

# How AI can help in disasters like the Milestone crash



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I was born and raised in Dhaka, where I spent the first 25 years of my life before moving to the US in 2015. Today, I work as a research assistant professor at the University of Oklahoma and serve as part of a research group, whose mission is to develop safer, more efficient aircraft through AI, digital twin technologies, and predictive maintenance. We work on reducing production costs, improving airworthiness, and minimising material waste.

When I heard about the FT-7 BGI jet crash into Milestone School and College in Dhaka's Uttara on July 21, 2025, which killed at least 32 people—including the pilot, teachers, and many young students—and injured over 150, I wasn't shocked. I was devastated, but not surprised.

Dhaka is one of the most overcrowded cities in the world, with a population density of about 23,234 citizens per square kilometre. Despite being the capital, it lacks proper zoning plans for sensitive infrastructure such as military air bases. The Kurmitola air base, from where the aircraft took off, is surrounded by densely packed residential areas and schools. When a malfunction occurred, there was simply

air traffic control, and implementing AI for predictive monitoring.

In FY2024-25, the proposed defense budget in Bangladesh was Tk 42,010 crore. Over the years, it has purchased various aircraft; for instance, the FT-7 BGI jet involved in today's crash is an upgraded variant of the Soviet-era MiG-21, with Bangladesh acquiring 16 such aircraft from China between 2011 and 2013. But buying hardware alone doesn't ensure safety. Advanced systems require equally advanced maintenance, simulation, infrastructure, and disaster preparedness—all of which Bangladesh often struggles to adequately provide.

Even superpowers like the US and China are shifting toward AI and digital twin solutions to reduce costs. If they're investing in smarter systems to minimise spending and maximise safety, it's clear that Bangladesh must do the same—not as an option, but as a necessity.

Too often we focus solely on avoiding disaster. But we must also ask: what happens if a crash does occur?

Take the example of India's Air India Flight 171 crash on June 12, 2025. This Boeing 787 Dreamliner went down just 32 seconds after

systems in critical areas—but they're not always standard or accessible in countries like Bangladesh.

In Dhaka's crash, victims burned to death inside the school. There was no immediate disaster management response. Metro Rail was used to transport victims four hours after the incident—with only one coach allocated. Ambulances were stuck in traffic. Nearby rickshaws and private cars often refused to

coordination. Government investment in such AI-based disaster protocols could dramatically reduce fatalities—not just in plane crashes, but in fires, industrial accidents, and floods.

Globally, military flight tests occur in remote, spacious zones. In the US, bases like Edwards Air Force Base cover thousands of acres for flight testing. China frequently conducts air drills in its vast airspace, including coastal zones like Shandong. Even India tests

manufacturing, and infrastructure can lay the foundation for smart, adaptive systems. Local industries should be encouraged to produce essential components and intelligent technologies, which would simultaneously create jobs in fields such as predictive analytics, aerospace simulation, and disaster modelling. To support this ecosystem, a national disaster coordination network powered by AI is essential. Key policy recommendations include



VISUAL: MONOROM POLOK

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nowhere safe for the pilot to go.

Even in the US, with its advanced infrastructure, similar disasters have occurred. Earlier this year, on January 29, a mid-air collision over the Potomac River near Washington, DC, between an American Airlines regional jet and a US Army Black Hawk helicopter tragically claimed all 67 lives aboard both aircraft. But such events are typically followed by systemic changes—strengthening flight corridors, improving

takeoff from Ahmedabad, en route to London, killing 260 of the 261 people on board and others on the ground when it impacted a medical hostel complex. While investigations are ongoing, initial findings point to mid-air engine failure. If onboard systems were designed to delay fire spread by even 2-3 minutes after such an event, many lives might have been saved. Today, technologies exist—such as advanced flame retardant cabin materials and automatic fire suppression

help. In that critical golden hour, most of the children who died could potentially have been saved.

Imagine a future where an AI system immediately classifies an incident's severity—from Level 1 (minor) to Level 3 (severe)—based on casualty estimates, proximity to medical facilities, traffic congestion, and emergency response availability. Based on this, the system could: i) notify hospitals, fire stations, and police within seconds; ii) activate metro rail or ferry systems to serve as emergency transport; iii) block traffic routes in real time, just as roads are cleared for VIPs today; and iv) command nearby private vehicles to assist in transport—with government compensation issued later via digital tracking.

Even rickshaws and CNGs could be part of a national emergency fleet with built-in GPS

aircraft over remote desert or mountainous zones.

Bangladesh, however, uses the skies above Dhaka—one of the most densely populated cities in the world—for its flight training. This must change. Future bases should be relocated to less populated regions, with enforced flight corridors and emergency landing zones. It's not just about modern aircraft; it's about responsible geography.

Bangladesh is not resource-rich, but it is youth-rich, with 33 percent of its population aged between 18 and 35, many of whom are enrolled in STEM programmes. Rather than continuing to import costly and difficult-to-maintain foreign equipment, the country should prioritise investing in AI education and workforce development. Building national digital twin platforms for aviation,

adopting digital twin technology for military aircraft maintenance, mandating fire-resistant interiors and delay-suppression systems in aircraft and public buildings, and establishing AI-based disaster response systems with real-time communication and routing capabilities. Moreover, redesigning flight zones to avoid dense urban centres, incentivising the use of private and public vehicles during emergencies, and using AI to model urban vulnerabilities and guide dynamic zoning policies would collectively strengthen national resilience.

The crash in Dhaka was tragic. But if it becomes just another event on a long list of avoidable disasters, then we are complicit in the next one. As a Bangladeshi-born researcher working to make aircraft safer, I believe the answer lies not in outrage—but in AI-driven transformation.

## The spectacle of suffering



**MIND THE GAP**  
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It was a mirror. And what stared back was not humanity—it was narcissism in high definition.

Let the dead rest. Let the living recover. And for once, let us ask: what have we become, if even in the presence of unimaginable sorrow, we can't tear our eyes away from our own reflection?

And if that's too hard, then at the

Then came the civilians. The onlookers. The republic of curiosity. Ladies bringing kids to "see the wreckage," uncles parking bikes across emergency entrances. Influencers "standing with Milestone" while pouting next to a crumbling wall of ash. There is no shame anymore—only captions.

Where were the police? Either shouting into megaphones no one listened to, or clearing space for the very important nobodies. Because apparently, nothing says "respect for the dead" like livestreaming over their ashes. We didn't just fail the victims—we trampled over families in our mad rush to be seen caring. When did grief become performance

art? When did loss need an audience? We've turned human suffering into a genre. We binge-watch tragedy in 30-second clips and scroll past death like yesterday's meme. Our response to national trauma isn't reform—it's content creation.

The only thing louder than the sirens was the echo of "like, share, subscribe." So, here's a humble request: the next time a tragedy strikes, stay home. Donate blood. Send supplies. Pray, if that's your thing. But please—resist the urge to narrate someone else's final moments like it's a story you own. Nothing is too small; if possible, do this: fundraise for skin grafts, share verified donation links,

demand accountability (why were children learning under a flight path?), advocate for real emergency reform. Listen. Sit with the silence. Let mourning belong to those who lost, not those who want to be seen losing something. You are not the protagonist of this pain. No one needs your analysis, your selfie, or your sorrow in cinematic colour grading; no need to further political agendas in instances like this. Sometimes the most human thing you can do is: *nothing*. And when smoke fills the sky again—and it will—rush in with oxygen, not opinions. Because this country cannot afford another disaster made worse by those who mistake visibility for value.



Curious onlookers added to the chaos of the catastrophe that hit the Milestone School and College on July 21 by delaying ambulances and jamming hallways and entrance to ICUs.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

There are no words large enough to hold the weight of what happened at Milestone School and College. No vocabulary invented by man can hold the shape of a classroom of children crushed under a falling sky. Some dreams were silenced mid-sentence. Others never got the chance to begin. Mothers ran barefoot into fire. Fathers dug with their hands. There are families right now who have forgotten how to breathe.

And yet—somehow—in the thick of this unthinkable grief, people found the space to pose. To post. To perform. Welcome to my city, where catastrophe is content, a clout-chasing opportunity dressed in black.

The building was still smouldering. Parents were clawing at hospital gates, desperate for news. Burn victims were arriving faster than doctors could respond. And instead of silence, we got flashes. Instead of support, we got soundbites. The cameras came before the counsellors.

The fire hadn't even stopped licking the flesh off children when the swarm arrived. Not doctors. Not trauma specialists. But the three horsemen of public dysfunction: politicians, journalists, and spectators. Each with one goal—visibility.

Not all came with malice, but many came with ego. As if grief by proximity grants relevance. As if being seen grieving is more important than allowing others the space to do so. The result? Chaos. Ambulances delayed. Hallways jammed. And the children—those who survived—had to endure not just the ordeal, but the noise of a country addicted to its own reflection.

At the National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery, staff pleaded—begged—for crowds to move aside so patients with third-degree burns could be attended to. These weren't just injuries—they were open doors to infection. Burn victims are among the most vulnerable patients in medicine: their skin, the body's first defense,

is gone. Their immune systems are compromised. They need sterile rooms, filtered air, antibiotics, and oxygen. What they got was breathless onlookers with dusty phones blocking the way for ventilators, touching stretchers, and flooding corridors. Onlookers who never thought that some child survivors could be infected by their very act of "witnessing" the survivors' pain.

We are no longer a grieving nation. We are a ghoulish, camera-happy circus addicted to the sound of our own concern. Everyone wants a piece of the pain. Everyone wants their frame in the frame. Even if it means kneeling beside corpses. Even if it means blocking an intensive care unit entrance to adjust your angle. There is something fundamentally broken in us if we cannot draw the line at a child's charred body. If we cannot sit still in the face of horror. If we cannot mourn without narrating our empathy. This wasn't just a tragedy.

very least—move. Get out of the way. Let the real heroes in.

One VVIP arrived with the poise of someone attending a ribbon-cutting. Another posed in front of the debris, eyebrows furrowed just enough for the camera—before blocking stretcher access for a better shot. "Important people are passing," his entourage declared, as nurses screamed for space. No one batted an eyelid. We've normalised stupidity to the point it now wears a press badge or rides in a convoy.

Journalists combed through the scene like it was a fruit market. Zooming in on half-melted schoolbags. Shoving microphones into the blood-streaked faces of children. One reporter asked a grieving mother how she felt—as if "devastated" needed confirmation on tape. When the woman couldn't speak, the reporter narrated: "She is too emotional to speak"—before shifting left for better lighting.

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e-Tender Notice (OTM) :01/2025-2026

Memo No: 46.02.1200.000.07.054.25-1705

Date: 23-07-2025

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of the work stated below:

Tender ID	Package No & Description	Last selling Date and Time	Closing Date and Time	Opening Date and Time
1132624	CCB/B/M-26 & Periodic Maintenance (Rehabilitation) of Dharmondal UP Office-(Kalogonj Bazar) - Marakuri Bazar Road from Ch. 00-8000m. [Road ID No. 412903003] [Nasirnagar] [Brahmanbaria] [Salvage Materials Cost: Tk. 29,37,839.00]	17-Aug-2025 16:00	18-Aug-2025 13:00	18-Aug-2025 13:00

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender shall be accepted in the National e-GP portal and no offline/hard copies shall be accepted.

To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

The fees for downloading the e-Tender Documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered Banks branches.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>).

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