

Jet slams into school, kills 22, mostly children

Toll may rise; around 170 injured, many critically; ISPR says 'mechanical failure' caused BAF training plane to plunge into Uttara school



Firefighters and army personnel conduct a rescue operation on the ground floor of a Milestone School and College building after a fighter jet crashed into it in the capital's Diabari yesterday afternoon, left. A mother cries out in desperation for her child, a student of the school, as the campus is cordoned off for rescue efforts.

PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

WASIM BIN HABIB, MUNTAKIM SAAD and DIPAN NANDY

The final bell had rung.

Dozens of children from the primary section of Milestone School and College in Dhaka, along with their guardians and teachers, lingered inside the two-storey building – some preparing to head home, chatting and winding down from the day.

Suddenly, the bustle turned into chaos.

A Bangladesh Air Force training jet plunged from the sky and slammed into the school's Diabari campus in Uttara around 1:30pm yesterday. The aircraft burst into flames on impact, killing at least 20 people, including the pilot, and injuring over 170 others, according to data provided by the Inter Service Public Relations (ISPR) around 5:30pm.

Before I could process anything, I saw children running toward me... fire spreading. I poured water on two or three of them in the washroom. Then another teacher shouted, 'Purnima, get out!'

Purnima Das,
a teacher of the school

the site, visible from a great distance.

The F-7 BGI training jet had struck the front of the building, tearing through concrete walls and iron grilles. The force of the impact drove the aircraft deep into the structure, leaving only the engine's rear end protruding from the mangled wreckage.

A desperate scene unfolded.

Students, their uniforms scorched and skin blistered, stumbled out of the smoke, crying, groaning, and calling for help. Some collapsed on the ground. Others were carried by guardians and seniors, their bodies marked with horrific burns.

The air was thick with smoke, screams, and confusion as residents, firefighters, and army personnel rushed to rescue the injured.



Children were carried on arms, stretchers, and rickshaw-vans, then loaded into ambulances. One harrowing video showed a boy walking with blistered skin. In another, a father sprinted with his wounded daughter cradled in his arms.

The injured were rushed to nearby hospitals and the Combined Military Hospital (CMH), Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Uttara Adhunik Hospital and the burn institute. The air force airlifted many of the critically injured.

Survivors who made it out were shaken.

"You could see the trauma etched on their faces," said one witness at the scene.

Ariful Islam, a first-year HSC student, said, "What happened on the ground floor is beyond description."

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Two of the injured died at the National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery later, taking the toll to 22, Resident Surgeon Shaon Bin Rahman told The Daily Star around midnight.

The toll from what is now the deadliest training aircraft crash in recent memory may rise, as many of the injured remain in critical condition, some with burn injuries covering their entire bodies.

Moments after the impact, fire engulfed several classrooms on the ground floor of the two-storey building. Children were trapped inside. The building housed classrooms for third and fourth grade students on the ground floor, and the room struck by the plane was used for class three.

TV footage from the scene and social media videos showed fire and a thick plume of smoke billowing from

the site, visible from a great distance.

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For students, unto death

Mahreen dies trying to save as many children as she could

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

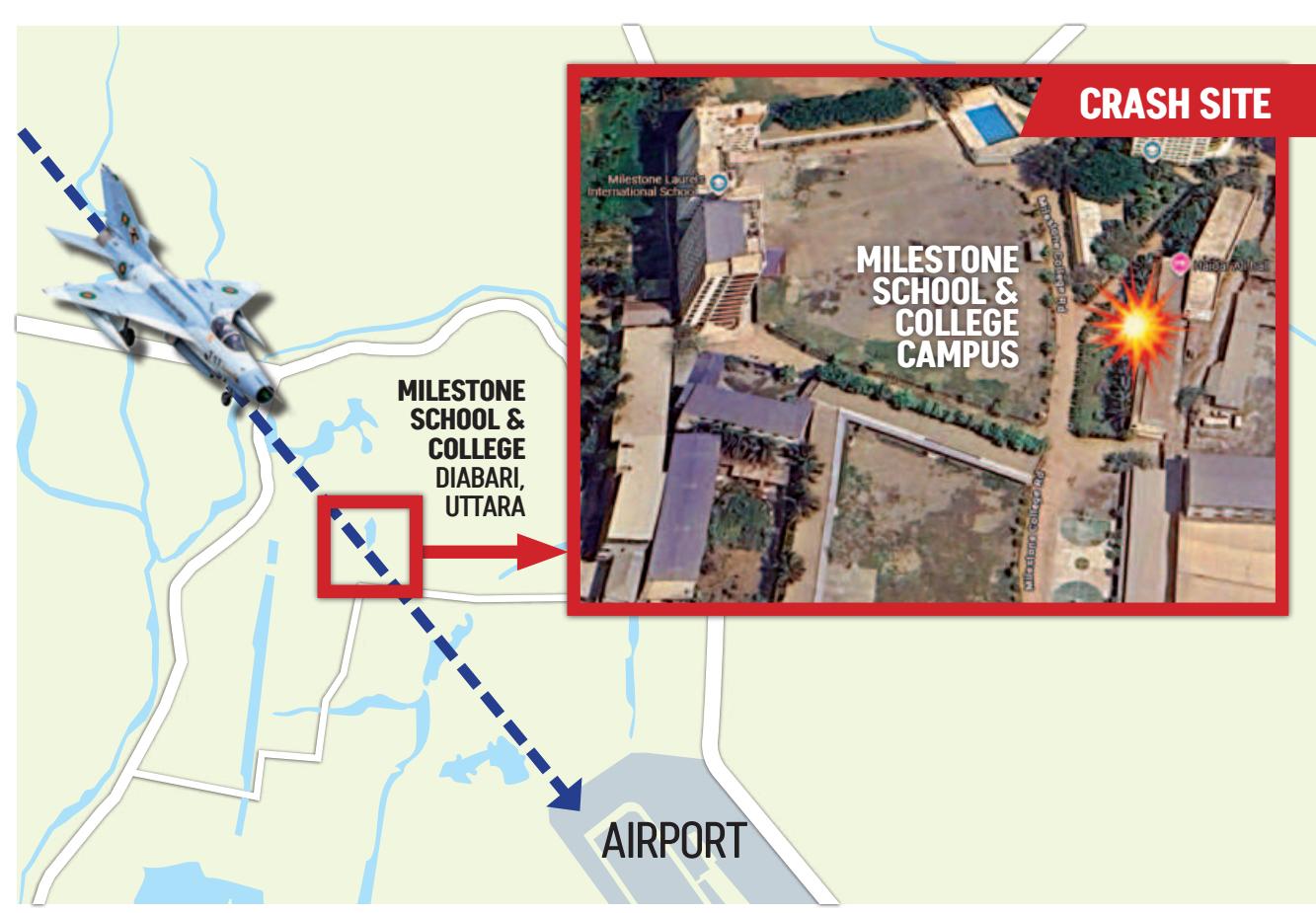


Mahreen Chowdhury, 46, a coordinator of Milestone School and College in Dhaka's Uttara, died yesterday after sustaining 80 percent burns while trying to escort students outside after a Bangladesh Air Force training jet crashed into one of the school buildings.

After fighting for her life for hours on life support at Dhaka Medical College Hospital's ICU, she succumbed to her injuries around 10:00pm.

Before being placed on life support, Mahreen was able to speak briefly with her husband, Monsur Helal. He said, "She told me school had just ended and she was helping the children leave when the plane crashed right outside the gate. Even after being burned herself, she tried to save them."

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'We were ready to go home'

Survivors, parents recount horror as jet crashes into school

SHAHEEN MOLLAH, AHMED DEEPTO and DIPAN NANDY

Barely 300 metres from Milestone School and College, Sharif Ul Anwar Sazzan was waiting for his son Srijon Sattik, a sixth grader, to come out so they could return home for lunch.

"My daughter and I were waiting when we saw what looked like a ball of fire in one of the school buildings."

Tragedy struck yesterday afternoon when a Bangladesh Air Force F-7 training jet crashed into the ground floor of a two-storey building on the school campus.

As of 11:40pm, 22 people, including the pilot and several students, were reported dead. Around 170 were injured, and many remained missing.

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NOTICE

In respect of the national day of mourning for the victims of the Milestone School and College tragedy, we are withholding this Tuesday's Lifestyle issue. Lifestyle will be published on Wednesday July 23.



NATION NUMB WITH SHOCK

Condolences pour in; national day of mourning today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has declared today a national day of mourning after an air force jet crashed inside the campus of Milestone College in Uttara, killing 22 people and injuring around 170 others, mostly students. To mark the day, the national flag will be

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Experts question training flights above mega city

RASHIDUL HASAN and ZYMA ISLAM

Aviation experts and pilots, both military and civilian, yesterday questioned the rationale behind allowing military aircraft to conduct training exercises over a densely populated area like Dhaka.

For many of them, it was a grim, 20-kilometre journey from the disaster site in Uttara to the country's top burn hospital in Chankharpool. About 70 people were rushed to the facility, many bearing life-threatening injuries. By yesterday afternoon, it became the epicentre of the crisis, as the most critical cases were transferred from smaller, overwhelmed hospitals in the northern part of the city.

Including these 70, at least 88 burn victims were being treated at seven city hospitals last night, with 25 in critical condition, according to health ministry data.

The crash occurred in the heart of densely populated Uttara, where the aircraft plummeted into a two-storey building of Milestone School and College, just after midday. Parents and guardians, many of whom had just arrived for school pickups, rushed into the unfolding chaos. With no time to wait for emergency responders, they carried the wounded out themselves, doing whatever they could to save lives before ambulances arrived.

Outside the burn institute, the scene was one of barely controlled turmoil. Volunteers struggled to clear paths for ambulances and private vehicles. Many of the victims arrived already swathed in bandages, evidence of hastily administered first aid from smaller clinics. Personnel from Ansar and the Rapid Action Battalion were deployed to manage the crowds and keep emergency entrances accessible.

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Aviation expert Kazi Wahidul Alam said that due to the densely populated nature of Dhaka, flying military training aircraft in the capital is significantly more dangerous compared to other parts of the country where the air force operates its fighter training missions.

"Despite the risks, the air force aircraft continue to use the sole runway at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport," said Alam.

"We have long been demanding the relocation of the air force base near Dhaka airport, as its presence is hampering the operations of commercial airlines at the airport."

A Bangladesh Air Force pilot from the same cohort as that of the deceased pilot, speaking anonymously, said training in such a populated area poses additional

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