

TALES OF THE REVOLUTION FROM CHATTOGRAM

TAMJIDUL HOQUE AND WAZIHA AZIZ

Bangladesh just witnessed a one-of-a-kind student movement which later transformed into a revolution, leading to the historical downfall of the Prime Minister. The whole country stepped forward and Chattogram was no different, living up to its name of "Bir Chattala". Throughout the movement, the students of Chattogram remained united while after the revolution, they took it upon themselves to help the community. The change, brought forward by the students, can now be felt throughout the city.

Mostafa Jishan, a student of University of Science and Technology Chittagong (USTC) says, "Honestly, I had nothing to do with the quota reform. My mother is a government employee and I, myself, can use the quota. However, when I witnessed the unjust shooting of Abu Sayed, I had to join the protest. How can the government allow law enforcement personnel to shoot innocent students like this?"

The students had to go through unprecedented horror. One such experience was shared by Tahamid Chowdhury Priyom, a student of Chittagong University of Engineering & Technology (CUET).

"The experience on July 19 at Bahaddarhat still haunts me. A student was shot right in his chest. There was no ambulance. He was taken to the hospital in a rickshaw by some of his friends. To this day, I still don't know if he is alive or not."

Reazul Islam Remon of Chittagong University (CU) says, "There was a lot of gunfire at Muradpur just before the curfew started and my family was scared. I had a long beard, but my mother forced me to trim it."

Another daunting experience was faced by Md Sadek Al Sunny of International Islamic University of Chittagong (IIUC) who says, "On August 4, we went to New Market where people were being attacked by law enforcement personnel. I was really close to the frontline when chaos ensued. More than 200 of us quickly took shelter inside Shah Amanat Market but thugs kept looking for us. We hid there until four in the afternoon when we were rescued. I witnessed two women getting shot and killed near Hazari Market that day. My biggest regret is having to leave their bodies behind."

The coordination amongst the protestors played a big role for the protest to succeed and it was the student coordinators who enabled it. One of them was Mohammed Tawsif, a student of East Delta University (EDU). When asked about how he became a coordinator, he said, "I joined as a protestor but was selected as the coordinator from East Delta University later on."

He recalls how he was constantly at risk throughout the protest, due to being a coordinator, "I had reasons to



PHOTOS: RAJIB RAIHAN



believe law enforcement personnel were looking for me and when they were conducting raids, they were targeting coordinators. Two coordinators from different universities that lived nearby got arrested. I was in fear that I could be next"

The risk was even greater when he was out on the streets. He says, "There were many instances where I was either chased or beaten by law enforcement personnel or goons. At Cheragi Pahar, I inhaled tear gas for the first time and I started vomiting and needed to rest. On August 4 alone, there were many moments where I thought I would die. One of those moments was at Jubilee Road in front of Golam Rasul Market. A person who was standing right beside me got shot. It could easily have been me."

However, after a tough journey, the objective was achieved, and it was special for Tawsif.

"When I got confirmation that the Prime Minister (PM) had resigned, I cried. Mentally, I had prepared to fight for the whole month of August. There were days I thought I wouldn't make it alive or get arrested. My sister would cry and not eat – waiting for me. After receiving the news, I felt relief that all the sleepless nights were worth it," he shares.

After the Prime Minister's resignation on August 5, there was joy but there were also instances of violence. One such experience was shared by Mona Ahmed, a student of Jahangirnagar University. She says, "My

experience at the victory procession was terrifying. After hearing about the PM's resignation, I immediately joined the procession with my friends. We walked towards Dampara from GEC Circle, and law enforcement personnel threw tear shells and sound grenades at us near BAWA School and College. We took shelter at Shilpokola. We decided to head back home but then my mother called to inform me that an angry mob had gathered outside my house, looking for a local leader that lived next door with his family. The individual has a wife and kids who are completely innocent, why must they suffer for someone else's crime? I decided to stay at a friend's house for the time being, but I was scared for my family's safety."

Another troubling experience was faced by Sudipto*. He says, "When the PM's resignation was announced, I was happy for my country, but I also knew us minorities would be at risk. The attacks began the next day. I had to advise my own mother not to wear shakha and shindur outside. Why must I feel so insecure in my own home? Every time we voice our concerns, people tell us to be patient. They fail to understand that all we need is for them to hear us and stand by us in these troubled times."

Amidst the tough times, Sudipto also went out to help the community, "I've been involved in cleaning and wall painting activities near the Central Railway Building. I consider this my duty as a citizen of the country. Playing a part in its reform and development is the least I can do."

*Name has been changed upon request.

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