



A group of protesters injured during the July Uprising staged a sit-in at the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR) in November 2024. They demanded proper treatment and the swift release of funds.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON / THE DAILY STAR

SCARS OF JULY

How are the injured now?

MIFTAHUL JANNAT

The July Uprising ended with the fall of an autocratic government on August 5, but for thousands who survived the atrocity, the struggle did not end with their newfound freedom. They now remain crippled by lasting injuries, trapped in a daily fight against pain, disability, and financial insecurity. Despite promises of financial support and rehabilitation, many are still waiting for aid to arrive, while official commitments continue to lag far behind on-the-ground realities.

Injuries that changed everything
Arafat Hossain, once a driver, lost his leg to amputation—and with it, his livelihood. Categorised as a B-level injury victim, he received Tk 2 lakh from the government and an additional Tk 1 lakh from the July Foundation. But the financial aid has only partially mitigated his struggle.

"With the family's main source of income gone, my younger brother had to drop out of school. Another brother is educated but still struggling to find a job," he said. Although he cannot return to his previous job, he wanted to start a small poultry farm to support his family—a dream that remains distant

without additional assistance. "If the monthly allowances arrived on time, I could at least start a small business," he mentioned.

Md Mijanur Rahman Badol is confronting the harsh reality of total visual impairment. "I can't see anything with my right eye, and my left eye has only 23% vision," he shared. "All the pellets are still lodged in my face, eyes, and head. They couldn't be removed. At times, they cause pain, and I often feel weak and disoriented. I'm still learning to live with this new reality."

He now relies on a small betel nut garden and a few livestock animals, which he managed to acquire with help from NGOs and other sources. The one-time government assistance was quickly consumed by the debts piled up in the months after his injury, leaving him no closer to financial stability. "I received the government-promised monthly allowance for only one month so far. The payments for the past two months are still pending. They informed me it would be disbursed together, so I'm waiting for that," he said, the frustration barely concealed in his tone.

Another victim, Akbar Ali, survives

similar bureaucratic complications who submitted verified documentation. were faced by another victim, Shahinur Miah. One of his eyes is gone forever, and the other now offers only a blur of light and shadow. Yet, he was incorrectly placed in Category B. When the writer first met him in April, Shahinur was at the National Institute of Ophthalmology & Hospital (NIOH), seeking approval from the director for a special letter recommending his reclassification to Category A.

He later submitted that letter to the local civil surgeon's office, which also issued a certificate acknowledging the misclassification and confirming that his case had been sent to the Ministry for correction. However, five months later, no change has been made.

"Since I'm listed as a B-category injured, I'm entitled to only Tk 3 lakh in one-time assistance from the government, of which I've received just Tk 1 lakh," he added. "I have to visit NIOH regularly for follow-up, which costs a lot for transportation, medicine, and accommodation."

Where do the authorities stand?
The Ministry of Liberation War Affairs



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN / THE DAILY STAR

Md Shahinur Miah waits outside the director's office at the National Institute of Ophthalmology & Hospital (NIOH), seeking reclassification of his documents to Category A. Five months on, no change has been made.

on borrowed money from his sisters and anyone willing to help. So far, he has only received support from the July Foundation. "I haven't received any government aid yet. There were some paper complications and delays in publishing the gazette list that contains my name," he said.

acknowledges the ongoing issues. Md Faruk Hossain, Joint Secretary and In-Charge of the July Mass Uprising Cell at the Ministry, said at the end of September that monthly allowance disbursements had been completed for four divisions—Sylhet, Barishal, Mymensingh, and Rangpur—for those

who submitted verified documentation. "The rest of the divisions will be cleared within the first week of October," he added. One-time assistance Tk 2 lakh for A-category, and Tk 1 lakh for B- and C-category fighters—has already been cleared, according to him. "The additional amount of Tk 3 lakh and Tk 2 lakh for A- and B-category injured, respectively, will be made once all information is updated," he added.

When asked about the total number of disbursements, Md Hossain explained, "The monthly disbursement process is ongoing, and the exact number cannot be shared at this stage. Once we have updated information for all recipients, likely within the next five to six months, we will be able to provide an exact figure." He cited delays due to missing documents and incomplete bank details from many beneficiaries.

Apart from the Ministry, the July Shaheed Smriti Foundation is another key organisation assisting the injured with direct financial aid. "According to the latest update, more than 6,006 injured July fighters have so far received financial assistance from us," shared Md Zahid Hossain, Head of PR & Media at the Foundation.

Although the official number of the injured stands at 13,799, according to the Health Ministry's website, the shared figure indicates that a great number of survivors are still struggling for support and awaiting the assistance they are entitled to.

Urgent intervention required
Victims consistently call for urgent measures:

- » Timely disbursement of entitled monthly stipends to ensure financial stability.
- » Lifetime medical care through valid health cards.
- » Streamlined procedures to reduce bureaucratic delays and minimise documentation-related hurdles.

For many, even a modest monthly allowance could mean the difference between survival and further despair. Delays and fragmented support have left many victims to fend for themselves, often at the cost of dignity and hope. Without prompt, comprehensive, and empathetic intervention, these survivors risk being left behind—reduced to mere shadows of the lives they once led.

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The slow death of LAWACHARA FOREST

Illegal tree felling, bamboo theft, gas exploration, excessive tourism, and land encroachment have compounded the crisis, forcing animals out of the forest and into nearby localities—often leading to fatal encounters.

MINTU DESHWARA

Dawn no longer breaks with the chirping of birds in Lawachara National Park—only with the rustle of leaves falling from dying trees. The cries of monkeys echo through the emptiness where deer once danced. As tourists shout for selfies, the forest quietly bleeds. Lawachara, once a sanctuary of life, now stands as a symbol of nature's silent suffering.

Illegal tree felling, bamboo theft, gas exploration, excessive tourism, and land encroachment have compounded the crisis, forcing animals out of the forest and into nearby localities—often leading to fatal encounters.

According to Swapan Deb Sajal, director of the Wildlife Service Foundation, the forest area in Lawachara has shrunk alarmingly



A monkey lies lifeless, hanging from an electric wire.

villages and handed them over to the Forest Department. "In 2024 alone, we rescued 35 wild animals. The previous year, it was 38. Some of these species are rare and endangered," Swapan added.

Nurul Mohaimin Milton, general secretary of the Bangladesh Paribesh Sangbadik Samittee, Moulvibazar unit, mentioned that growing human encroachment—through lemon orchards, houses, and tourist infrastructure—is reducing the safe habitats for animals. "Vehicles and human noise are making things worse," he said.

Rehabilitation of degraded forest zones and ensuring safe water sources during the dry season are essential. "The government should also support local communities to create alternative livelihoods so that people don't depend on forest resources," he added.

Data from the Forest Department and voluntary group Stand for Our Endangered Wildlife (SEW) show that in 2024, around 350 wild animals that escaped from Lawachara were recovered—250 alive and 100 dead—from different parts of Kamalganj and Srimangal. The rescued species

included deer, monkeys, leopard cats, pythons, owls, hawks, and vultures.

SEW co-founder Sohel Shyam said unregulated tourism is disturbing the forest ecosystem. "Lawachara is a place for wild animals, not for human shouting and selfies. We've seen tourists mimic owl calls when real owls are calling—that disrupts their behaviour. The number of visitors should be limited, and guides must ensure responsible conduct. Fines should be imposed for violations."

Locals echoed similar concerns, saying the increasing number of irresponsible tourists is driving animals deeper into the forest or into nearby villages. They reported frequent monkey raids on homes and markets. "They steal food because they are hungry," said Mamun Ahmed, a Srimangal resident. "They too need to eat—they must be protected."

Manjur Ahmed Azad Manna, president of the Kamalganj Biodiversity Protection Committee, said the forest lacks tall trees that once provided shelter for monkeys.

"The food crisis now affects all animals in Lawachara. Because of this, all types of animals are going outside in search of food," he said.

Saju Marchiang, publication secretary of the Khasi Social Council, echoed this sentiment. "Barking deer, once a common sight in Lawachara, have become rare. Now you hardly see anything other than monkeys."

He said the forest that existed in Lawachara a few years ago is no more. There is no chloroform tree in the garden either. The roots of the trees stand as silent witnesses to the passage of time. At that time,

large trees of the decision-making process, noting that it had been taken hastily and without proper consultation with all stakeholders. A more inclusive discussion, he added, could have led to a balanced solution that benefited both conservation efforts and local communities.

Shamsul Haque also mentioned irregularities in the development of a market inside the forest, which began around 2014. The shops, set up without proper procedures or transparent approval, continued to expand under subsequent CMC leadership. He pointed out that many of these shops are now operated by private traders with connections to local influential, rather than by members of the Community Patrol Groups (CPGs) who are tasked with protecting the forest. In fact, only one shop is reportedly operated by a CPG member, while women CPGs—despite their crucial role—have been entirely left out.

Hassan Al Razi, a PhD fellow (wildlife research and conservation) at the University of Western Australia, said no such system has been seen anywhere else in Bangladesh. "Higher tourist numbers mean higher revenue, which is viewed very positively in our country, even though it endangers our forests and wildlife."

We need to determine the carrying capacity of our forests to protect them and their wildlife from the pressures of tourism. A policy should be made so that tourists cannot go everywhere. Also, tourist guides should be trained to serve as forest and wildlife conservators," he added.

Abul Kalam, Divisional Forest Officer of Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation in Sylhet, said, "Following a ministry meeting on September 14, we received eight directives for the conservation of the Lawachara forest. One of the key decisions is to make the forest eco-friendly. We are currently working on implementing that."



A dead Gondhogokul (Asian palm civet).

sandalwood, chloroform, agar, teak, and chapalish species were there, but they are gone now. Trees and bamboo are being stolen, and large species such as sandalwood, agar, and teak have almost vanished. Many animals—snakes, monkeys, foxes, even pigs—die in road and railway accidents, he added.

Shamsul Haque, general secretary of the Lawachara People's Forum and a former member of the Co-Management Committee (CMC) of Lawachara National Park, strongly supported the recent ban on vehicle entry, explaining that it was introduced primarily to protect wildlife and restore ecological balance. However, he also criticised



With forests stripped of bamboo and large trees such as sandalwood, agar, and teak, Lawachara's wildlife are being forced out—many dying on roads and railway tracks in search of food and shelter.

PHOTOS: MINTU DESHWARA

over the past few decades. Along with this, the sources of food and drinking water for wild animals have also decreased. As a result, animals often stray into localities in search of food or habitat and sometimes die on roads or at the hands of humans.

Since 2012, the foundation has rescued 658 wild animals from nearby

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