

‘DESH TA KI TOR BAPER NAKI’

Ethun Babu and crew recall risky resistance



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PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

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In November last year, the song *Desh Ta Ki Tor Baper Naki?* became a rallying cry against the oppressive regime, reflecting the frustrations of the oppressed. Written by renowned musician Ethun Babu, known for his commercially successful film songs, the track gained renewed attention during July’s student-led mass uprising. Voiced by Mousumi Chowdhury, the song struck a chord with protesters, symbolising resistance against authoritarian rule.

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Ehtun, Mowshumi, and Poran, the trio behind nearly 39 protest songs, faced severe threats for their work, even being forced into hiding. Despite the dangers, their collaboration fuelled a powerful resistance, using music to challenge oppression and amplify the

voices of the silenced.

“Our story, spanning 15 months, began with 46 artistic pieces: 39 songs and seven poetry segments, recitations, and short plays. These creations weren’t just art; they were protests, imbued with the raw emotions of those standing against the suffocating grip of a regime that had overstayed its welcome,” shared Ethun Babu. “But this rebellion came at a price. We were forced into hiding after receiving numerous threats. It was a precarious time for us, as we feared for our lives while continuing to fight through our art.”

“For us, this was a unique experience,” Mousumi reflected, as they recalled the circumstances that birthed their protest music. “The disappearances and murders happening around us weighed heavily on our minds, haunting our thoughts. These grim events stoked up our creativity, inspiring songs that not only captured the frustrations of the people but also served as anthems of resistance.”

Ethun Babu remarked, “During the time of the sham election period in January, we released the powerful song *Bhot-er Bakshe Lathi Mari* (Kick the ballot box),” which was a direct attack on the alleged corruption and voter suppression that marred the election process. He claimed to have received constant threats following that. “Shortly after, we released the track *Mamar Barir Abdar*, and it was a satirical song reflecting the widespread nepotism within the political system.”

Songs like *Amar Odhikar Kere Nichche Karagare* (My rights are being taken to prison) and *Dofa Ek Dabi Ek*, *Sheikh Hasinar Podotyag* (One demand, one condition: Sheikh Hasina must resign) followed. These were bold calls for justice and freedom, demanding the resignation of the former prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, and holding the government accountable for its actions.

On December 3, 2022, in Rajshahi, the band performed a song that would mark a pivotal moment in their protest journey—*Desh Ta Ki Tor Baper Naki?*

In the following six months, they organised six programs, performing 19 of their songs. But the atmosphere was tense, as they were always under surveillance. In Faridpur, while performing on a truck, they were targeted by a group of people armed with sticks. Fortunately, their supporters

living with feelings of suffocation,” she recalled, as the band members hid to avoid recognition. They were being hounded, not only for their art but also for the truth they spoke. Songs like *Tomar Tole Tole Betha Go* (Pain in your feet) and *Tomar Chair Bhenge Jachchhe* (Your chair is breaking)

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were there to shield them from harm. Yet, this incident left them shaken, reminding them of the risks they were taking.

By June and July, the pressure had intensified and they had become direct targets. “It felt like I was holding death

laid bare the deteriorating healthcare system, where ordinary citizens suffered while government officials sought treatment abroad.

Poran, another band member, shared how his father was socially insulted because of his involvement with the group. In a particularly cruel twist, Poran was branded as part of Jamat Shibir—a label often used to discredit political opponents by associating them with Islamist extremism. These stigmas not only threatened their safety, but also isolated them from their communities.

Despite the threats, harassment, and fear that followed them everywhere, the band continued their mission. They performed with the knowledge that anything could happen at any moment. “Yet, the fear could never silence us completely,” said Ethun Babu.

Their protest was not just against the government’s oppressive regime, but also against the years of torture, rising prices, and injustice that had plagued Bangladesh for 15 years. They sang for the people whose voices had been drowned out and whose lives had been made unbearable by the circumstances.

Their songs, like *Desh Ta Ki Tor Baper Naki?* still echo in the hearts of those who continue to fight for freedom, proving that music, even in the darkest of times, remains one of the most powerful forms of resistance.



(Is this country your father’s property?). “This audacious track questioned the entitlement of the ruling elites, confronting the narrative of power that had alienated the people. After this performance, the band felt the need to lay low for a few months, as the situation had become increasingly dangerous,” said Poran. This track was also used as a tool during the Kolkata protest this year.



in one palm and freedom in the other,” described Ethun Babu. Their supporters within the government passed on warnings, trying to protect them from being completely cornered.

The situation took a heavier toll on Mousumi Chowdhury. She was forced to move homes 25 times to evade those threatening her after the release of the songs. “We were experiencing

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Reconstitute NHRC with qualified people

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that institutions like the NHRC do not act as a puppet of the government.

“There should be fairness in the appointment of commission members and the commission should undergo constructive reforms,” added Shihab.

Pallab Chakma, executive director of Kapaeng Foundation, said the human rights situation of a country can be evaluated through the condition of its minority communities.

“Our commission has become a rehabilitation centre for retired bureaucrats. How would these bureaucrats, who worked under the political leaders and ministers, question the past government?” Pallab wondered.

Speaking at the event, Shipping, Textiles and Jute Adviser Brigadier General (Retired) M Sakhawat Hussain sought the cooperation of political parties to uphold human rights and bring reforms.

“We need the support of every political party.”

“We must protect all of our citizens. It is also your (political parties’) duty to protect the rights of all the citizens,” he said.

The adviser said the government has a plan to build the police as a humane force, and added that violators of human rights must be brought to justice.

Sakhawat stressed the need for a united civil society, which is “divided into many factions”.

Mohammad Nur Khan, executive director of Ain o Salish Kendra, said the role of the NHRC is significant, and its appointment process should be transparent. Its members should

also be accountable.

He urged the government to not only focus on recent human rights violations, but to start discussions on violations dating back to 1972.

“We must preserve sites of state abuse like torture cells and the ‘Aynagar’ as historical evidence,” he said.

Khan also called for immediate travel bans on government officials implicated in past human rights abuses to prevent them from fleeing the country.

Supreme Court advocate Dilruba Shormin said retired bureaucrats were appointed to the commission as it always was insignificant to the government.

“If we want to reconstitute the commission, we have to make sure that a law enforcement agency does not have the authority to investigate human rights violations by its own members,” she said.

Political observer Saleh Ahmed said that Bangladesh could not build a society where human rights prevail because the country lacks a “fair political practice”.

“We do have commissions, laws, and everything in place, but there is no application of those as we lack a fair political practice. If it does not exist, no institution will function. If we can improve our political practice, everything else will get better,” he said.

Journalist Ashraf Qaiser said those who can torture others are appreciated in this country.

“If you have power and don’t show it, you’re not a man. It’s part of the culture. It’s not possible to ensure human rights just by amending some rules or reconstituting some

institutions. We have to change our mindset as well,” said Qaiser.

Alena Khan, human rights activist and lawyer, opined in favour of amending some rules of the NHRC.

“The commission cannot disclose the report of any investigation committee to anyone other than the government. If this law remains in place, every commission will be compelled to work as per the will of the political government. This must be changed,” she said.

Nationalist Democratic Movement (NDM) Chairman Bobby Hajjaj said that the commission should have the capacity to fight against any human rights violations by government institutions.

“If the Human Rights Commission remains a part of the government, it will not be able to oppose the government. We have to bring it out of the government’s dominance to see an effective role from it,” said Bobby.

The speakers also urged the interim government to form separate commissions to investigate the deadly 2009 BDR mutiny, the 2013 attack on a Hefazat-e-Islam rally and the killings during the July-August student-led mass uprising.

Sanjida Islam Tulee, convenor of Mayer Daak, a platform for family members of victims of enforced disappearances, Barrister Asaduzzaman Fuaad, joint member secretary of the Amar Bangladesh (AB) Party, Rashed Khan, general secretary of the Gono Odhikar Parishad (GOP), Jahangirnagar University student Tauhid Siam and Jagannath University student Naima Akter Rita, among others, spoke at the dialogue.

Interim govt must win

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important to remember that the visible and invisible evil spirit of a dictatorship, built up over a decade and a half, will not rid us of its poisonous breath so easily.”

The BNP’s Jhenaidah district unit organised the mass rally at Payra Chattar, demanding justice for Rakib and Sabir, two locals who were martyred during the recent anti-autocracy movement.

The BNP acting chairman said they are often witnessing the interim government’s helplessness and disarray in the face of the ongoing conspiracies in the partisan administration left behind by “autocrat Hasina”.

He also cautioned that “if this

situation persists, the government, trapped in the constraints placed by the autocrat’s associates, will eventually see a series of small crises escalate into major disasters. At that point, the path to effective solutions will be exceedingly narrow.”

Tarique said it is important to keep in mind that there is no alternative to an elected government for ensuring foreign investment, international confidence and relations, state stability, ease of doing business, public safety, continuity of development, and providing citizens with daily services at the grassroots level.

He further said the mass uprising led by students and the public in July and August has emerged as a message

of another independence and victory for the nation. “If we hastily label this as the success of a specific group, we risk falling into the trap of distorting history once again.”

The BNP leader highlighted the importance of honouring the contributions of people from all walks of life—political parties, students, housewives, and workers—in the great conflict against autocracy.

He also emphasised the sacrifices of the millions of political activists who have fallen victim to everything from murder and enforced disappearances, to judicial harassment and other forms of oppression over the past seventeen years. “If we fail to do that, history will not forgive any of us.”

Khamenei moved

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strike on south Beirut on Friday.

After Hezbollah confirmed Hassan Nasrallah’s death, Khamenei condemned Benjamin Netanyahu-led Israel’s actions, declaring that “all the resistance forces in the region stand with and support Hezbollah.”

Khamenei called upon Muslims to “stand by the people of Lebanon and the proud Hezbollah with whatever means they have and assist them in confronting the ... wicked regime [of Israel].”

Khamenei asserted that “the fate of this region (Middle east) will be determined by the forces of resistance, with Hezbollah at the forefront.”

Earlier, Khamenei took to social media to state that “Hezbollah is the victor” in its ongoing struggle against Israel, despite the group facing significant challenges from repeated Israeli strikes against its leadership.

The backdrop of Khamenei’s statements includes a series of unprecedented air raids targeting residential areas in Lebanon. Reports indicate that over 700 people have been killed since Israel intensified its bombing campaign earlier this week, with numerous civilian casualties, including children.

Khamenei condemned the violence, stating that “the massacre of defenseless people in Lebanon once again revealed the savage nature” of Israel and highlighted the “short-sightedness” of its leaders.

‘Shop employee kills cigarette trader, assistant’

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of land on Road 108, had been living in the tin-roofed house for the past decade. He had also been running a wholesale cigarette shop on the same plot. Sabbir was his employee who helped out at the shop. The owner of the plot lives abroad.

Rafiq’s son, Arifur Rahman Bappi, who went through CCTV footage collected from the area, told The Daily Star that the double murder took place early Friday morning.

According to Bappi, both victims

were killed by a recently hired employee. The suspect, whose identity remains unknown, fled the scene with a significant amount of cash and cigarettes from Rafiq’s shop.

Citing the contents of the CCTV footage, Bappi said the employee was seen exiting the house, where Rafiq and Sabbir had been staying, around 6:30am on Friday. Later, a pickup van arrived at the scene, on which the employee was seen loading multiple sacks with the help of the driver.

However, when contacted, the

police did not confirm the details provided by Bappi. Yesterday morning, local residents alerted the police after noticing a foul odour emitting from Rafiq’s house.

After arriving at the house, police found the bodies with their throats slit.

The bodies were later sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital mortuary.

Gulshan Police Station Officer-in-Charge Touhid Ahmed said an investigation was underway to apprehend the perpetrator.