

Air India crash a wake-up call for all

It shows why aviation safety can never be compromised

We are shocked and saddened by the devastating crash of an Air India plane that went down moments after taking off from Ahmedabad, Gujarat on Thursday, in what is now the world's worst aviation disaster in a decade. Our deepest condolences go out to the families and loved ones of the victims. Air India confirmed on Friday that all but one of the 230 passengers and 12 crew members on board were killed. Among the dead were also eight local residents, including four medical students, as the aircraft—a Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner—crashed into the residential quarters of a medical college in the area. The death toll may rise further as more details emerge.

India's Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) is presently probing into what caused the crash, which could take some time, as such investigations involve multiple factors. Preliminary theories suggest that dual engine failure, bird strikes, or mechanical malfunction could be possible factors, with the aircraft failing to gain enough thrust after takeoff. After analysing footage of its crash, aerospace safety experts noted that the plane's landing gear was down at a phase of flight when it would typically be up, an anomaly that may have contributed to the loss of power. However, the recovery of black box data could provide definitive answers.

This tragedy must serve as a wake-up call for those in the aviation industry, including in Bangladesh. The crash has shown what can happen if safety protocols are compromised—a reality that Bangladesh, with its own history of aviation safety concerns and irregularities, can ill afford to ignore. Major stakeholders, including the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) and Biman Bangladesh Airlines, the national flag carrier, have long faced criticism for repeated incidents of negligence and corruption. Only recently, we were alarmed to learn of an investigation from CAAB itself that uncovered numerous irregularities in pilot licensing and training programmes. These included serious breaches such as flying schools recommending pilot licences without students completing mandatory solo flight hours, falsification of flight records, and the use of unauthorised software in written tests. Shockingly, one pilot even certified himself. Despite being aware of such practices, CAAB has failed to take action.

Unless these systemic and deep-rooted issues are addressed, Bangladesh's aviation sector will remain vulnerable to the kind of tragedy we mourn today. The lesson here is clear: aviation safety must never be taken lightly. From airworthiness of aircraft to pilot qualifications, from pre-flight inspections to regulatory vigilance—every step must be treated with utmost seriousness. We urge aviation regulators and airline/airport operators in Bangladesh to reassess their standards and practices. If a disaster can happen to a major carrier like Air India, how confident can we be about averting a similar tragedy?

Why is child marriage still so widespread?

Let our girls reach their full potential

We are alarmed by the continued prevalence of child marriage which no legal or institutional framework seems able to deter. According to a recent UN report, Bangladesh has the highest rate of child marriage in South Asia, with a staggering 51 percent of girls being married off before they turn 18. Unfortunately, while we are failing to stop this scourge, our neighbours are making significant progress in addressing it. For instance, only two percent of girls are married before 18 in the Maldives, 10 percent in Sri Lanka, 18 percent in Pakistan, and 23 percent in India. This stark contrast underscores the need to reassess whether our efforts are on the right track.

Needless to say, child marriage is at the root of many problems that girls and women face throughout their lives. It not only limits their opportunities in education and employment, but also enhances their risk of facing violence. Studies have found a significant connection between child marriage and gender-based violence. Child brides also face a heightened risk of childbirth-related deaths. Currently, the maternal mortality ratio in Bangladesh stands at 115 deaths per 100,000 live births. Preventing child marriage could help reduce this ratio considerably. We have ample laws and regulations in place to do so. Why, then, are we failing to do it?

To effectively combat this scourge, it is crucial to understand why parents choose to marry off their daughters at a young age. While poverty remains a major driver, lack of awareness and societal pressure also contribute to the prevalence of child marriage. Alarmingly, many parents secretly arrange these marriages despite being aware of the legal consequences. For instance, between July 2021 and June 2022, some 88 child marriages were stopped at the Tala upazila of Satkhira, but 65 of these later took place in secret. This highlights the immense challenges in stopping this trend.

Against this backdrop, there is no alternative to sustained action from the authorities. They must strictly enforce existing laws and expand awareness campaigns nationwide. The harmful effects of child marriage should also be integrated into school curriculum to educate students. It is equally important to create jobs and financially support marginalised communities so that families don't feel pressured to marry off their daughters early. Since 18 is the minimum legal age for marriage, the authorities must enforce this standard at any cost.

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EDITORIAL

CAMERAS IN THE COURT

A step towards transparency or trial by media?



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On June 1, a historic moment unfolded in Bangladesh's justice system. For the first time, the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) allowed a live television broadcast of its proceedings, marking a bold step towards judicial transparency. The hearing involved the submission of formal charges against former President Hosni Mubarak's trial backfired, with the iconic image of him lying on a hospital gurney inside a cage overshadowing the legal substance of

to question the tribunal's legitimacy. For some observers, the televised trial of Saddam Hussein in Iraq appeared more as a spectacle of humiliation than a genuine pursuit of justice. Egypt's decision to televise former President Hosni Mubarak's trial backfired, with the iconic image of him lying on a hospital gurney inside a cage overshadowing the legal substance of

This development follows the recent insertion of Section 9A into the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973, which empowers the tribunal to record and broadcast its proceedings under conditions that safeguard the safety, dignity, and privacy of participants. While the move has been widely welcomed as a stride towards accountability, it also raises critical questions: can justice truly be served in front of a camera? Or does the lens risk turning legal proceedings into spectacles?

There is no doubt that transparency strengthens trust in the judiciary. Bangladesh's legal system, like many others, has often been accused of opacity, inefficiency, and undue influence. By allowing the public to witness courtroom proceedings, the ICT opens its doors to scrutiny and, potentially, greater legitimacy. For a country grappling with past atrocities and democratic backsliding, such openness can provide catharsis and help restore public confidence.

Moreover, Bangladesh joins a growing number of jurisdictions embracing camera access in courtrooms. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) set an early precedent by televising high-profile trials, most notably those of former leaders Slobodan Milošević and Radovan Karadžić, both of whom were accused of human rights violations and war crimes. The goal was to educate the public, honour the victims, and demonstrate that no one is above the law.

However, the international experience also provides cautionary tales. In some cases, the courtroom turned into a stage. Milošević used the broadcast to promote his political agenda, while Karadžić employed it

the proceedings. Consequently, the presiding judge reversed his decision to televise the proceedings after the first day, citing the need to protect the public interest.

The core problem lies in the performative risk of broadcasting. While the public has the right to observe justice being done, there is a danger that justice may be swayed—if not by the camera, then by its audience. Witnesses may feel intimidated or reluctant. Judges and lawyers may alter their demeanour, consciously or subconsciously. And worst of all, public perception may be shaped not by legal reasoning but by dramatic moments clipped, edited, and circulated in the media.

The media landscape of Bangladesh presents an added layer of complexity:

It is diverse but often deeply polarised. While some outlets strive for responsible journalism, others may be tempted to sensationalise the trial proceedings for viewership or political mileage. In this climate, live broadcasts risk misinterpretation, with legal nuances lost amid headlines and soundbites.

How, then, can we balance the need for openness with the imperatives of fairness and dignity?

One approach is to adopt a filtered broadcast model, wherein selected portions of proceedings, especially those of public significance, are recorded and aired with contextual explanations. This mirrors practices at the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the ICTY, where full proceedings are recorded but public access is

subtles in trial broadcasts. Given that proceedings are conducted in Bangla, this would significantly expand accessibility for the international legal community and human rights observers. Bangladesh has long sought recognition for its commitment to justice, particularly in prosecuting international crimes; making such trials intelligible to global audiences would reinforce its credibility.

Importantly, the media must recognise its pivotal role. Journalistic freedom carries with it an ethical duty: to report accurately, explain legal developments with care, and avoid prejudging outcomes. Justice is a solemn process. The press must resist the temptation to exploit courtroom moments for clickbait or partisan narratives. Instead, it should help build



This screengrab from a live broadcast shows International Crimes Tribunal Chief Prosecutor Tajul Islam reading out the charges against former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and others at the tribunal on June 1, 2025.

managed carefully. Such an approach safeguards the interests of victims and witnesses, avoids disruption, and provides the public with a coherent understanding of complex legal arguments.

The ICT in Bangladesh should consider developing detailed protocols for courtroom recording and media coverage taking guidance from the practice of international courts. These may include restrictions on camera angles, identity protection for vulnerable witnesses, and codes of conduct for journalists. The goal should not be to censor, but to ensure that courtroom decorum is maintained and that proceedings are not prejudiced by external pressures.

Another practical and meaningful reform would be the inclusion of English

a more informed, legally literate society.

As for the International Crimes Tribunal, the live streamed hearing on June 1 was indeed a milestone. But whether this becomes a catalyst for enduring transparency or a cautionary tale of overexposure will depend on what follows. The tribunal should proceed with measured caution, learning from both global best practices and its own experience. The stakes are too high to risk turning justice into a performance.

Public trust in the judiciary cannot be manufactured through media optics alone. It must be earned through consistent fairness, rigorous legal reasoning, and above all, the assurance that justice is not only done, but done with dignity. Cameras may aid that mission, but only if guided by principles.

To be heard, workers need trade unions



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In a fast-changing economy like Bangladesh, the manufacturing sectors, especially RMG, underpin growth and integration into global value chains, playing a pivotal role. They employ millions, support rural-to-urban migration, and anchor the nation in global markets. Yet, beneath the clang of machines and the glow of economic progress lies a sobering reality: the persistent struggle of workers to have their voices heard and their rights protected.

Amid rising productivity and industrial expansion, many factory workers continue to operate in environments where fair wages, basic benefits, and workplace safety remain aspirations rather than realities.

They need functional trade unions, which, at their core, are instruments of collective bargaining. A properly operating trade union empowers workers to negotiate collectively for fair pay, reasonable working hours, and safer working conditions. When active and functional, unions play a transformative role, not only by improving individual livelihoods but also by fostering a more equitable and accountable labour market.

More than just wage negotiators, unions can influence workplace policies and secure non-wage benefits such as occupational safety, paid leave, access

to healthcare, and effective grievance mechanisms. At their best, they cultivate a culture of dialogue, ensuring that economic progress does not come at the cost of exploitation.

As a labour abundant country that relies heavily on low-cost production, Bangladesh has specialised in labour-intensive manufactured exports, particularly RMG products. While globalisation and increased labour market flexibility have been expected to boost workers' agency, the reality has been more complex. Fragmented contracts, widespread subcontracting, and high rates of informal employment have diluted workers' ability to assert their rights. Informal employment, which dominates the Bangladeshi labour market, is typically linked with lower productivity, depressed wages, limited social protection, and heightened vulnerability to poverty.

The case for trade unions is not ideological, it is pragmatic. Global evidence shows that unionised workplaces not only deliver better economic outcomes but also create safer, more equitable environments by aligning practices with national and international labour standards.

Unionised settings often offer fairer conditions—reasonable hours, anti-discrimination protections, and a voice in workplace decisions—ultimately

benefiting both workers and firms.

In Bangladesh, unions often advocate for a living wage that supports a decent standard of living, including food, housing, education, healthcare, transport, and savings for emergencies. Importantly, the benefits of union activity often extend beyond union members. Spillover effects help raise labour standards across the board, as non-unionised workers in the same factory, or firms in the same supply chain, benefit from improvements initiated through collective bargaining.

Union presence is generally higher in export-oriented industries than in domestic facing sectors. While other export industries, such as leather, show relatively high union coverage, these are mostly combined unions rather than factory-level basic unions. Historically, RMG factory owners have resisted unionisation, slowing growth despite industry expansion. However, the Rana Plaza tragedy in 2013 catalysed change: international pressure spurred a sharp increase in union registrations, supported by legal reforms and advocacy led by development partners like the EU.

Still, the mere presence of trade unions does not guarantee effectiveness. Their impact depends on their ability to engage in genuine collective bargaining, enforce workers' rights, and ensure meaningful improvements in working conditions. In this regard, RMG unions are relatively more active, thanks to the sector's visibility, size, and global scrutiny.

Yet, significant challenges persist in Bangladesh's labour environment. Despite having legal tools like the Labour Act and Labour Rules, union registration remains cumbersome and politicised. Workers organising

unions frequently face intimidation, harassment, or even dismissal. In the informal sector, which encompasses the majority of employment, most workers are excluded from basic labour protection altogether.

Public discourse on labour rights often centres on the RMG sector—and understandably so, given its scale and international importance. But Bangladesh must now turn its attention to other rising industries: light engineering, electronics, plastic, furniture, food processing, and more. These sectors are expanding rapidly, yet labour representation remains weak or non-existent.

In these lesser-monitored sectors, workers are particularly vulnerable, subject to weaker enforcement, lower pay scales, and minimal protections. Without factory-level unions, most lack any structured mechanism to voice concerns or report exploitation. Stronger trade unions, paired with the enforcement of national and international labour standards, are vital for ensuring fair labour practices and sustainable industrial development.

As Bangladesh charts its path towards the upper middle-income status, the voices of its workers must not be left unheard. Ensuring fair wages, safe working conditions, and meaningful representation is not only a question of rights, it is central to building a resilient, future-ready economy. Strengthening trade unionism across all manufacturing sectors requires decisive reforms, employer accountability, and international support. If Bangladesh is to achieve truly inclusive industrial progress, it must place workers' voice and dignity at the heart of its development agenda.

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