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**NEWAGE**

## Silent sufferings of victims

by Tahsin Nawar  18 July, 2025, 00:00



ONE year after the July uprising shook Bangladesh to its core, families of those killed and injured during the uprising have expressed deep sorrow and frustration, lamenting that they feel forgotten and neglected. Their emotional wounds, intertwined with societal neglect, leave them in a relentless cycle of grief.

How do you mourn someone when you never got to say goodbye? Even after twelve long months, why are some victims still unnamed, unclaimed and unheard? In the shadows of revolution and reform, the silence of these families serves as a haunting reminder that freedom comes with a price — one paid by the innocent. Amidst banners waving and speeches about democracy, those suffering demand their voices be heard, raising an essential question: What about us?

The UN's Fact-Finding Report on the July 2024 Uprising in Bangladesh paints a harrowing picture of state-sponsored violence and systemic human rights abuses. The report estimated 1,400 deaths, including women and children — many of whom were innocent bystanders or peaceful activists overpowered by an unstoppable wave of violence. Behind every statistic lies a story of immeasurable grief.

Abdul Hasan, a humble rickshaw puller from Mirpur, lost his precious four-year-old son, Abdul Ahad. 'He was just playing on the balcony,' Hasan recalled, his eyes distant. 'A bullet found him, and no one ever came to explain why.' Fading photographs of a little child caught up in a violent political storm he could never understand evoke bittersweet nostalgia and grief.

Md Sogir, a grocery shop owner from Sylhet, searched city morgues for two weeks before finding his son, buried in an unmarked grave. 'I knew it was him from a small scar on his shoulder. They never even asked us for DNA,' he recounted tearfully. Every story, including Sogir's, bears witness to the disturbing effects of violence — a permanent mark on the public consciousness that begs society to act and remember.

At least six bodies from the uprising still lie unidentified in Dhaka Medical College Hospital's morgue, resting in conspicuous obscurity and coldness. A trail of despair and unanswered questions was left behind when several individuals were hastily buried in mass graves in Rayerbazar and Mirpur, often without their families' knowledge. While grieving families have rightly blamed negligence and a total lack of empathy, the administration has been quick to attribute the failures to logistical errors.

Immediate DNA testing and exhumation have been demanded by human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Ain o Salish Kendra. 'This issue is fundamentally about dignity; it goes beyond the simple handling of bodies,' an ASK official stated. In light of such tragic events,

their remarks underscore the importance of honouring and respecting the departed as well as their families.

In response to the growing pressure, the interim government has allocated Tk 405 crore in the 2025–26 budget specifically for the rehabilitation of affected families. Promised initiatives include free housing, mental health support and job quotas for those impacted by the crisis. A memorial museum is being built on the Gono Bhaban grounds to honour the memories of the lost.

However, many families report that these measures have yet to reach them. A recent protest in front of the Jatiya Sangsad saw over 200 families holding pictures of their loved ones, chanting, 'Where is justice? Where are our names?'

Most of those who suffered during the July uprising have not been included in the collective narrative, despite it often being regarded as a pivotal moment in Bangladesh's democratic transition. 'We forged a new Bangladesh, but it was not meant for them,' writes author and social activist Samira Khatun with intensity. The glaring absence of sustained media coverage has intensified the families' feelings of abandonment and neglect. With deep anguish in his eyes, Sogir said, 'Last year, cameras were everywhere, capturing our pain and resilience. Now? Not even a phone call reaches us.'

The demand for justice and accountability is resolutely expressed by the July Victims' Alliance, which has put forth a compelling set of urgent demands. These include: the establishment of a nationwide compensation fund that is rigorously monitored and accessible to the public, offering victims' families a renewed sense of security; the creation of permanent legal aid cells to provide continuous support to affected families navigating the legal system; a mandate for thorough DNA testing of unclaimed bodies to ensure that the unidentified receive the dignity and recognition they deserve; and the formation of a truth and reconciliation committee tasked with conducting a comprehensive investigation into the horrific killings while promoting an environment of understanding and healing.

So far, none of these demands has been fully implemented. As the nation reflects on the legacy of the July uprising, it must confront an uncomfortable truth. While some gained their voices, others were silenced. Countless innocent workers, children and ordinary citizens who had no desire to participate in an act of rebellion also suffered deeply in the conflict, alongside the protesters who valiantly gave their lives to pave the way for a better future. This challenging era has forged a complex legacy that necessitates a thorough evaluation of both its significant achievements and its devastating costs.

True victory will remain elusive until families receive rightful recognition and the acceptance of their genuine identities. Memory serves as a powerful tool for upholding justice across generations. Those who have endured unimaginable suffering now await the moment of justice that has long been denied. Every heartbeat resonates with their pain, underscoring their profound desire for recognition, acceptance and closure.