

An unspeakable horror

Deadly air force jet crash must bring national reckoning

We are shocked by the horrific tragedy that befell students after a training aircraft of Bangladesh Air Force crashed into the Milestone School and College campus in Uttara on Monday afternoon. As of 8pm, at least 20 have been confirmed dead, including the pilot who was steering the jet. Over the years, there have been quite a few tragedies during such training missions by the air force, but this crash is certainly the deadliest. With about 170 suffering burn injuries in its aftermath, many critically, the death toll seems certain to rise in the coming days.

A tragedy like this demands not only our deepest condolences but also urgent answers and accountability. And the fact that most of the victims are children barely in their teens makes the urgency even more profound. After the crash, our correspondents reported horrifying scenes of panic and devastation both on the spot and at the hospitals, where families were desperately searching for their loved ones. Survivors described moments of sheer terror: flames erupting post-crash, smoke choking the air, and panicked screams echoing down the hallways. According to an eyewitness, the jet struck a two-storey building where primary-level classes are held, with the fire spreading to nearby buildings. Many students and staff were reportedly caught off-guard near the gates as the crash occurred, leaving them exposed to the impact.

Key details are still emerging. The authorities have yet to determine the reasons for the crash, so we will have to wait until investigators reveal what really happened. Many, however, have questioned the rationale for allowing air force training missions so close to residential areas in an overcrowded city, maximising the risk of any crash. In the absence of clear safety buffers, even a minor error or technical failure can lead to catastrophic consequences, as this crash has so painfully demonstrated. In a way, it has also renewed concerns over our aviation safety amid reports of persistent irregularities, with a recent investigation by the CAAB uncovering numerous anomalies in pilot licensing and training programmes. Dhaka's uncontrolled expansion—bringing flight paths dangerously close to densely populated neighbourhoods—is also something we must critically ponder going forward. For now, however, we hope the authorities will conduct a thorough investigation not just into Monday's crash but also the conditions of all trainer jets and safety protocols of the air force.

A tragedy like this must bring a national reckoning. The memory of seeing our children burn and die in such a senseless tragedy will haunt us for a long time. It was, however, heartening to see the frantic rescue and treatment efforts that followed, with volunteers and professionals alike giving their all to help the victims. But going forward, we must take all measures necessary to ensure that such a tragedy never happens again.

Can the world hear the cries in Gaza?

Israel is killing starving Palestinians even when they seek aid

Updates emerging from the Gaza Strip over the past few weeks paint a picture that even someone with a modicum of humanity would struggle to imagine: starving human beings being shot at as they desperately seek food aid. On Sunday, Israeli forces again opened fire on Palestinians crowding around aid trucks, killing at least 93 people and injuring dozens more, according to Gaza's civil defence agency. That these individuals went out hoping to get food and were met with death instead is distressing, to say the least.

The UN World Food Programme said its 25-truck food convoy faced "massive crowds of hungry civilians which came under gunfire" near Gaza City on Sunday. "Hunger makes you desperate," the US-based National Public Radio quoted one of the victims as saying. "I have no food at home. I went out to feed my kids. And this is what happened to me," he said, injured in the head and leg from Israeli tank fire. This cry for help is all too understandable as people continue to die of starvation in Gaza. On Sunday alone, at least 19 deaths from starvation were reported over the previous day, including that of a 35-day-old baby.

Israel, meanwhile, continues to dispute the numbers presented by the Gaza authorities. Regarding Sunday's incident, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) claimed that soldiers fired "warning shots" at the crowds of aid-seekers to "remove an immediate threat posed to them." If these were truly warning shots, how did so many people end up fatally wounded?

Israel has been running its atrocious campaign in Gaza by weaponising hunger for weeks. In March, it blocked aid from entering the strip. That blockade lasted 11 weeks before it was finally lifted "following pressure from its allies," according to a BBC report. But while Israel eventually allowed aid trucks into Gaza, it started killing those seeking the aid. The UN recently reported that at least 875 aid-seekers were killed at aid distribution points, and along or near the routes of aid convoys, between late May and July 13.

This is a blatant display of disregard for both human rights and international law. What's worse is that Israel is getting away with it while the world watches in silence. How much more must the people of Gaza suffer before they are saved? If world leaders truly stand for humanity, they must come together to stop Israel from continuing its inhuman campaign in Gaza.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Pablo Escobar escapes prison

On this day in 1992, Colombian drug trafficker Pablo Escobar escaped from police custody as he faced transfer from La Catedral, a luxurious prison that he had built, to a more secure facility. He remained a fugitive until December 1993, when he was killed during a shootout with law enforcement.



Who is India pushing into Bangladesh?



Kamal Ahmed is head of the Media Reform Commission in Bangladesh and an independent journalist. His X handle is @ahmedkal.

KAMAL AHMED

July 16 was a special day this year. On this day, we observed July Martyrs Day for the first time, marking the ultimate sacrifices made by heroes like Abu Sayed and Md Wasim Akrum. Yet, while we remained focused on post-uprising efforts to rebuild the state through forging political consensus and reforming institutions, our border management seemingly slipped into disarray.

On July 17, Bangladeshi media reported that the day before, India had pushed 55 individuals across the border at four locations in Sylhet and Sunamganj. Citing Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) sources, the report noted that these push-ins happened between 4am and 1pm.

The cumulative number of individuals forcibly pushed into Bangladesh may have already exceeded 2,000. Foreign Affairs Adviser M Touhid Hossain acknowledged that such incidents persist despite the existence of formal mechanisms between the two countries for verifying and returning nationals. "There is a prescribed process between the two countries to identify and take back citizens through the exchange of verified lists. Any push-in that circumvents this process is a clear violation of the rules," he said. While he confirmed that Bangladesh had recently accepted several citizens under this framework, he urged India to be consistent in adhering to the agreed-upon procedure.

Perhaps none of this is surprising. Earlier, on a separate occasion, the adviser admitted that push-ins were taking place, though he argued that physically resisting them was not a practical option.

This response seems entirely out of sync with the reality on the ground. One is left wondering whether our foreign ministry is even fully aware of the growing outrage among Bangalee politicians in India over these forced deportations. In BJP-governed states and at the national level, Bangla-speaking individuals—many of whom are Indian citizens—are increasingly being harassed and pushed across the border into Bangladesh. This issue has been festering for some time and is now reaching a critical point, especially in West Bengal.

In West Bengal, on July 16, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee led a protest march in Kolkata. Speaking at



In India, Bangla-speaking individuals—many of whom are Indian citizens—are increasingly being harassed and pushed across the border into Bangladesh.

FILE PHOTO: AFP

the rally, she declared, "I have decided to speak more in Bangla from now on. Hold me in detention camps if you can," in direct defiance of the BJP's stance.

Banerjee highlighted that nearly 22 lakh Indian Bangalee migrant workers are employed across India and hold valid documents, including Aadhaar, Voter ID, and PAN (Permanent Account Number). "What right does the BJP have to harass Bangalees, arresting them and pushing them into Bangladesh? Is West Bengal not part of India?" she demanded the answer.

This was not her first public criticism of the Modi government's treatment of Bangla-speakers. On June 16, in the West Bengal State Assembly, she condemned the Maharashtra government for allegedly deporting individuals solely based on their use of the Bangla language, branding them arbitrarily as "Bangladeshis."

In a recent incident, three Bangalee migrant workers were deported to Bangladesh only to be returned to

India following an intervention by her administration.

In Bangladesh, several media outlets have reported detailed cases in which individuals pushed in by the Indian authorities were not Bangladeshis but Indian citizens and even Rohingya refugees who had sought shelter in India. Such practices are not only devoid of decency but also constitute

retaliating—a stance that should continue. But the continued mistreatment of Bangla-speaking individuals and the forced deportation of Indian citizens under the guise of identifying "illegal immigrants" must be firmly rejected.

It is time to consider reactivating a strategy that once proved effective: the push-back policy. Between 2003

serious breaches of international human rights and humanitarian law. Expelling one's own citizens to another country, or forcibly deporting refugees fleeing wars and persecution, violates fundamental norms and is a rare thing.

Although the foreign ministry in Bangladesh has sent multiple official communications to the Indian authorities, these textbook diplomatic measures have yielded little progress. The reality is that such tactics are unlikely to be effective in the near future, particularly given the electoral stakes in India. With crucial state assembly elections looming in West Bengal and Assam—states where Bangla-speaking and minority communities typically vote against the BJP—the ruling party appears to be exploiting nationalist sentiment for political gain.

While credible allegations exist of Indian interference in Bangladesh's internal politics over the years, Bangladesh has refrained from

and 2005, the then Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), predecessor to the BGB, implemented this approach, resulting in India's Border Security Force (BSF) to cease push-ins. The BSF resumed these actions at an alarming rate only in recent months.

The BGB must now be instructed to not only resist any unauthorised push-ins but also to return individuals who are forcibly sent across, swiftly and decisively, using any available border points. Such actions would send a strong, unambiguous message to New Delhi: that Bangladesh expects adherence to international norms, including the verification of citizenship at the point of detection and repatriation through proper consular cooperation.

The current situation is not merely a matter of diplomatic formality; it is about national dignity, human rights, and the protection of our sovereignty. A principled, firm and lawful response is not just justified—it is urgently required.

The Gopalganj killings and the peril of impunity



Maj (retd) Md Badrul Alam Siddiqui, PhD is head of operations at Millennium Certis Security Bangladesh Ltd. He can be reached at siddiqui1964@gmail.com.

MD BADRUL ALAM SIDDIQUI

The names of the dead in Gopalganj—Dipto Saha, Ramzan Munshi, Sohel Mollah, Ramzan Kazi, Imon—are bound to haunt the conscience of new Bangladesh. They were not political leaders or armed combatants; they were ordinary citizens stuck in a firestorm of political violence. Yet, the most damning story is not just how they died, but how they were buried. In the chaotic aftermath of the clashes on July 16, four victims were laid to rest "without inquest or post-mortem examination," a shocking abdication of legal duty that threatens to entomb the truth along with them. This is more than a procedural failure; it is a foundational crisis for a state forged in protest against impunity.

The failure to perform autopsies creates a black hole of accountability. A post-mortem is the state's first and most essential tool for answering the cardinal question in any violent death: who is responsible? It can determine the type of bullet used and, through ballistics, potentially link it to a

specific weapon. Without this "vital piece of evidence," as Supreme Court lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua described it, the chances of identifying who fired the fatal shots are drastically reduced. The official explanation that "an unruly mob forcibly removed the bodies" from the hospital to prevent autopsies seems like an admission of the state's loss of control. It raises an even more disturbing question: why did a hospital holding the primary evidence of a multiple-homicide case have inadequate security?

This evidentiary vacuum is made darker by the cloud of official contradictions. On the one hand, the inspector general of police asserted that his officers did not use "lethal weapons." On the other hand, the Inter-Services Public Relations Directorate (ISPR) acknowledged that its troops used "force in self-defence" but made no mention of gunfire or casualties. With at least nine people suffering from gunfire wounds, legal rights group Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK)

asked the question on everyone's mind: who fired these shots? In the absence of forensic proof, the conflicting statements from the authorities deflect responsibility, making way for rumours and speculation and deepening public distrust. A similar thing happened with the death of Abu Sayed, the first martyr of the anti-discrimination movement. His killing

The human cost of this failure is immense and ongoing. The families of the victims are left not only with grief but with a thorny path to justice. As Jyotirmoy Barua warned, if they wish to file a case, they may now face the 'traumatic hurdle' of having to 'exhume the bodies for autopsies.'

on July 16, 2024 was followed by a brazen state-led cover-up.

The then-government of Sheikh Hasina attempted to muddy the waters with false narratives of brickbats and rubber bullets. More damningly, they waged a war on the truth itself. As detailed in later reports, the forensic physician at Rangpur Medical College was pressured and threatened into

altering the autopsy findings six times, each version designed to obscure the simple fact that Abu Sayed was killed by police birdshot. The previous regime's crime was to corrupt the evidence.

Now, the methods differ, but does that matter when the outcome is identical? In both instances, justice is obstructed at its source. In both cases, impunity was hatched, even though the interim rose to power on the promise of accountability.

The human cost of this failure is immense and ongoing. The families of the victims are left not only with grief but with a thorny path to justice. As Jyotirmoy Barua warned, if they wish to file a case, they may now face the "traumatic hurdle" of having to "exhume the bodies for autopsies." It is cruel forcing families to choose between letting the truth remain buried or disturbing the final rest of their loved ones.

The government has formed a committee to investigate the violence. But this inquiry will be meaningless if it cannot answer the questions the missing autopsies left unanswered. Its primary task must be to cut through the official obfuscation and establish a clear chain of command and action for the security forces on that day. The new Bangladesh cannot be built on the foundations of the old regime's practices. To allow that is to betray the very mass uprising that brought on this new Bangladesh.