

How are the Jul-Aug survivors doing now?

More than four months have passed since the student-led mass uprising of July-August, which left around 20,000 people injured. The Daily Star speaks with a few of the injured, their families and volunteers who are helping them, to understand the challenges they are currently facing.

'Don't know when the govt will give me money'



Masura Begum is a homemaker.

MASURA BEGUM

On August 5, I was on my way to the hospital to visit a relative. I was in Mohammadpur when a

procession passed by, and police started chasing them. I fell off the rickshaw, and the wheel

ran over my left leg. My leg has not yet healed. Over the past four months, I've visited several hospitals, but my leg has got infected, and antibiotics have not helped. I have diabetes. My leg swells when I walk; when I lie down, the swelling decreases. I must wear a plastic bandage when I walk and remove it at night. I don't think my leg will ever heal.

I continue to take medicines and go for check-ups

occasionally. I had an open heart surgery in the past, so I already take many medications. Now, I also need to take medication for my leg. My relatives and some volunteers have been helping me with my treatment. I've already spent thousands of taka on my treatment, but I haven't received any help from the government yet. I don't know when I will get the financial support.

'Govt must be guardians of the injured'



Farhana Sharmin Emu is an architect and activist of Visionary Voyage, a volunteer network.

FARHANA SHARMIN EMU

Our teams worked across five hospitals. Each team had three to four medical students, two architects, two junior doctors, one coordinator, and two monitors. They assisted patients from morning to evening, providing medicines, meals for patients and attendants, coordinating tests, distributing nutritious food, and offering financial support based on the patients' needs. Even after four months, our volunteers continue their work on the ground because the support is still urgently needed. Many patients are still admitted in hospitals, some have returned home and come for follow-ups periodically, while many others are getting readmitted with new complications. From the very beginning, we have felt that those who were severely injured in the uprising needed both financial support and respectful guardianship.

We have secured long-term guardianship for the injured, with verified needs for daily meals, medicines, house rent, and school fees. Guardians have been assigned responsibility for 43 severely injured individuals requiring long-term recovery, family support, and rehabilitation. To prevent misuse, financial aid is transferred directly to patients' mobile phones every 7-10 days. Each patient is assigned a coordinator and volunteer for coordination. Many of us are trying to support these injured heroes personally, through various means. But when the number of injured is about 20,000, the government should be their guardian and set strategies accordingly. I believe our interim government has no shortage of good intentions. However, there are some

challenges. The main issue was poor coordination. For example, when Zakir Hossain Babu was sent to Bangkok for treatment, his elder sister, who accompanied him, was confused about accommodation, meals, and other needs. After struggling, she contacted us, and we quickly sent 12,000 baht for 15 days' expenses. However, the government had already decided to cover one attendant's costs, leading to a similar issue with another family. Such coordination gaps need to be addressed promptly.

The second issue is the lack of effective monitoring. Although the government set up coordination cells at 14 hospitals in Dhaka, there were complaints that members were unreachable by phone, and many were unaware of their assignments. It's unclear if there is any proper monitoring or accountability mechanism for these cells, but it's evident that there's no public accountability in place. If the government's three ministries—health, social welfare, and labour—collaborate on the long-term treatment and rehabilitation of the injured, the coordination issue can be easily resolved. Those involved in the process over the past few months can work together to ensure smooth coordination.

One of the interim government's primary tasks should be to provide comprehensive support to those injured in the movement, who continue to suffer physical and mental pain, financial hardship, and are struggling to access treatment. The government must urgently step in as the true guardian of these vulnerable individuals.

'Govt should rehabilitate the injured'



Sharful Alam works at a medical equipment supply company.

SHARFUL ALAM

I was shot on August 5 in Uttara. The bullet entered through my throat and exited through my back. I was in the hospital for about 8-10 days. After being discharged, I now need to visit the doctor every month. My

main problem is that I can't move normally. If I move my hand too much, it hurts. If I sit for an hour, I get severe aches on my right side. If I stand for one or two hours, my neck swells and hurts severely. The bullet exited

through my right side, very close to my windpipe. The doctors told me, "If the bullet had been just one centimetre off, you might not have survived." They aren't sure how long I will suffer like this. They explained that the soft tissues near the bullet's path were damaged, and they are trying to control it with medication, but the treatment is slow.

I've been paying for my own treatment. Recently, the July Foundation sent me Tk 100,000, but I have already spent around Tk 120,000. I work for a medical equipment supply company, but due to my condition, the

company hasn't asked me to work full-time. I have a family—my wife, two children, and my parents—and I am the only earning member.

I believe the government should provide free treatment for all those who were injured during the July-August uprising. Many haven't received any financial assistance; it should be provided immediately. The government should also set up a project to rehabilitate the injured. It's been four months since the interim government took charge, but little progress has been made on these issues.

'We may now be seen as the state's burden'



Md Shahinur Mia used to be an auto-rickshaw driver and day labourer.

MD SHAHINUR MIA

Before the July uprising, I worked as an autorickshaw driver and day labourer in Habiganj to support my family. On August 2, at around 4 pm, I was shot while participating in the protests outside Habiganj Town Hall. Numerous pellets struck my eyes and body. I was first rushed to Sylhet North East Medical College and Hospital, then transferred to the National Institute of Ophthalmology and Hospital (NIOH) in Dhaka

on August 3. Doctors informed me that one of my eyes was irreparably damaged, while the other required intensive treatment. I also received treatment for pellet injuries at BSMMU.

Currently, I am under the care of a doctor at Ispahani Islamia Eye Institute and Hospital. I need to travel to Dhaka regularly for check-ups. Due to near-total blindness, I need at least two people to assist me with travel.

My wife, a homemaker, helps with my care but struggles with hospital formalities, so I often rely on my nephew or cousin for assistance.

Each trip to Dhaka is costly, with expenses for travel, lodging, and food for three people, in addition to expensive medication. Supporting a family of six—including my wife, two children, and elderly parents—has become increasingly difficult. As the sole breadwinner, my blindness has left me unable to work, worsening our financial struggles. The growing medical costs, travel expenses, and household bills have left me deeply in debt.

I have repeatedly called the government's hotline but received no response. I'm unsure whether my name has been included in the list of those

injured during the July uprising. During my last visit to Dhaka in November, I submitted a form at the NIOH, but I have heard nothing since. I don't know if my information reached the July Shaheed Smriti Foundation.

I don't know if I'll ever be able to work again, and even if I do, I can never return to my previous life. Sometimes I feel like a burden to my family, which has led to dark thoughts of ending my life. I've received support from some volunteers, which has given me small moments of hope and strength. I appeal to the government to establish sustainable support systems for people like me, who have lost their eyesight or limbs. It is heartbreaking to think that we, the injured and disabled, may now be seen as a burden on the state.

'Govt must expedite financial assistance'



Md Nur Nabi is a former employee of a fabric store.

MD NUR NABI

I used to work at a fabric store. My modest earnings, being the sole income of my family, barely covered our expenses. On August 5, during a police crackdown in Uttara, I was shot and beaten, which fractured my right leg. When I was almost unconscious from tear gas, two strangers helped me to Uttara Adhunik Medical College Hospital (UAMCH) for initial treatment. To avoid distressing

my unwell mother, pregnant wife, and diabetic father, I kept my injuries hidden and struggled alone in Dhaka.

As I was unable to walk, I was admitted to UAMCH on August 13 for surgery. I had to use Tk 50,000 from my mother's eye surgery fund and borrow another Tk 100,000. Soon after, the government announced free treatment for injured protesters, but by then, it was too late for

me. Despite the formation of government committees, my attempts to reach officials went in vain. The flood crisis diverted the government's attention, and I turned to the As-Sunnah Foundation, which helped fund my mother's surgery. I spent two months in my village using crutches to move.

When I attempted to submit my case to the upazila nirbahi officer's (UNO) office, I was told I was not eligible as I was not a student. I later discovered that no list of injured individuals was being maintained.

In September, I learnt that other injured protesters had received financial help. I travelled to Dhaka, but my visit resulted in additional expenses—Tk 1,400—and no help. The government

hotline was unreachable, and I was redirected to the July Shaheed Smriti Foundation, where submitting forms took over a week. The financial and physical toll of this journey left me exhausted.

I have finally submitted my application, but three weeks have passed, and I have yet to receive any help. With a newborn child, I had to return to work despite my injury. Commuting with a fractured leg is agonising, but I have no choice.

I urgently request the government to expedite the promised financial assistance, reduce the harassment faced by injured individuals, and provide rehabilitation and employment opportunities for those permanently disabled by their injuries.



Farzana Sultana Nilu is clinical psychologist at the Center for Mental Health and Care, Bangladesh (CMHC.B).

FARZANA SULTANA NILU

Witnessing the injuries sustained by students during the July protests deeply affected me. As a mental health professional, I wanted to contribute meaningfully to alleviate their suffering.

Our efforts began by targeting university students directly involved in the protests. We organised online support groups, led by 30-35 clinical psychologists from the Bangladesh Clinical Psychology Society. However, we quickly realised the limitations of online group sessions. So, we transitioned to individual counselling sessions, creating a more personalised approach. We also set up a helpline so students could call and schedule appointments at any time. All these services were provided free of charge, underscoring our commitment to supporting the mental well-being of these individuals.

After the protests, our focus shifted to the injured, with information coming through the volunteer organisation Loraku-24. We collaborated with them to extend mental health support to those hospitalised.

Psychologically, trauma is classified into five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Survivors who successfully navigate these stages are adapting to life post-trauma. Most survivors of the July-August events, however, are still stuck in the anger stage, struggling with resentment and sorrow. Many feel they haven't received the attention or support they need from the government. Healing from the anger stage varies, but with psychological

support and community care, it can be managed. Unfortunately, in Bangladesh, gaps in medical care and government action have prevented proper healing. Without addressing this stage, survivors cannot reach the acceptance stage. It is crucial that trauma survivors' needs are recognised, especially by the government, who must engage with them patiently and sensitively.

Our fieldwork revealed that those with eye injuries or amputations were the most severely affected psychologically. These individuals, facing the reality of life-altering injuries, often experience profound depression, sleeplessness, and anxiety about their future.

Although the government has pledged to address the psychological needs of the injured, a comprehensive, government-led initiative is needed. This should include mental health units in hospitals for injured protesters, integration of mental healthcare into rehabilitation programmes, and community-based or remote counselling services in urban and rural areas. Telehealth platforms could help reach individuals in remote locations.

Further research is needed to understand the mental health impact on the families of the injured and deceased. The psychological scars borne by protesters and their families are as significant as their physical injuries, if not more so. A unified, comprehensive effort is crucial to ensure that they are not left to navigate this trauma alone.

'My mother refuses to accept that her son's eye won't heal'

Md Zobayer Hossain is brother of Md Julfikar Ali, candidate of 2025 SSC exams.

MD ZOBAYER HOSSAIN

My brother, Md Julfikar Ali, is a candidate for SSC exams in 2025. On July 18, he was shot in front of the BNS Centre in Azampur, Uttara. That day, when Julfikar didn't return home, I searched for him at various protest sites,

hospitals, and police stations in Uttara, but couldn't find him. After five days, we received a call from the Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH), saying he was in the ICU. His appearance had changed so much that he

was unrecognisable.

His right eye got destroyed by a bullet, with seven or eight pellets lodged inside. There are over 100 pellets in his head, neck, and face that doctors say cannot be removed. The bullet also broke two of his teeth. He was hospitalised for nearly three months, first at DMCH and then at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH). Later, he had a prosthetic eye fitted at Ispahani Islamia Eye Hospital. Despite his condition, he continues his studies and daily activities using his good eye.

Doctors from China and

France recently examined him and confirmed that taking him abroad wouldn't help, as the pellets cannot be removed. He will have to live with them.

Many people have supported Julfikar's treatment, and the doctors have provided good care. We recently received Tk 100,700 from the July Foundation via bKash. However, my mother refuses to accept that her son's eye won't heal, and the pellets cannot be removed. She keeps saying, "If the government takes him abroad, at least I'll get some consolation. I can't accept my son's condition."