

Eyes on July, scars for life



PHOTO: K M ASAD

There's a silence that settles in when the shouting ends and when the camera finally rests. But for the photojournalists who stood in the eye of July's storm, that silence is anything but peaceful. These are not just men with cameras. They are the reluctant custodians in a country where truth is often unwelcome. Through almost shattered spirits and bloodied pavements, they documented one of the most chilling chapters in Bangladesh's recent memory. What they witnessed didn't just make headlines, it left scars.

The human behind the viewfinder

K M Asad, an award-winning freelance photojournalist, has covered tragedies from the Rana Plaza to Cyclone Sidr, including the Rohingya crisis. But nothing, he says, quite prepared him for this. On 16 July, as shots rang out near Dhaka Medical College, Asad found himself staring at a child who had just been gunned down.

He wasn't ready. No one ever is. "Still

now, that moment haunts me," he says.

Like most of his peers, Asad wrestled with the duality of his role: human first, journalist second — or the other way round? When grieving parents begged for help, he felt helpless. When hospitals overflowed with bodies, he froze.

"I always ask myself—am I doing the right thing? But if we don't capture these moments, who will?"

Grief in shutter speed

For Ibrahim Khalil Ibu, a multimedia journalist at the Daily Star who covered multiple flashpoints across the city, it was a pink shirt that stuck. The young man wearing it — shot dead in front of him — was



K M Asad

helping others just moments before. "He was alive, smiling, giving out water. Then a gunshot—and he was gone."

The pink shirt isn't just a memory. It's a marker of how quickly life became death that month. And for journalists like Ibu, death was not abstract. It was immediate. It had a name. A face. A scream.

Rampura. Jatrabari. Shahbagh. The names became shorthand for carnage.

But the toll didn't end with the field.

"My trauma responded after months," he admits. "One day I was sleeping at night in my room, and out of nowhere, I started hearing slogans by protesters, gunshots, sound effects — in

my sleep. Even while working, somewhere in the back of my mind, the whole scene is still playing."

Trauma as an unpaid assignment

Md Samsul Alam Hady, a photojournalist at UNB, didn't file a single photo. Not because he wasn't there — he was everywhere — but because he couldn't. What haunted him wasn't the image, but the sound. A father saying "Innalillahi..." after learning, over a borrowed phone, that his son had died. That call, Hady says, broke something in him.

"I didn't touch my camera for weeks," he admits. "I'd wake up to screams in my sleep. Even now, I leave the room when people start talking about July. I can't hear it again."

His words echo a deeper truth: what these journalists witnessed was not just violence. It was a collapse of something more fundamental—hope, perhaps, or the illusion that this country would spare its own children.



Ibrahim Khalil Ibu



PHOTO: IBRAHIM KHALIL IBU