



ILLUSTRATION: DOWEL BISWAS

Valiant voices against brute force THE FEARLESS UPSTARTS OF BANGLA RAP

DOWEL BISWAS

*If your time to you is worth savin'
And you better start swimmin'
Or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'*

As Bob Dylan, often considered as one of the greatest songwriters of history puts it on his revolutionary anthem *The Times They Are A-Changin'*. Dylan later recalled writing the song as a deliberate attempt to create an anthem of change for the moment, to capture the spirit of social and political upheaval that characterised the 1960s. However, it's weirdly satisfying to find that time echoes its own course, speaking the truth no matter what and where-it does always sing for the oppressed.

The song finds a weird sense of autonomy alongside the protesters on the streets, musicians, singers, rappers, from all walks of life—the voice of youth and the country now, are screaming with an untrumpable tool that no oppressing entity could ever tame—poetry, lyricism and music.

It's incredible how modified slogans, songs, anthems surrounding our Liberation War of 1971 are being uttered on the streets to support the quota reform movement that has been raging in the country for the past month. Bangla has always been a land where political resurgence has been dealt and stood on the stronghold of its cultural heritage. People have raged wars, formed rebellion through the purest form of art, the voice of the revolution always has been laid on this landscape with cultural dignity and opulence, through its songs, poems, graffiti and mass folk

songs.

Rapper Hannan Hossain Shimul, who has recently come into the spotlight for his hit rebel rap *Awaaz Utha*, was arrested on July 25 in Narayanganj's Bhuighor area.

Ironically, he starts his song by incorporating Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's historic 7th March speech, with a chorus that tells us to call out freedom through *Awaaz Utha Bangladesh*. Hannan's lyrics loosely translate to:

"Bengalis are no fools, we won't fall for every trick they throw,
...Sayed, I'm taking the bullet, smiling at the barrel's call,

Student voices rise, commands come from the hall."

Hannan's song, which sought freedom of speech, had gathered over 600,000 views on YouTube and was trending on #5

in music category till August 1. The song emphasised the strength of music in rebellion as it stands, as a cultural movement, mirroring the same values, empowering individuals to express their truths and confront societal challenges. However, his non-political stance couldn't save him from being imprisoned under

unknown clauses of the law and jurisdiction.

Dozens of rap songs came to prominence in the span of only a month to stand alongside the thousands of protesters across Bangladesh, voicing their demands and speaking of what the imprisoned, 'beaten up' and 'silenced' could not. Like Pablo Neruda's famous

line "You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep spring from coming," these fiery artistes are a voice that no oppressing entity could ever stop.

Another rapper Shezan, popularly known as Shezan Beatz, released his rap track *Kotha Ko* on July 16, which had gathered over 1.6 million views, making the YouTube trending with the following lyrics.

"Where's the difference between 52 and 24? Speak up!

If the country claims freedom, where's the freedom? Speak up!

My siblings die on the streets, are you even trying? Speak up!

Another rap song, Gold Cube and Scary Crow's *Desh Shongskar*, also borrows from a historic speech from Bangabandhu. In the song, they demand answers from the ruling party for the mass imprisonment, usage of oppressive methods of handling peaceful students and protestors on the streets urging for a rightful demand, merit-based assessment and opportunities. His lyrics read, "Rebellion every time...not for jobs, stipends, but dignity...in a land ruled by tyrants, where thieves feast, more students die than birds with bullets," the song carries out with this message.

Rap song, *Desh Kar?* by Lunatix Veer and Rhythmsta, speaks no different than its predecessors, carrying the same spirit of resistance and uprising, which came back to us in every generation, the only difference perhaps is its usage of contemporary Bangla as a language.

Quota na Medha?, dedicated to Abu Sayeed, who died after being shot by rubber bullet while protesting for the

quota reform, chants the claim of the protesters, "Quota or Merit?".

"I dream of change,
...As death visits my life,
Chanting slogans, my voice cracks,
Counting bullet scars on my chest."

Most of these songs speak of the same demands, cries, chants we hear through shouts, chants, slogans, in poetry and

spirit. They are of the same message with different words put together eloquently, beautifully and blatantly, looking eye to eye with a higher power.

Joining in the rebellious voices are *Chobbisher Guerrilla* by the rap group by the same name (trending #18 on YouTube for music), Omix's *Rokto*, Mcc-e Mac and Gk Kibria's *Inqilab*, Panda

O's *Free*, and Dashu's *Freedom ain't free*, Crown Engine's *Daam De*, Flag Bang's *Godi Chhar*, Chef-IQ's *Bangla Ma*, Raafky's *Odhikaar*, Coldcraft and Bihan's *Bayanno*, Mascot's *Freedom?*, Wakeup Hadi's *Shokuner Chokh*, and Rafsan Ahmed Siam's *Joy Bangla*, while many others have become the voice of the bleeding country whose sons and daughters are on the streets fighting for their cause.

These young upstarts of Bangla rap have achieved a feat that the mainstream music industry in Bangladesh could never achieve in this decade—point their valiant, unsheathed, and belligerent voice against the guns of the oppressors.

The rap verses have been translated into English for the readers' convenience.



REBELLION IN CINEMA

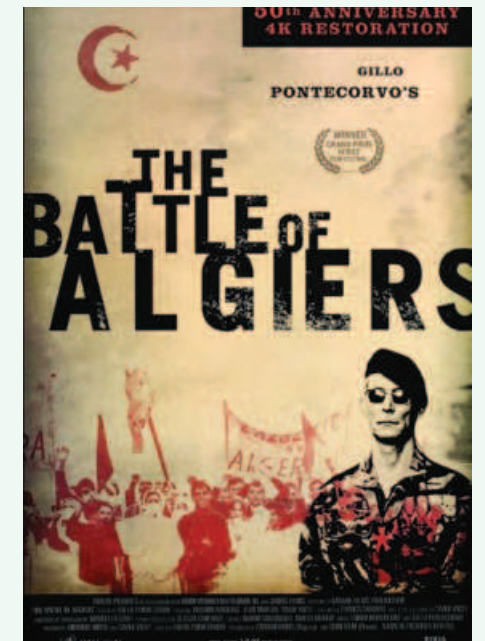
October: Ten Days That Shook the World (1927)



I Am Cuba (1964)



The Battle of Algiers (1966)



Alor Michil (1974)



The Revolution Will Not Be Televised (2003)



1-MINUTE REVIEW

Silent cries and enduring impact of 'Grave of the Fireflies'



A forlorn, devastating, yet enrapturing Studio Ghibli production that will forever remain as one of the flagbearers of Japanese credo and stand the test of time is *Grave of the Fireflies*.

Released in 1988, this Isao Takahata-directed anime film tells the story of two military siblings who endure the consequences of surviving the end of a losing war, marred by the death of their mother and the uncertain return of their father, who works in the Japanese Navy.

In March 1945, as the Pacific War neared its end, American Boeing B-29 Superfortress bombers obliterated much of the city of Kobe. Following their mother's death, Seita and Setsuko

Yokokawa were forced to leave their abusive aunt's home after staying there too long.

It is Seita's hard-and-fast ideal of never having to settle for abuse or mistreatment, which is often associated with being Japanese, that prevents him from either seeking help or even accepting help from people who willingly lend a hand.

The film derives its meaning from the bond between the brother and her sister. Scarcely finding kindness in a war-ridden and nearly apathetic atmosphere, Seita goes above and beyond to provide his beloved younger sister, Setsuko, with the comforting images of a world that was too harsh and unforgiving.

WHAT'S PLAYING

AWAAZ UTHA

Awaaz Utha by Hannan, produced and mastered by SnareByt, is a powerful rebel rap song that begins with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's historic 7th March speech.

Released on July 18, the track emphasises the importance of freedom of speech and the courage to resist oppression, aligning with Hip Hop's core values. With 381k views in just 12 days and trending at #9 on YouTube, the song has struck

a chord with listeners. Its compelling intro, *Raise your voice, Bangladesh*, calls for justice and resilience against societal injustices.

The intro of the song loosely translates to: *Raise your voice, Bangladesh, raise your voice!// So much blood on the streets, raise your voice/Raise your voice, Bangladesh, raise your voice/Who fired the shots on the streets?/Raise your voice, Bangladesh.*

