

July never ended, it's an ongoing reality: Shayan

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DOWEL BISWAS

"If I don't rise to fight my fight, then who will carry my fire tonight?"

Farzana Wahid Shayan, the acclaimed singer-songwriter whose songs catch the strings of truth in our times, and may best be described as a 'musical social commentary,' has always found herself standing on the right side of history.

The artiste, whose lyrics and guitar immortalised the volatile, uncertain moments of the July Uprising through songs such as *Bhoy Banglay*, *Jonotar Beyadobi*, *Bhoy Banglay Bhoy*, *Ei Meye Shon*, *Rani Maa*, and *O Neta Bhui*, offered this correspondent a deeply personal glimpse into her creative process during a time when life seemed hollow and rebellion offered meaning.

"When Abu Sayed and Mugdho were killed, something broke inside me," said the singer, comfortable in her minimalist Dhanmondi studio. "Their deaths revealed the regime's cruelty in full. I had already been living in fear, so staying quiet under fascism no longer felt like living at all. I accepted the risk. It was either the streets or silence."

The singer recounted that pivotal moment of clarity at the 'Gayebana Janaza' held at the base of the Shontrash Birodhi Raju Sharokh Bhashkorjo on the Dhaka University campus on July 17, 2024.

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"There is no single memory—only a flood of emotions. July is my most intense lived history, and I'm still inside it. Some of us came back, some didn't. The truth that I'm alive because others aren't, haunts me daily. That contradiction is the

grief I carry," the songwriter added. "I think of Anas' letter, of Sayed, of the unnamed, the unremembered. To speak their names is resistance. To remember them in our joy, our breath, our sleep—that is resistance. We must never forget the cost of this moment. Freedom is not free. And we must remain awake to injustice. Mourning and speaking—both are necessary."

The singer, who has faced endless bullying, threats, and attacks for her beliefs and outspoken views, made it clear that things did not ease even after the fall of the regime.

"Actually, the worst came after Sheikh Hasina's fall—when factions tried to spin the illusion that her regime had allowed me to speak. If I'm silenced now, it means even that fragile promise of freedom is gone," explained the artiste.

"It took time to become functional again. July never ended for me—it's an ongoing reality. We lost young lives, and that loss redefined freedom as responsibility. Before July, even our thoughts were chained. Now, there's a fragile, chaotic freedom—and with it, a call to rebuild," said the singer. "The political awareness and collective courage I see today felt impossible before. Possibilities are endless. But they come with wounds that are still bleeding. We must carry both: hope and grief, freedom and accountability."

"For too long, the truth was unspeakable. Silence became survival. But silence now feels unethical. Every word unsaid is a betrayal of those who are gone. This freedom is a gift born of sacrifice. We owe it to them to express, to provoke, to grow," shared the songwriter. "I feel compelled to be more honest than ever—about myself, my society, and this moment. The strength of a society's freedom lies in how we use it, not just how we earned it."

What does the July Uprising mean to her? "July showed that art is not decoration. It is a dutiful disruption. It is fire," the artiste declared. "Songs, slogans, poems and the collective cultural resistance sustained us. They lit the path forward. I think of Hannan, Shezan, Parsha, of Nazrul, of today's poets who created without pause. Their work was not entertainment—it was endurance. It stitched us together in defiance and hope. I am grateful to each one."

What did July bring as a collective awakening? "Yes, the people are ready now. Ready for truth—even its ugliest

forms," the singer answered. "We were conditioned to perform obedience. That era is fading. July cracked open the silence, but the truth is a heavy thing. It demands strength to hold. We are learning. Slowly. Painfully. But we're learning."

How did she manage to write songs in such turbulent times? "It has never been difficult for me, honestly," the songwriter said. "I process injustice by

writing, composing, and singing. The songs come to me and I just go with the flow. It's how I survive. Even the unreleased songs were necessary—they held me when nothing else could. They're my resistance, the process of my healing, my truth."

Is she political? "You see, everything is political—from gender-based violence to wanting a better educational system," the artiste explained. "Everything we come across in daily life and choose to feel about is a conscious and unconscious political decision. Therefore, yes, I am a very political person."

"However," she added, "I very consciously and very obediently refuse proximity to power. It dilutes critique and dulls conscience. As an artiste, I owe the people—not power—my voice. It's not a role. It's a responsibility. Whether or not we choose to speak about it is a choice, and I respect that. Not everyone can talk about politics and the right things, and that's alright."

Has anything changed for the artiste since the fall of the regime? "Yes, I feel less afraid now—but not freer," she replied. "The violence has grown more desperate, more faceless. I've received death threats too many times to count. But silence is not an option. I won't become a pawn in anyone's narrative."

"In a patriarchal society, my very existence as a woman is resistance," the singer declared. "I've made peace with being a threat to those who fear a free voice."

"If I lived in an ideal world where no one labelled or bullied artists, maybe life would be easier—but not as meaningful," the songwriter said. "The obstacles built me. They sharpened my art and deepened my roots."

"Again, everything is political. From Gaza to gender, education to economic injustice—our lives are shaped by policy and power. Being political doesn't mean chasing parliament. It means refusing to look away. I choose to stand with the people," the artiste added.

"Fascism may have been an era. But what we face now—mob culture, rising fundamentalism—is formless, shifting, and just as dangerous. And so, our resistance must evolve too," the artiste reflected.

"I don't engage with those who supported repression, through silence or open approval," she said. "I won't attack them, but I won't offer respect either. Supporting an oppressor may not be a crime, but it is a profound ethical failure. Their silence helped normalise brutality. That choice, in my view, is theirs to carry—a permanent, shameful stain."

"An artiste's highest calling is to stand with the oppressed, to confront injustice, and to ask: how far can my art reflect truth?" said the singer. "Those who turn away from that calling waste not just their talent, but their chance to matter."

"And I love my country—deeply. That love keeps me going. That love is enough. I no longer save my dreams for the future—I live them now," she asserted.

The ever-rebellious songwriter concluded with a vision of hope: "My deepest hope is that we cultivate a sense of ownership over this country. Bangladesh will become whatever we build with intention today. Ownership brings responsibility—and with that comes power. If we believe it's ours, the possibilities are endless."

Like her favourite singer, Nina Simone, Shayan wants to follow her own narrative—one rooted in belief, adapted to the needs of the moment, and unafraid to evolve.

PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix
Untamed



Prime Video
The Summer I Turned Pretty



Hulu
Washington Black



Apple TV+
Acapulco



HBO Max
Billy Joel: And So It Goes



1-MINUTE REVIEW

BALLERINA

spins a fierce new chapter in the 'John Wick' saga



Spinning gracefully into the action-packed universe of *John Wick*, *Ballerina* carves out a unique space of its own.

Ana de Armas shines as Eve Macarro, a grief-stricken yet fierce assassin on a mission of vengeance. While the film takes a slow start, it eventually hits its stride, delivering inventive action sequences that feel both brutal and exhilarating.

Eve's story may follow familiar emotional beats, but de Armas brings vulnerability and raw power that make her journey worth rooting for. Once the film leans into its strengths—clever choreography, dark humour, and unexpected weapon choices (yes, even dinner plates and duct tape!)—it becomes a thrilling ride that honours Wick tradition without being weighed down by it.

Keanu Reeves' appearance is short but meaningful, subtly passing the torch without stealing the spotlight. And with a new, scene-stealing villain played by Gabriel Byrne, *Ballerina* deepens the franchise lore while also lightening its tone.

Ultimately, *Ballerina* proves that the *John Wick* universe has room to grow—with grace, grit, and a bit of grenade-fuelled mischief.

OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA

FILM FIESTA TAKE 3

HER LENS, HER STORY



Film Fiesta

Today (July 19) | 5pm-9pm
Alliance Française de Dhaka, Dhanmondi

Exhibition: The Colors of Nature

July 18-24 | 3pm-9pm
Safiuddin Shilpalay, Dhanmondi

She, the Universe: The Infinity Within Her

July 18-26 | 3pm-9pm
Alliance Française de Dhaka, Dhanmondi

'ALL I CAN TAKE'

by Justin Bieber

Justin Bieber bares his soul on *All I Can Take*, the introspective opener to his latest album *Swag*. Trading pop polish for moody minimalism, the track captures a quieter, more contemplative Bieber—one wrestling with fame, pressure, and the weight of being seen.

And it's working. The song has quickly become a fan favourite, racking up over 50 million Spotify streams in just two weeks and landing at No 12 on the Billboard Hot 100. It also broke into the Top

20 on Spotify's Global Chart, proving that even in his most stripped-back moments, Bieber still commands the spotlight.

Released amid whispers of tension in his marriage to Hailey Bieber and following the birth of their son Jack Blues in 2024, *All I Can Take* lands at a personal crossroads for the pop star. Honest, restrained, and quietly powerful; it's Bieber at his most human.



WHAT'S PLAYING