

Rest well, little angels

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Near and dear ones grieve the young lives lost in Uttara fighter jet crash



On a seemingly ordinary Monday morning in Dhaka, dozens of children headed to school with lunchboxes in hand and dreams in their eyes.

But by afternoon, the nation was shaken by a horrifying tragedy -- a Bangladesh Air Force training jet had crashed into a building of Milestone School and College in Uttara's Diabari area.

The crash has claimed at least 32 lives, including those of little ones -- each with a story, a future, and a family now shattered beyond repair.



Saima

'TATA BYE-BYE, MOM!'

"Mom, I'm going to school, tata bye-bye!"

Those were the last words nine-year-old Saima Akhter said to her mother before leaving for school on the day of the tragedy.

Little did her mother know, it would be the last time she'd see her daughter.

Hours later, Rina Begum learned through social media that Saima had died in the crash.

"My daughter will never sleep hugging me again," said an inconsolable Rina, after Saima was laid to rest in Bipravardha village of Gazipur.

Saima, a third-grade student, lived with her family in Uttara.

Her father, Mohammad Shah Alam, was also devastated.

"Last night, she hugged me so many times before going to sleep," he said. "Now she won't hug me ever again."

Saima's elder brother, Sabbir Hossain -- who had just passed his SSC exams from the same school -- broke down in tears.

"You were my heart. Who will I take to school now?" he cried.

Saima was buried at the family graveyard after her funeral prayers at the local mosque.

Once filled with laughter and the chatter of children, the family's ancestral home now echoes only with silence and sorrow.



Tanvir

'HE WANTED TO MAKE OUR FACES SHINE'

Lipi Begum, mother of 14-year-old Tanvir Ahmed, a class VIII student at Milestone, said, "He [Tanvir] told me, 'I will go to the USA to study and return home to make your faces shine. I want to be something very big.'"

Tanvir had been waiting for a coaching class after school when the aircraft crashed. His younger brother Tashfiq had already gone home.

Following the crash, Tanvir was rushed to the National Burn Unit at Dhaka Medical College Hospital but succumbed to his injuries soon after.

A resident of Nagarbhatgram village in Tangail's Mirzapur upazila, Tanvir had been studying at Milestone since nursery. His father Rubel Miah, a trader, stood speechless during the funeral in their village.

Lipi Begum, devastated, remembered her son's achievements: "He came first in all classes, got GPA 5 in every subject. Teachers loved him."

Tanvir was buried after the namaz-e-janaza at Andipara Government Primary School. The bright boy with ambitions far beyond his village now rests in the soil where his dreams once took root.



Humaira

'SHE WAS WAITING FOR ME IN HER CLASSROOM'

Sumi Akter, the mother of Mehnaz Akter Humaira, 9, said, "She was just waiting in her classroom for me to pick her up."

Her daughter, a third-grade student, died on the spot as the aircraft crashed into her classroom at Milestone School.

Humaira's father, Delwar Hossain Rana, a lecturer in the Bengali department at the same institution, was seen kissing his daughter's coffin during the funeral in Sakhipur's Hataya Keranipara in Tangail.

"Everything happened before my wife's eyes," Delwar said. "She's now unable to speak. How can I console her?"

Humaira, their only child, was buried at the family graveyard following a tearful janaza at Gabal Bazar.

Her grandfather, Abdul Bashed, wept inconsolably. "Grandpa used to be with me all the time. She'll never call me Grandpa again!"



Shamim

'MOM, WILL YOU STAY WITH ME TONIGHT?'

Abdullah Shamim, 13, a sixth-grade student at Milestone, was buried beside his father, Abul Kalam Azad, in Shariatpur's Bhedarganj upazila.

His father had recently died in Saudi Arabia, where he had worked for years. The family returned to Bangladesh three years ago and had hoped to rebuild their lives.

At the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College, Abdullah Shamim asked his mother, Zulekha Begum, a question: "Mom, will you stay with me at night?" Hours later, he passed away.

"My son used to press my feet and say, 'Paradise is under your feet, Mother'," Zulekha wept. "Now my son has gone to paradise himself."

Shamim's maternal uncle Saiful Islam condemned the authorities for allowing flight training over residential areas. "No government representative even came to visit us," he said. "We buried a child, and the silence was deafening."



Samiul

'HE DIDN'T EVEN WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL THAT DAY'

In Barishal's Mehendiganj, a heartbreaking janaza was held for 12-year-old Samiul Karim, a seventh-grade student whose life was cut short in Monday's tragedy.

The funeral took place at the Bir Muktijoddha Mustafa Kamal School ground -- the same school where his mother, Reshma Begum, is a teacher.

Samiul's family had moved to Uttara after losing their ancestral home in Rukundi village to river erosion.

Just a day before the incident, Samiul had returned to Dhaka from a visit to his family home in Mehendiganj and Barishal.

"He didn't even want to go to school that day," said his uncle, Humayun Kabir. "But the school authorities had asked him to submit his marksheet, so he went."

His father, Rezaul Karim Shamim, went to the school to pick him up. As they were walking just a short distance away, a burning fragment of the jet fell on Samiul.

"In front of his father's eyes, he caught fire and was fatally burned," said Humayun.

Relatives described Samiul as a bright and respectful child. "We should not lose anyone else like we lost Samiul," said family member Abu Jaher.

Overcome with grief, Samiul's father broke down during the funeral prayers, struggling to pray for his son's departed soul.

Samiul was buried in Deshkhagkata village, beside his maternal grandfather's home, surrounded by heartbroken classmates and neighbours.

'I CALLED HIM EINSTEIN'

In Lakshmipur, grief has gripped Bashikpur village as 14-year-old Shayan Yusuf, a seventh-grade student of Milestone School and College, died early yesterday from burns.

Shayan, son of AFM Yusuf, an assistant professor in Milestone's Chemistry Department, passed away at 3:30am while undergoing treatment at the burn institute.

His body arrived in the village that afternoon. His grandmother Kamrun Nahar, upon hearing the ambulance, collapsed in grief, repeatedly crying, "Where is my precious one?"

At the funeral, Shayan's father broke down, telling mourners, "We won't live in this country anymore. Politicians have destroyed it. My son was brilliant -- I called him Einstein. Why did this happen to us?"

Shayan's uncle recalled seeing a video of the boy, burnt but walking with his schoolbag before collapsing. His janaza was held after the Asr prayers; he was buried beside his grandfather Dr Maqsoodur Rahman.

Another victim, Afnan Fayaz, also a seventh grader from Sonapur village in Lakshmipur, was buried in Dhaka.



Ukya Ching

QUIET HILLS IN RANGAMATI ALSO SHAKEN

In the hills of Rangamati's Rajasthali upazila, another family mourned quietly. Ukya Ching Marma, 13, a seventh-grade student, had been critically burned in the crash. He died at 2:25am on Monday at the Burn and Plastic Surgery Institute in Dhaka.

His father, Usai Mong Marma, a teacher, and mother Daisy Marma, an assistant teacher in Bandarban, rushed to Dhaka upon hearing the news.

"We are bringing his body back. The cremation will be held on Wednesday," Usai told The Daily Star.

Ukya's village, Collegepara in Bangalhalia union, fell silent in mourning. UP Chairman Adomong Marma noted, "This has shaken the entire area. Everyone is grieving."

[Our correspondents from Tangail, Gazipur, Shariatpur, Rangamati, Barishal and Noakhali contributed to this report]