

‘Shono Mohajon’: The unlikely anthem that became the voice of a generation



ILLUSTRATION: DOWEL BISWAS

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MAHIYA TABASSUM

In the sweltering summer of this year, as Bangladesh erupted in what would later be known as the July Revolution, an unexpected soundtrack emerged from the chaos. *Shono Mohajon*, a song released nearly a decade earlier by the local band Shunno, suddenly found new life as the unofficial anthem of a nation in upheaval. This feature explores the journey of the song, its creators, and the profound impact of music on social movements.

The birth of an unlikely anthem

Formed in 2007 by vocalist Imrul Karim Emil and former lead guitarist Shaker Raza, Shunno quickly established itself as a prominent voice in Bangladesh’s music scene. The band, completed by bassist Andrew Michael Gomez, drummer Rafatul Bari Labib and guitarist Ishmamul Farhad, had already tasted success with their song *Shoto Asha* becoming the unofficial theme for the 2011 Cricket World Cup in our country. However, it was *Shono Mohajon*, a track from their earlier days, that would ultimately define their legacy.

Written by popular lyricist Shahan Kabondho and produced by Fuad Al

Muqtadir, *Shono Mohajon* was not created with any specific political agenda in mind. As Emil explains, “When we made the song 9-10 years ago, we didn’t target any political party.” Instead, the song spoke to a universal experience of oppression under dictatorship, its lyrics a poignant cry against abuse of power:

*“Amar bichar tumi koro, tomar bichar korbe ke
Kobe tomar dokhol theke, mukti amay debe
Shono Mohajon, ami noyto ekjon
Shono Mohajon, amra onekjon.”*

The chorus loosely translates to:

*“You judge me, but who will judge you?
When will you free me from your control?
Listen, lord, I am not alone
Listen, lord, we are many.”*

As students took to the streets in July as part of the anti-discrimination student movement, demanding an end to the corrupt governance and repressive regime, *Shono Mohajon* found new resonance. Its lyrics, once a general critique of power structures, now

seemed tailor-made for the moment. Students used the song as background music for countless social media reels documenting the protests, spreading its message far beyond its original reach.

The band, touring in Canada at the time, watched in awe as their creation took on a life of its own. “We were surprised and proud to see the mass circulation,” Emil recalls. “We were out of the country at that time, but we felt happy that we could contribute to the cause through our music.”

On July 30, as the protests reached a fever pitch, Emil changed his profile picture to solid red, an act of solidarity with the students back home. Meanwhile, in Toronto, the band dedicated their performances to the protesters, using their platform to raise awareness about the situation in Bangladesh.

What made *Shono Mohajon*

and become a vessel for the hopes and frustrations of a new generation. As Michael notes, “The song isn’t ours anymore, it has become the song of the people.”

Music as a catalyst for change

The story of *Shono Mohajon* and its role in the July Revolution is more than just a tale of musical success; it’s a stark reminder of the complex relationship between art and society. While the song’s resurgence demonstrates the power of music to inspire and unify, it also raises critical questions about the nature of protest anthems and the responsibilities of artists in times of social upheaval.

On one hand, the adoption of *Shono Mohajon* by protesters showcases the organic way in which art can transcend its original intent and become a powerful tool for change. The



resonate so strongly with the protesters, particularly the youth? Andrew Michael Gomes, the band’s bassist and occasional lyricist, offers an insight: “We were true to our art and words when we created the song. It’s a song for anyone who has ever been oppressed, can be anyone from any background. Our song wasn’t directed towards any particular party or institution. We didn’t even promote the song during the movement. It got picked up because of its relevance.”

This universality, combined with the song’s emotional power, allowed it to transcend its original context

band’s surprise at their song’s new life highlights the unpredictable nature of artistic impact. In an era of viral content and rapid information spread, we must consider the potential for manipulation and misinterpretation of artistic works.

Moreover, while Shunno’s indirect approach to social commentary allowed their message to resonate across time and context, it also raises questions about the role of more direct, confrontational art in social movements—is it more effective to create universally applicable works that can be reinterpreted, or to produce art that explicitly addresses

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ACC to work

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The official said signing of a memorandum of understanding between the FBI and the ACC also came up for discussion.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, ACC Secretary Khorsheda Yasmeen said it was a courtesy meeting.

“They [FBI officials] wanted to learn how the ACC operates. They have assured us of providing support in recovering laundered money, if needed.”

On Sunday, Commerce Adviser Saleh Uddin Ahmed announced plans to form a special taskforce to recover laundered money.

Speaking to the media at the commerce ministry, the adviser said the authorities were working on establishing the taskforce’s operating guidelines and the criteria on picking its members.

ACC sources said the special taskforce will include representatives from Bangladesh Bank, Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit, the ACC, the Finance Division, the NBR, the Attorney General’s Office, and the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission, among other agencies.

No plastic bags in supermarkets

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inform the public about the ban.

To ensure the availability of jute shopping bags, the Ministry of Textiles and Jute will hold meetings with superstore operators within a week to secure a steady supply of alternative bags.

In addition, the Department of Environment, in collaboration with the NGO ESDO, will host a fair by September 30, showcasing eco-friendly bags made from jute and other sustainable materials.

The event will serve as a platform for supermarket authorities and bag manufacturers to discuss their requirements and production capacities.

The meeting, chaired by the secretary of the ministry, was attended by high-ranking government officials, including additional secretaries, the director general of the Department of Environment, and representatives from supermarket chains and other ministries.

14-year-old boy killed

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India earlier in the day were detained by BSF.

After the fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led government, people, especially from the minority community of Thakurgaon and its nearby districts, have been going to the border to go to India, the police officer said.

The Border Guard Bangladesh and the BSF held a flag meeting at the Balia border in Panchagarh’s Atwary upazila around 4:30pm following a request by the former.

Commanding Officer of BGB 50 Battalion Lt Col Tanjir Ahmmad led the Bangladeshi side while acting Commandant of Kishanganj BSF Battalion Jiten Dev Sharma led the Indian side in the 40-minute-long meeting.

ICT starts field-level probe

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sent separate letters to local and police administration, medical colleges, media houses, and university authorities and sought information concerning the student movement.

In a letter to all metropolitan police commissioners, deputy commissioners, and superintendents of police, the agency sought a list of casualties between July 1 and August 5, information about graveyards and a list of martyrs buried there, information about any mass grave and list of martyrs buried there, names and addresses of victims’ families, and the role of law enforcers and the then ruling party cadres in quelling the movement.

In a letter to all directors of medical college hospitals and civil surgeons, the agency sought a list of the casualties, their attendants, and treatment-related documents.

In a letter to all editors of the national dailies and the heads of news at TV channels, the agency sought reports that quoted the speeches or comments given by the then ministers, advisers, lawmakers, party leaders, and law enforcers to suppress the movement and stories or footage related to killing, mass killing, torture, confinement, enforced disappearance, arson, etc.

In a letter to vice-chancellors of the public and private universities the agency sought information about students, teachers, and staffers who were killed or injured and information about the role of law enforcers and the then ruling party

The BGB strongly protested the killing and said the BSF could have detained the Bangladeshis and processed them for illegal entry or handed them over to the BGB instead of shooting them.

The BGB officials said they would not be patient and respond accordingly if such incidents recur.

The BSF officials in the meeting said that they opened fire as the intruders attacked BSF personnel after entering Indian territory, Lt Col Tanjir said.

Last week, a 16-year-old girl was shot dead by BSF in Kulaura upazila of Moulvibazar.

According to Ain O Salish Kendra, 31 Bangladeshis were killed by BSF along the border in 2023, of whom 28 were shot dead.

cadres in quelling the movement.

Sheikh Hasina, who was ousted on August 5 following a student-led mass uprising, is facing 12 charges of crimes against humanity and genocide.

Eleven complaints were filed in connection with the recent student movement, while another complaint was connected with the crimes committed centring the Hefajat-e-Islami rally in Dhaka in May 2013.

Besides Hasina, her party leaders and several journalists, were also included in the complaints filed with the ICT.

Hasina-led government formed the International Crimes Tribunal in March 2010 to try the people who committed crimes during the Liberation War in 1971. Later, a second ICT was formed.

At least six BNP and Jamaat leaders were executed for their 1971 crimes following the ICT verdicts.

Filing of complaints with the investigation agency started after Law Adviser Asif Nazrul on August 15 said the interim government decided to hold the trial at the International Crimes Tribunal for the killings during the mass uprising that toppled the Hasina-led government.

The government on Thursday reconstituted the prosecution team of the ICT by appointing a chief prosecutor and four other prosecutors.

Tajul Islam, who defended several Jamaat-e-Islami leaders facing wartime crimes charges at the tribunals, was made the chief prosecutor.

Border killings

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Earlier, on September 5, Dhaka had requested New Delhi to investigate all border killings, identify those responsible, and hold them accountable. The request followed the killing of a 13-year-old Bangladeshi girl, Shwarna Das, who was shot dead by BSF on September 1 in Moulvibazar’s Juri upazila.

According to the human rights organisation Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), 31 Bangladeshis have been killed by BSF in 2023, with 28 of them shot dead. Between 2009 and 2022, 563 Bangladeshis were killed by BSF.

“Such killings occurred even when the relationship was described as the golden chapter. There has been no change so far. This is unacceptable,” Hossain said.

He emphasised that good relations between countries are not just about government-to-government ties. It also depends on the perception of people of those countries about each other, and border killings do not help in that regard.

Asked about media reports claiming President Mohammed Shahabuddin has a second home in Malaysia and a residency permit in Dubai, the adviser declined to comment, stating that the foreign ministry cannot act on speculation.

He, however, stated that the claims should be addressed by the relevant authorities.

Asked about the Rohingya crisis, Touhid said repatriation of the Myanmar citizens is not feasible at the moment due to ongoing clashes between the junta military and the Arakan Army in Myanmar’s Rakhine State. Repatriation can only take place when conditions are stable, he added.

MAN Siddique

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Siddique, a former secretary of the division, was appointed the managing director of the state-run company in October 2017.

The country’s first metro rail service started partially in December 2022 and the entire Uttara-Motijheel section in November last year. Work for the extended part of the line up to Kamalapur is underway.

DMTCL is now implementing two more metro rail projects, MRT Line-1 and MRT Line-5 (northern route), and has planned to construct three more lines in Dhaka and its adjacent areas to reduce traffic congestion and environmental pollution.

39 more DCs

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DCs would be withdrawn, so they were mentally prepared.

However, another DC believes that evaluating all officials in the same way is unfair.

“Not every appointment during the last government was partisan. Most officers became DCs based on merit. We did not expect such a decision from a non-partisan government. For those of us who have served as DCs for a short period, it leaves a stain on our careers.”

“Has my competence become my enemy?” the DC said.

India follows ‘dominance politics’

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He made the comments in response to Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh’s recent remarks urging the country’s armed forces to remain prepared for war.

According to Indian media reports, Singh emphasised the need for India’s armed forces to be ready for war to maintain peace.

Fakhrul, along with the leaders and activists of Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal, visited Zia’s grave at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar and paid homage to him by placing a wreath, marking the 46th founding anniversary of the BNP’s female wing.

BNP standing committee members Selima Rahman and AZM Zahid Hossain, Mohila Dal President Afroza Abbas, General Secretary Sultana Ahmed, and Joint General Secretary Helen Zerin Khan, among others, were present.

Fakhrul said Bangladesh was freed

current issues?

As the country enters a new era of newly-found freedom of expression, the music industry stands at a crossroads. The potential for a renaissance of creative expression is immense, but so too are the challenges. Emil and the band see both opportunities and responsibilities for artists. “Since now we have got the ‘license’ to tell stories, hopefully, we will be able to tell more interesting, compelling stories now,” Emil muses. He emphasises the importance of artists staying conscious and continually challenging those in power. “Asking the right, conscious questions will help in the long run. We, as musicians and artists, can also raise questions through our creation.”

Michael, the band’s bassist, expresses optimism about the potential for more authentic and diverse artistic expression: “Other musicians and artists who could not fulfil their artistic potential due to censorship would be able to exercise the newly found freedom, and I am really happy for them.” However, Emil also notes the importance of responsible use of this freedom, particularly in an age of misinformation. “The youth are much more aware now. People verify every piece of news before believing it. So, if censorship is eliminated, I am sure people will make good use of it,” he says.

Regarding the reform of the music industry, Emil suggests, “We should welcome all kinds of music,” advocating for more diverse representation in music events and festivals. He also emphasises the need for established industry associations to provide better resources and guidance to emerging artists, helping to build a strong foundation for the next generation of musicians.

The legacy of *Shono Mohajon* serves as both an inspiration and a caution. It reminds us of music’s power to unite and inspire, but also of the need for critical engagement with the art we consume and create. As Bangladesh’s artists step into this new era, they carry with them not just the opportunity to create and express freely, but also the weighty responsibility of shaping cultural narratives and social discourse.