains as elusive as a quiet afternoon in Gulistan.

Surviving Dhaka demands a sense of humour. Not the slapstick kind, but the gallows variety. Take the Great Waterlogging Chronicles: you invest in waterproof shoes, only to discover the real enemy is the floating garbage island blocking the drain. Or the VIP Movement Saga, where your entire commute is derailed because someone's convoy needs to glide through the city like a pampered comet. And then there's the Protest Paradox: you support the right to demonstrate but draw the line when it turns your 20-minute errand into a three-hour odyssey.

The editorial's call for "responsible protest" is noble but feels like asking a tornado to mind its manners. Protests here aren't just political theatre; they're catharsis. When the system grinds you down, blocking a road feels like the only megaphone you've got. The problem isn't dissent—it's the collateral damage. A city can't thrive when its arteries are clogged daily, when ambulances are trapped behind slogan-chanting crowds, when students miss exams because the streets are a battleground.

But imagine this: What if protests were organised with precision? What if the government actually planned for them, rerouting traffic, designating zones, ensuring that emergencies aren't collateral damage? What if, instead of adversarial standoffs, we had dialogue?

To survive Dhaka, you need a strategy. Start by embracing the absurd: treat every crisis as a plot twist. Stuck in traffic? Perfect time to memorise a poem. Power outage? Candlelit introspection hour. Find your

oasis—a rooftop garden, a quiet cafe, a library corner—and claim a sliver of peace amid the bedlam. Channel your inner Tagore; the man wrote about birds and freedom while colonialism loomed. Create beauty anyway. Demand better, but build resilience: advocate for change, but don't wait for it. Plant a tree. Mentor a kid. Fix a pothole yourself (if the city won't). And above all, laugh. Loudly. Because if you don't, you'll cry.

The editorial ends with a plea for collaboration—government, parties, citizens—to stop treating civic life as a hostage. But collaboration requires trust, and trust is in shorter supply than parking spots here. Yet, hope persists, in the students demanding safer streets, architects designing vertical gardens, journalists chronicling both collapse and resilience.

Dhaka is a city of contradictions. It's a place where you can attend a rooftop art exhibition overlooking a slum, where a phuchka vendor philosophises about inflation, where the smell of rain on concrete mingles with the stench of neglect. It's unliveable. It's home.

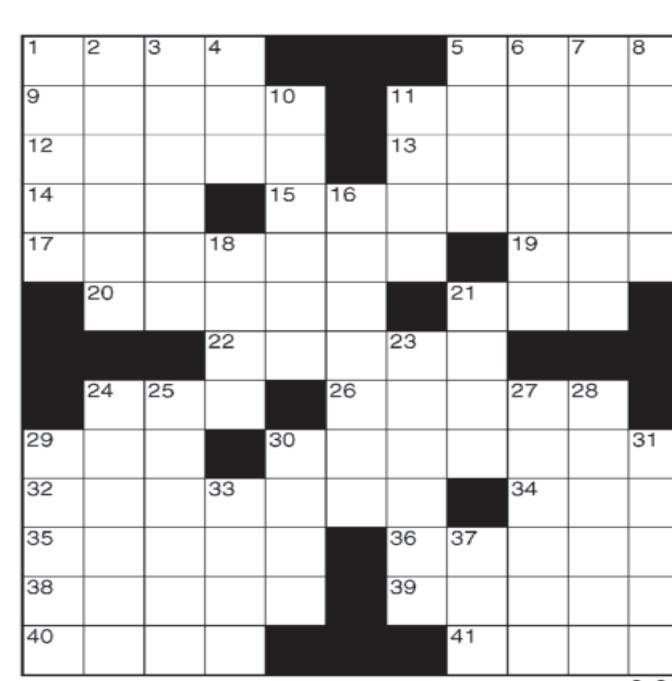
The editorial is a mirror held up to our collective face, reflecting exhaustion, yes, but also a stubborn refusal to surrender. Survival here isn't passive; it's a daily rebellion. So, the next time you're trapped in traffic, roll down your window. Share a snack with the rickshaw wala. Complain about the potholes. Dream of a better city. And remember: Dhaka's chaos is also its pulse. As long as it beats, so do we.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS**

- 1 Bar mixer
- 5 Used the pool
- 9 Sports spot
- 11 Biscotti flavor
- 12 Deadly
- 13 Blog entries
- 14 Greek vowel
- 15 National League team
- 17 National League team
- 19 Gift from Santa
- 20 Cologne's river
- 21—Alamos
- 22 Nick of "Affliction"
- 24 Chips buy
- 26 Sub sounder
- 29 "Roses—red"
- 30 National League team

- 32 National League team
- 34 Casual top
- 35 Wall climbers
- 36 Martini garnish
- 38 Davis of "Thelma & Louise"
- 39 Witch trial town
- 40 Helper: Abbr.
- 41 Go by
- DOWN**
- 1 Less dangerous
- 2 Stump figure
- 3 Tear off
- 4 "Knives Out" star de
- 5 Winter weather
- 6 Aware of
- 7 American League team
- 8 Unkempt
- 10 White rat, e.g.
- 11 Some primates
- 16 Catches
- 18 Throne occupant
- 21 Singer Horne
- 23 Trunks
- 24 National League team
- 25 Eagles' homes
- 27 Hun leader
- 28 Keanu of "John Wick"
- 29 Friendly senorita
- 30 Tower town
- 31 Appears
- 33 Spring period
- 37 Track trip



SATURDAY'S ANSWERS

