

Families of July’s fallen journalists HOW ARE THEY NOW?

“Your movement lasted until July,” says Farhana Islam, “but for us, for our children, our struggle will last until our death.”

MIFTAHUL JANNAT

A year has passed since the country erupted in protests over the quota-reform movement — a wave of demonstrations that soon snowballed into a nationwide uprising. The turmoil that followed claimed many lives, including those of journalists who paid the ultimate price for doing their job. For the families they left behind, the pain did not end with death — it only began.

Every day, the parents, spouses, and children of the martyred journalists wake up to grief. “We are alive physically, but we died that day,” says Md Belayet Hossain, father of Shakil Hossain, a reporter for *Daily Bhorer Awaj*, who was killed in Gazipur on July 18, 2024. “We have nothing left except for tears. Maybe we’ll run out of those too someday, but the void left in our heart will never be filled.”

Shakil’s mother suffered two strokes and has been bed-ridden since her son’s death. She still murmurs, “Won’t Shakil be back? When will I meet him?” Belayet says with a trembling voice, “This old woman still asks me if her Shakil is doing well. I say yes. What else can I say?”

The family filed a case with the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT)



Martyred journalist Mehedi Hasan with his two daughters.



Journalist Tahir Zaman Priyo was shot dead when police opened fire on quota protesters near Science Lab on July 19, 2024.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

last August, but there has been no progress. “I seek justice from the Almighty,” Belayet says, bursting into tears. “But there is also a legal system in Bangladesh. Justice must be delivered to the families of the martyred. I’m old — I want to see the murderers punished before I die.”

He also made a heartfelt appeal for his ailing wife: “I want the government to arrange proper treatment for Shakil’s mother if possible. That is my only demand.”

Hasan Mehedi, a reporter for *Dhaka Times*, was also killed on July 18 during a clash at Jatrabari. His death fractured an entire family. His father, Mosharraf Hossain, has suffered four strokes and continues to battle heart disease. “My medicine costs BDT 10,000 a month,” he says. “Whenever I used to call Mehedi for help, he would send some money instantly. Now that he’s gone, I can’t even buy my medicines on time.”

Mehedi, the family’s only breadwinner, had also been arrested

once before for writing against police misconduct. His father believes his murder was targeted. “He was shot from ten hands away,” he recalls.

The initial case filed by police falsely accused members of opposition parties. After the fall of the previous government, Mehedi’s father appealed to the Golapbagh DC to file a case against 28 individuals. However, Jatrabari Thana OC Faruk Ahmed reportedly dropped five police personnel from the list, and the case ultimately proceeded with 23 accused. But there has been no update since. Repeated attempts by this writer to contact OC Faruk Ahmed were unsuccessful, and police personnel at the station declined to comment on the matter.

Mehedi’s mother Mahmuda Begum sits by her son’s grave every day. “This time last year, he was alive,” she sobs. “Now I only have his photos and his grave.”

Farhana Islam, Mehedi’s widow, is raising their two daughters, just four

and a half years and 18 months old. “My older daughter still looks for her father. Whenever she gets hurt, she starts calling out for him,” she says, in tears. Farhana still awaits justice. “Everyone saw that Mehedi was shot from the No. 25 armoured police vehicle. Is it so hard to find out who was inside and bring them to justice?”

Her grief is further deepened by rifts within the family, stemming from the absence of clear guidelines on how financial aid should be distributed between a martyr’s spouse and parents. “It’s creating problems in families like ours,” she says. “There’s no official circular. In some cases, it’s 50/50; in others, 80/20 — whoever can exert more pressure gets more. The government must establish clear and fair rules.”

She enrolled her older daughter in a local kindergarten, though Mehedi had dreamed of sending her to a top school. “I don’t have the means,” she says. “The monthly allowance promised from the government hasn’t arrived

yet. I’ve only passed SSC, but if the government arranges a job according to my qualifications, I’ll work to secure my daughters’ future.”

Shamsi Ara Jaman, the mother of freelance journalist Tahir Zaman Priyo, is enduring her own version of this nightmare. Priyo’s five-year-old daughter remains deeply traumatised. “She falls ill whenever she sees someone holding a camera or sitting in their father’s lap,” Shamsi Ara says. “She keeps asking where her father’s camera is. Often, she breaks down with a high fever from the shock.”

Her voice falters when she speaks of the loss. “The emptiness in our hearts, it can’t be explained. Those who haven’t gone through this will never understand nor do I have the strength to describe it.”

She also filed a case with the ICT, but like others, waits in limbo. “They keep saying they’re overwhelmed with cases, it might still take several months. But I want to see my son’s killers punished before this government’s term ends,” she says firmly. “Our future seems bleak since my son died, but we haven’t died yet. We want justice, and if more anarchy lies ahead, we are ready to fight it.”

The grief of loss is mirrored in every martyr’s household. Abu Taher Md Turab, a young journalist from Naya Diganta, had been married for just two months when he was killed on July 19. His brother, Abul Ahsan Md Ajraf, recalls how police initially refused to take their case seriously, accepting it only as a general diary entry.

It was on August 19 that the family managed to file a case naming 18 individuals. The ICT is currently handling it, and while two arrests have been made, the rest remain free. “My mother is almost 70 now,” Ajraf says. “All she wants is to see justice for her youngest son before she dies.”

Those who were killed were not just journalists, they were sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers. Their families are now caught in a spiral of grief, financial struggles, and unresolved justice.

“Your movement lasted until July,” says Farhana Islam, “but for us, for our children, our struggle will last until our death.”

Miftahul Jannat is a journalist at The Daily Star.

HOW CITIES FAIL THEIR GIG WORKERS

Insights from Melbourne and Dhaka

LUTFUN NAHAR LATA and ANDREW COPOLOV

The gig economy is rapidly reshaping urban life, yet digital labour platforms fail to provide adequate support to the workers who keep this economy running. According to a recent World Bank report (2023), nearly 435 million people work in the gig economy globally. The total number of gig workers is higher, however, the World Bank report primarily focused on cloud workers. There is a data gap in the gig economy. At a national and global level, we do not really know how many people work in the gig economy. According to ABC News (2023), nearly 250,000 people work in the gig economy in Australia. In Bangladesh, around 800, 000 gig workers are engaged in the gig economy, including 300,000 location-based gig workers and approximately 500,000 cloud or online remote workers, making the country the second-largest online outsourcing destination.

Despite gig workers’ contribution to economic development in Australia and Bangladesh, gig workers are classified as independent workers rather than employees. This classification allows platform companies to avoid providing their workers with access

to essential services such as parking, water, toilets, and battery charging. Due to geographical location and economic differences, the provision of public amenities varies greatly between Dhaka and Melbourne. However, our research demonstrates that gig workers in Australia and Bangladesh experience similar challenges in accessing essential resources which digital labour platforms fail to provide.

Profit for platforms, precarity for workers

From ride-sharing giants like Uber and Pathao to food delivery services such as DoorDash and Menulog, gig platforms depend heavily on urban infrastructure to function. Yet, they take little responsibility for ensuring workers can access the resources they need. This has led to a phenomenon we call ‘parasitic platform urbanism’, where platforms profit from cities’ existing services without contributing to their maintenance or expansion.

The consequences are visible on the streets. When we asked delivery riders in Melbourne about the kind of amenities they would like greater access to, many focused on toilets. Chitapanya, a 25-year-old Thai food delivery rider working in Melbourne, said:



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN/ THE DAILY STAR

“Toilets are most important and there should be more of them around. They have toilets in parks, but they’re all locked”.

This statement suggests that public amenities are insufficient for the needs of those working in the street at night. Similarly, Uber drivers in Dhaka pointed out how the lack of public toilets negatively impacted their health:

“I do not drink enough water when I drive. As there are not many public toilets and public parking available in Dhaka city, it’s hard to find a toilet. Also, we can’t go to toilet if we have a customer. But it has impacted my health now. I have diabetes now” (Riad, Uber driver).

In Dhaka, Uber drivers often face police harassment due to a lack of designated parking. In Melbourne, food delivery riders struggle to find safe places to rest or charge their devices, particularly at night. Fast food restaurant chains offer some respite, but here delivery riders feel shrivelled and often unwelcome. Drevan, a food delivery rider based in Melbourne, highlighted the value of

having somewhere to exchange information.

“It would be nice to have a space to discuss where is busy, and any incidents that have occurred, with other delivery drivers”.

The desire for a space to share advice and socialise was common among respondents, illustrating the potential of any dedicated rider amenity to also act as a social space. The above daily hurdles experienced by gig workers expose a growing gap in urban planning, as cities have yet to adapt to the demands of the gig workforce.

Who should be held responsible?

Based on our research findings, we call for greater accountability from platform companies, urging them to share the burden of maintaining urban infrastructure. While local governments typically manage public resources like parking and sanitation. We also suggest that digital platforms should contribute financially to developing infrastructure that directly supports their workers.

In Melbourne, some city officials have

shown interest in addressing the parking needs of rideshare and delivery drivers. However, in Dhaka, no such interest has been shown. Within this context, we argue that policymakers must recognise the increasing role of gig workers in the urban economy and take action accordingly.

Ensuring fair work: The need for policy reform

One potential solution is extending occupational health and safety laws to cover gig workers. For example, regulations ensuring employees access to clean drinking water should also apply to delivery riders and rideshare drivers. Additionally, expanding public amenities such as more bike lanes, accessible rest areas and additional public toilets with extended hours would improve working conditions for gig workers.

We further warn that unless governments and unions hold platforms accountable, the burden of accessing essential amenities will continue to fall on workers. A lack of public investment in infrastructure leaves platform workers vulnerable, while cities struggle to manage the consequences of an increasingly digital workforce.

By acknowledging the infrastructural needs of gig workers, cities can move towards

“Toilets are most important and there should be more of them around. They have toilets in parks, but they’re all locked”



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS / THE DAILY STAR

a more sustainable and equitable urban future - one where public amenities support workers.

Lutfun Nahar Lata, a Senior Lecturer at School of Social and Political Sciences, The University of Melbourne, Email: llata@unimelb.edu.au

Andrew Copolov, a PhD researcher of Art, Design and Architecture, Monash Urban Lab, Monash University, Email: andrew.copolov1@monash.edu