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ARTWORK BY **AYYAN ANON**

THE REBEL Within You

#PERSPECTIVE

Remembering 36th July!

The year 2024 shall forever remain etched in our hearts as a season of mixed emotions. On one hand, we look back at those tumultuous days with joy. On the other hand, we remain apprehensive about what lies ahead.

Representing the generation of the '90s, I saw two of the biggest political victories of the common people — the fall of the dictator in December 1990 and the July Uprising of 2024. I fondly recall the celebrations that followed the downfall of Ershad, and I remember the August afternoon that shook the foundations of the Hasina regime.

By 5 August, 2024, we and 160 million other people were glued to the TV sets. And as the morning rolled into the afternoon on that August day, we could not believe the events that were about to unfold. And they did! Sheikh Hasina had fled the country, and people were in tears of joy.

While the TVs were broadcasting ecstatic scenes from Ganabhaban, we headed to Shantinagar Square, marching with a jubilant crowd, savouring the new taste of freedom. We saw people at the neighbourhood's sweet shops sharing roshgollas with random strangers!

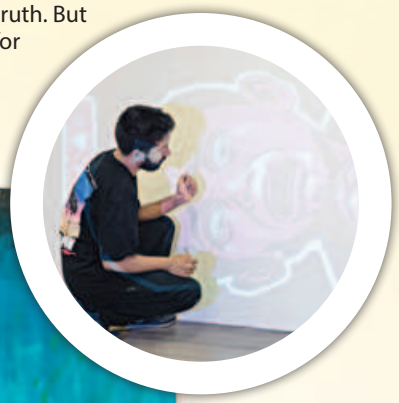
And even from a distance, we could hear the chants — slogans against the autocrat; the cries of triumph. The long-awaited moment had finally arrived.

We were greeted by known faces and we were greeted by complete strangers: "Is it true?" they asked, but none waited for an answer.

After a session of screaming our hearts out, we decided to take a bird's-eye view. As we walked onto the overhead flyover, we saw graffiti drawn on the walls. People, in their rage against the fascist regime, painted the walls in a riot of colours. And we witnessed a surreal scene. It seemed that the people below were dancing to the beat not of a drum, but swaying to the tide of hopes of a new tomorrow.

As the sun set in the west, we slowly walked back to our homes. Thousands of people, initially hesitant, were coming out of their homes. It seemed that the festivities would continue throughout the night. And they did!

There are no restart buttons in life. And as a nation, we are slowly coming to terms with that truth. But for today, and for as long as I shall live, there will always be this 36th day of July. The day freedom came back to life.



By Mannan Mashhur Zarif
Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel

#PERSPECTIVE

What is patriotism to you?

It is a topic most of us once wrote essays about in school, and the word still evokes profound emotions in us. In a conventional sense, patriotism is seen as loving your country; standing for the national anthem and saluting the flag in its honour. We love Bangladesh the way we love our mothers, unconditionally, and without needing a reason. And with the July revolution, it could be argued that we have taken a bold step towards understanding the true meaning of patriotism.

Riad Uddin, a July warrior who protested on the streets of Dhaka, shared: "Patriotism is about feeling responsible for your country. It means knowing that you can no longer say 'It's not my problem,' because it is, indeed, your problem. So, you need to fix it."

He also added, "Before the July Revolution, we only used to read about legends in textbooks who brought independence to our country. But having witnessed a historic moment in the July Uprising through my own eyes, I now feel hopeful that if we stay united, we can do what it takes to protect our motherland."

Patriotism does not always require taking to the streets. One can show their love through small acts of kindness, because loving your country also means loving its people.

Mahjabin Khanam, a teacher, fulfils her civic duty to the country by voluntarily dedicating her free time to teaching street children how to read and write.

"These children are our nation's future, and we cannot let them down. I want to help them. I don't know how far I will succeed, but I will keep trying with all my heart," she said.

Patriotism is also about realising that it doesn't always require grand gestures to show your love for the country and the people. Oftentimes, it could be as simple as planting a tree in your backyard or balcony.

Mohammad Badshah Miah, an autorickshaw driver, shows his love for the people in his own unique way by decorating the three-wheeler he drives every day with small plants inside.

"I just want the people who sit in my autorickshaw to feel like home. If anyone, taking inspiration from my plants, grows at least one at their home, I will find myself fulfilled," he expressed.

This gesture reminds us that patriotism can grow even from the humblest of places.

It can also be expressed through a deep love for your own culture and language. Sometimes, it is as simple as appreciating the richness of our mother tongue.

Fariya Nowshin Deya, a university student who shares a deep love for the Bengali language, said in this regard, "I find comfort in watching Bangla natoks and reading the novels of Rabindranath Tagore and Humayun Ahmed. It is difficult to explain why, but I love complex Bengali words."

Even from beyond borders, one can still show love and support for their country, whether by sending remittances through official channels, gathering with friends abroad to watch the cricket match in support of their home country's team, or simply practising good work ethics and hygiene etiquette among their foreign colleagues and peers.

Faysal Ahmed Ratul, an expatriate living in Australia, remarked, "You won't truly realise how much you love your family until you live away from them. In the same way, you won't realise how much you truly love your country until you set foot outside, eat foreign food round the clock, and yearn to come back home."

Sifat Islam Ishty, a senior lecturer at BRAC University who teaches economics, noted, referring to the issue of brain drain, "Patriotism could mean returning to your country with valuable skills that you can use for the advancement of your country". He also added, "It could even mean dedicating your time and effort to any research that helps solve a problem your country is facing."

To me, patriotism is beyond symbolic gestures. Patriotism lies in everyday choices made by a person. It is the realisation that if you don't step up for your country, no one from outside will take on your responsibility. It is about feeling that inner call of duty through your own conscience, even when no one is asking you.

In essence, patriotism is a lifelong pursuit, which means supporting and loving our country even when it is going through difficult times. Despite the turbulence, it means never losing faith in your people and nation.

By Minhazur Rahman Alvee
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed / LS Archive

#PERSPECTIVE

Eyes on July, scars for life

PHOTO: K M ASAD

K M Asad

There's a silence that settles in when the shouting ends and when the camera finally rests. But for the photojournalists who stood in the eye of July's storm, that silence is anything but peaceful. These are not just men with cameras. They are the reluctant custodians in a country where truth is often unwelcome. Through almost shattered spirits and bloodied pavements, they documented one of the most chilling chapters in Bangladesh's recent memory. What they witnessed didn't just make headlines, it left scars.

The human behind the viewfinder

K M Asad, an award-winning freelance photojournalist, has covered tragedies from the Rana Plaza to Cyclone Sidr, including the Rohingya crisis. But nothing, he says, quite prepared him for this. On 16 July, as shots rang out near Dhaka Medical College, Asad found himself staring at a child who had just been gunned down.

He wasn't ready. No one ever is. "Still now, that moment haunts me," he says.

Like most of his peers, Asad wrestled with the duality of his role: human first, journalist second — or the other way round? When grieving parents begged for help, he felt helpless. When hospitals overflowed with bodies, he froze.

"I always ask myself—am I doing the right thing? But if we don't capture these moments, who will?"

Grief in shutter speed

For Ibrahim Khalil Ibu, a multimedia journalist at the Daily Star who covered multiple flashpoints across the city, it was a pink shirt that stuck. The young man wearing it — shot dead in front of him — was helping others just moments before. "He was alive, smiling, giving out water. Then a gunshot—and he was gone."

Ibrahim Khalil Ibu

The pink shirt isn't just a memory. It's a marker of how quickly life became death that month. And for journalists like Ibu, death was not abstract. It was immediate. It had a name. A face. A scream.

Rampura. Jatrabari. Shahbagh. The names became shorthand for carnage.

But the toll didn't end with the field.

"My trauma responded after months," he admits. "One day I was sleeping at night in my room, and out of nowhere, I started hearing slogans by protesters, gunshots, sound effects — in my sleep. Even while working, somewhere in the back of my mind, the whole **scene** is still playing."

Trauma as an unpaid assignment

Md Samsul Alam Hady, a photojournalist at UNB, didn't file a single photo. Not because he wasn't there — he was everywhere — but because he couldn't. What haunted him wasn't the image, but the sound. A father saying "Innalillahi…" after learning, over a borrowed phone, that his son had died. That call, Hady says, broke something in him.

"I didn't touch my camera for weeks," he admits. "I'd wake up to screams in my sleep. Even now, I leave the room when people start talking about July. I can't hear it again."

His words echo a deeper truth: what these journalists witnessed was not just violence. It was a collapse of something more fundamental—hope, perhaps, or the illusion that this country would spare its own children.

PHOTO: IBRAHIM KHALIL IBU

PHOTO: **PRABIR DAS**

Prabir Das

The violence you don't publish

Prabir Das, senior photojournalist at The Daily Star, still carries the weight of pictures. Girls beaten with sticks. Friends searching for friends in body bags. Moments too brutal to show, yet too important to forget.

He doesn't revisit the images. He can't. "Those crying faces, those bodies—they're all in my memory.

I don't need to see the pictures again."

There were moments where the human side took over through him helping others. "That time I tried to be more of a human being, rather than a journalist," he says, recalling how he relayed information to students trying to escape violence.

"They were children. They didn't know what to do while being in the midst of a bloody chaos. I did what I had to save however many souls I could."

At one point, he even risked blending in to save students under attack. "I pretended to be physically and verbally aggressive to blend in, and then I grabbed them by their collar, took them away from the mob in the midst of chaos. Because you can't move opposite to the tide, you have to move with the tide."

But survival didn't mean healing. "Still now, I face those traumas," he confesses. "After July, I went to France, and when I was talking with people, I forgot the names of people, dates, and so many. I forgot so many things that time."

The new boundaries of risk

After July, their boundaries changed. Not just professional ones, but personal, ethical, and emotional. K M Asad, who once saw the camera as an armour, now considers it as a burden.

"We faced so much backlash in July. People used to call us 'Dalal' and all," he says. "But I've been working for so long, I know how to handle it. I started to see and post things a little differently, because now I know what a picture can do."

Ibu, once meticulous about his gear, now thinks first about escape routes. Hady no longer photographs wounded children in hospital beds. And Prabir believes therapy should be standard issue alongside helmets.

He said, "They need to have their safety gear, like a bulletproof jacket, a lightweight camera and gear, and a helmet. And one thing I must say is that they should have counselling. The situation that photojournalists face regularly affects our minds and may cause PTSD."

Support, especially from peers, makes a difference, but it doesn't always come from home.

"Internationally, they know how to appreciate a picture. How to appreciate the work of someone," K M Asad points out. "Nationally, we don't. Sometimes we become competitive, which is good, but bad competition is never good."

Md Samsul Alam Hady

PHOTO: **MD SAMSUL ALAM HADY**

July, one year later

A year on, July feels like a bruise that hasn't faded. Its images, those that made it to the public and those that didn't, still hover over a country unsure of what it's become. And the journalists who bore witness? They're still learning how to carry what they captured.

They didn't just shoot photographs. They held up mirrors. And what stared back was a nation coming undone.

But even now, even after everything, they remain committed — not to fame, not to awards, not to the front page. But to the truth. And that's perhaps the most human thing of all.

By K Tanzeel Zaman
Photo: Courtesy/ K M Asad; Ibrahim Khalil Ibu; Md Samsul Alam Hady; Prabir Das

#EVENTS

THE REBEL WITHIN YOU
Painting the memory of a movement

In commemoration of the July Uprising, on 29 July, 2025, The Daily Star hosted an art camp titled "The Rebel Within You," inviting 11 young artists who lived through the chaos, fear, and fire of 2024's student-led mass movement. On that day, the walls of The Daily Star Centre pulsed with more than just colour, as they echoed with memory, protest, and the quiet defiance of a generation that refuses to forget. The event was, at its core, a reminder that revolutions do not always end when the crowd disperses. Sometimes, they linger in colour. Read on to hear directly from the artists — what they painted, why they painted it, and what the uprising left behind in their hearts.

Star LIFE Style

ABDULLAH AL JUNAYED

I am a student of Media Studies and Journalism, but art has always been my second language. And today, I'm not just painting; I'm remembering.

For this exhibition, "The Rebel Within You," I chose to depict Mir Mahfuzur Rahman Mugdho, one of the young souls martyred during the July Uprising, while offering water to protestors. The act was so simple – handing out water – but in that moment, it became sacred. That bottle in his hand, once ordinary, turned into a national symbol of resilience and sacrifice.

Art does something that words and photos often can't: it reaches deeper. A photograph might document an event, but a painting, I believe, whispers to the soul. That's why this event feels different.
It's not just another reflection on July, but an artistic reckoning. A way for us to process what we went through, and share that grief and hope with those who may not have felt it firsthand.

LATA CHAKMA

During the July Uprising, I was trapped between protestors and political mobs. At Beribadh, I found myself alone in a chaos of blocked roads and fear. Someone even reached into my rickshaw to harass me. I kept going because there was no other choice.

"The Rebel Within You" gave me the space to turn that fear into art. Through my painting, I ask: how did we reach this point — and where do we go from here?

AISHAEE CHAKMA

During the July Uprising, I was in Dhaka. And I remember the situation clearly. It was a paralysing uncertainty. It was not only a mass uprising, but also a moment of personal reckoning.

When the call came from The Daily Star about "The Rebel Within You," I didn't hesitate. I knew I needed this canvas just as much as it needed me. I didn't think of it as an opportunity, but saw it as a responsibility.

My painting is not gentle. It's a societal image of what the country looked like through my eyes: raw, disoriented, desperate, but not broken.

MONG SHONIE RAKHAINE

I'm a Master's student at Dhaka University. During the July Uprising, I was in Jigatala, where tear gas filled the air and police raids became routine. I remember 18 July, 2024 — sound grenades, panic — the kind of chaos that makes you question whether you will ever make it home.

For "The Rebel Within You," I painted Riya Gope — a girl who wasn't protesting, didn't hold any placard, and yet, became a victim of state violence. That's what broke me. You didn't need to chant to be punished. Just being present was enough.

This piece isn't just a work of art; it's a memory. It's for Riya, and for everyone who didn't choose to join a revolution but became part of it anyway.

AYYAN ANON

I'm in Class 9 and live in Dhaka. Last July, the city just didn't feel like home. I wasn't outside protesting, but stuck behind screens, scrolling through chaos — gunshots, arrests, blackout zones — every update made me feel more helpless.

So, when I got the chance to paint for "The Rebel Within You," it felt like a release. It was my first time working on such a big canvas, and I was nervous. But as my brush moved, I felt like I was finally doing something. Giving shape to everything I had held inside.

My artwork focuses on the unity we saw that month and how people came together despite fear, despite pain. I don't know if I'll get another chance like this. But for now, through this painting, I'm part of something bigger.

TANVIR IBN KABIR

I'm a student at the Institute of Fine Arts, University of Chittagong. Last July, I painted walls, made graffiti, and turned every blank surface into a voice.

When The Daily Star reached out about "The Rebel Within You," I didn't think twice. I knew exactly what I would paint: Abu Sayeed, standing with arms stretched wide — the image that became a symbol of our defiance.

That pose from July wasn't just iconic; it felt like a turning point. On my canvas, he (Abu Sayed) stands wrapped in red and green — not just representing protest, but something deeper: the possibility of rebirth. This work isn't just about memory. It's about belief. That image, that man, that moment — still speaks.

ARHAM HABIB

This initiative, "The Rebel Within You", matters. It reminds me of what we lost and regained during the July movement. Before 18 July, that space for free expression was disappearing. The student uprising cracked it open, even if only for a moment.

A year later, that freedom still feels distant. But this exhibition gives us space again — space to reflect, to create, to speak through art. My piece is based on what I witnessed firsthand. And this piece isn't just art. It's evidence. It's what I saw.

BADHON AKTHER

When "The Rebel Within You" was announced, I saw it as my chance to finally pour a year's worth of silence and fear onto canvas.

My artwork is about how we each resisted in our own way; some with slogans, some with silence, and some, like me, through art.

We hoped July would bring real change. Some things shifted, but it is not enough. That frustration still sits in my strokes.

Art lets me preserve what happened. To remind people that this wasn't just a protest. It was a cry. A memory. A movement. And it must not be forgotten.

SAFIQUL ISLAM SAGOR

I'm a student at the Institute of Fine Arts, University of Chittagong. During the July Uprising, I saw people fall. That kind of trauma doesn't leave you. It follows you into the studio and onto the canvas.

So, when The Daily Star announced "The Rebel Within You," it wasn't just an exhibition. It was a continuation. My painting captures a harsh truth: peaceful protest met with brutal force. Hope, crushed.

Yes, the autocracy fell. But much of the system remains. Justice still feels far away. That's why I'm here. Not to move on, but to remember.

OVI RAHMAN

I'm a designer, a filmmaker — and sometimes, a protestor with a paint can. When the July Uprising erupted, I didn't grab a megaphone. I grabbed colour. I made images on walls, screens, and posters, which spoke when words couldn't. That's how I resist. That's what brought me to "The Rebel Within You." This isn't just an art camp — it's a reminder.

My piece is the crying face of a child. Not a fighter, not a leader, but a witness. The kind of face we often ignore. While adults were bleeding and marching, children were watching. Absorbing. Inheriting trauma. That's what I wanted to capture — the impact we never measure.

Last July was chaos. We rose, we broke, we burned. And even now, something of it still smoulders. This exhibition preserves the ember. To me, art is rebellion — a frame, a mural, a brushstroke. They're all protests if done with purpose. Artists aren't here just to document. We're here to disturb. To make people feel.

FARHAD HUSEN SUMON

I'm from the Institute of Fine Arts, University of Chittagong.

For "The Rebel Within You," my artwork is titled "Medha Shohid". It's based on what I witnessed during the Quota Reform Movement — when peaceful protestors were shot, and a rickshaw puller carried away a bloodied student. That scene haunted me. I had to paint it.

I stayed on campus until 3 August. Afterwards, my family asked me to return to Jamalpur. But even there, I joined the anti-autocracy movement. Walking in processions, chanting with one voice. The spirit didn't stop at campus gates.

When I was invited to this exhibition, I felt proud. I changed ideas multiple times before settling on this image. It felt right and honest. This isn't just art. It's memory. And now the world will see it.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel, Sheikh Mehedi Morshed.
***The artworks created by the participating artists during the art camp, "The Rebel Within You," are now on display at The Daily Star Centre. The exhibition is open to all visitors.

#FASHION & BEAUTY

“1972 ART 39”

How Mohammed Maaz is stitching social justice into fashion

The room was lively, and all around us, there were thread-bound canvases leaning against walls that served as portraits of defiance and fragments of untold stories. And at the centre of it sat Mohammed Maaz, a soft-spoken artist.

Before venturing into the world of art and design, he spent over two decades in the steel industry. In a candid conversation on a July afternoon, we spoke with the artist about art and design. However, his eyes lit up every time the conversation turned to freedom, justice, and resistance.

Maaz's work fills the emotional and political gaps left by both mainstream media and traditional NGOs. At a time when many avoid political expression for fear of repercussion, he invests in it. In a country where arts education is often undervalued and political neutrality is demanded, his venture is a small but potent act of cultural dissent.

The awakening

Mohammed Maaz does not carry the air of an artist-activist. He does not go for flamboyant declarations and certainly does not chase attention. But there's a quiet urgency in the way he speaks. Like someone who's learned to turn silence into something more powerful. And for him, the year 2023 was a turning point.

"I was depressed and the world felt heavy. Like we'd all forgotten what freedom meant," he explains. One day, in that haze of frustration and helplessness, he picked up the Constitution of Bangladesh.

"I found Article 39, which promised me freedom of speech, expression, and conscience. That's the day I realised that this isn't a gift from a government, but a birthright."

However, where does one go to exercise that right when public spaces are watched and voices are silenced?

Most people would not think of rebellion when they look at embroidery. However, Mohammed Maaz's jackets and textiles are stitched with symbols of defiance. His first work centred on the underrepresented communities, following conversations with individuals whose lives had been defined by rejection.

"Hearing their stories, I realised how invisible they were. That made me cry. That made me act," he says.

Working with artisans from the Bihari communities of Mohammadpur and Mirpur, he learned of embroidery as a medium and insisted it could be more than decoration. The artisans were sceptical at first.

"They told me the designs would fail, the cloth would be wasted," he recalls. Six months later, a design finally worked. And the result was astounding – a voice made visible.

Not your typical fashion brand

The label "1972 Art 39" emerged from a process. Named after the year the Constitution of the country was written, it is not about seasonal trends or celebrity endorsements (though, yes, one of Maaz's jackets worn by Adnan Al Rajeev made it to Cannes). It's about documenting the stories of people often left out of the national imagination.

His pieces have been displayed in exhibitions as far as New York, and during a major human rights event hosted by ActionAid, ambassadors and cultural figures were drawn to his work. The pieces tackled gender identity and the erasure of dissent. Each design was hand-embroidered by artisans who used to earn modest wages, and often juggled family obligations and social stigma.

"When they stitch, they're not just sewing patterns," Maaz says. "They're embedding their own survival stories. Embroidery was my choice because every thread, every weave, carries meaning. It's slow, just like our fight for justice."

Revolution and resonance

Throughout our conversation, Maaz returns to one idea: resistance doesn't need a loudspeaker. It needs courage. His activism isn't born from ideology, but from lived contradictions. For him, art was not only aesthetics, but also a survival tool.

"My work has not been much liked by the family. Still, I listened to my heart and continued. I'm not a speaker, but I can express myself with fabric. That's my protest," he affirms.

When the July Movement took over Dhaka in 2024, he was watching, listening, and eventually participating — online and off. He collaborated with young rap artists to produce a protest album, Sangram, amplifying youth voices that had no recording budget, but had plenty to say.

Entrepreneurship in Bangladesh often focuses on solving market problems: transport, logistics, fintech, etc. But what Maaz offers is a different kind of solution: cultural and civic disruption through storytelling.

"We're not taught to love ourselves in this country," he says. "We're taught to obey and no one teaches kindness. No one teaches how to respect someone different from you."

This is why entrepreneurs like Maaz matter. Not because they scale fast or rake in millions, but because they remind us what freedom of conscience looks like up close. He is sceptical of overused titles and tired of surface-level engagement, and he certainly does not call himself an activist or a disruptor.

"In Bangladesh, we say we care about art and justice, but we rarely mean it. There's no real infrastructure for it. No respect for our artists," he states.

Still, he hopes. Hopes that 1972 Art 39 can grow into a global platform. That his embroidered stories will one day travel to places where their messages might land louder, unfiltered by local censorship or fear.

Already, some of his pieces are in New York.

Socially conscious entrepreneurship is not just a trend, but indeed a necessity. In countries like Bangladesh, where structural oppression still silences millions, people like Maaz are filling a dangerous vacuum. They may not always be celebrated. They may face backlash, censorship, or even ridicule. But they are building alternative futures, thread by thread.

And the fact that Maaz doesn't want to be glorified? That may be his most radical act yet.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel

#PERSPECTIVE

Synonyms of bravery

MARTYRS WHO BECAME SYMBOLS

It's been barely a year since July 2024, yet it feels like an eternity. The smoke clouding the sky, the gunshots, the sounds heard across the country — all seem like distant memories. Our minds have a strange way of handling trauma, and erasing recollections is just another coping mechanism. However, no matter how fleeting our minds are, the collective conscience of the nation remembers the martyrs — brave individuals who sacrificed their lives so that we can have a country that is fair and just.

The Language Movement of 1952 have historically inspired many of the uprisings that have followed. Abdus Salam, Rafiq Uddin Ahmed, Abul Barkat, and Abdul Jabbar are the names that come to mind as soon as someone mentions 21st February. Of course, there were many more, and as history teaches us, the language movement was not just confined to Dhaka.

The death of the three added momentum to the struggle, and the movement peaked on 22nd February 1952. Shafiur Rahman, another notable martyr, was shot the next day along with other students.

I still cannot fathom how a government can be so unreasonable as to shoot its own people over something as simple as demanding recognition for their mother tongue.

Later in our history, other souls have become iconic symbols of political movements.

Amanullah Asaduzzaman was gunned down by police during the events of 1969, and today we commemorate the day as Shaheed Asad Day. Our war of independence in 1971 had thousands of martyrs. And it is a cruel play of fate that even though we send our prayers and respect to all, a complete list of martyrs is yet to be compiled.

The Seven Bir Sreshthos ('The Most Valiant Hero') are our national heroes who fought and died bravely for the country. As a child, I marvelled at the bravery of Flight Lieutenant Matiur Rahman and that of Hamidur Rahman. I remember trying to picture him with a grenade in hand, his close combat with the Pakistan army, and then him bleeding to death, yet not giving up. Then there was Shafi Imam Rumi, who could have achieved everything in life, but instead chose to serve the country and paid with his life. I recall reading about each one of them and thinking how these real-life heroes were bigger than the heroes of any epics we have read.

Turning the pages of history, we also learn of Shaheed Noor Hossain and how he was killed on 10 November, 1987.

"Swairachar nipat jak, Gonotantra mukti pak" (Down with autocracy, let democracy be freed) were the words on his chest and back and this, for us, became a symbol of retaining a belief in your core and standing up for it.

Our younger generations were inspired by all of these, as we saw in July of 2024. We witnessed people protesting like Noor Hossain, using their own bodies as a canvas against oppression. We saw how people came forward and how hundreds of them died. Some still remain nameless!

Shaheed Abu Sayed's arms spread, standing defiantly in the face of oppression and gunpoint, remind us what July took from us.

Every time you see his photos, it triggers something in us. During those fateful days of July, Abu Sayed's sacrifice fuelled our people with the melancholy-filled rage that we needed to master up our courage.

Mir Mahfuzur Rahman Mugdho is another name that is now synonymous with the Monsoon Movement. Everywhere you see his photograph, you see him with a

graceful smile. "Pani lagbe, Pani?" — those words mean so much more now. It's now more than a simple offer for water; it's a reminder that something noble can be so simple, yet the impact can be so powerful.

This attempt of ours does not contain an exhaustive list of the martyrs. Nor is it possible to name every one of them. There are hundreds, and many of them remain nameless to this day. We pay our tribute and respect to each and every one of them and pray for the salvation of their souls. Let this be our silent promise: to create a country that they can be proud of.

By Ashif Ahmed Rudro
Photo: Prabir Das, Anisur Rahman
Illustration: Ashif Ahmed Rudro

#PERSPECTIVE

PARENTS WHO LET GO

The silent sacrifice of July 2024

When children face adversity, mothers experience their deepest fears. Fathers respond in their own way. July 2024 witnessed all of this, as it was also a month that reshaped the way families looked at protest and resistance.

The new generation was no longer silent observers. They have learned to rise, resist, and demand justice. The words echoed through the streets, but behind this wave of youth-led protest were homes filled with quiet anxiety. The parents with heavy hearts lived every moment in silent fear. The hours of waiting felt endless. And yet, parents chose to let go. They could have forced their children to stay home, but they did not. They allowed them to join the protests because they felt silence was no longer an option.

On 18 July, Romecha Begum received a phone call that turned her world upside down. Her son, Riad Uddin Ridu — a university student — had been exposed to tear gas fired by police to disperse protesters. She had assumed he was attending his classes that day. Instead, he had joined the protests without informing his parents.

"I was in our village at that time. All I could think was — if only I were in Dhaka, I would have run to his university and brought him somewhere safe," Begum shares.

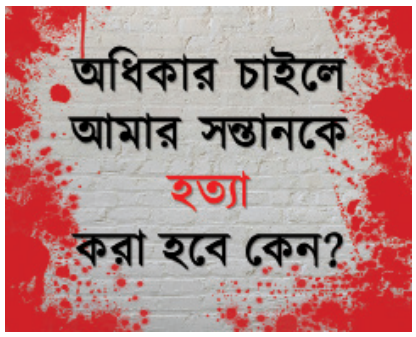
She called his friends, her relatives, anyone who might reach him, but the fear didn't leave.

"It was like a weight on my chest that wouldn't go away." And yet, amid fear, came the memories. She remembered her own glory days, the 1990 protests that brought down Ershad.

"I had been on the streets of Rangpur with my siblings. When I saw these kids, even the ones who got shot, still standing tall, I felt strength return to me."

And Romecha Begum was not alone.

Luthfun Nessa, a teacher by profession and mother of Kibo Mahojenin Khan, a university student, remembers the first time her daughter



joined the protest on 16 July.

"I supported her from the beginning," she said. "Even after the 18 July clashes, I kept supporting her, because she was trying to bring change."

Still, Nessa was worried, and every moment was filled with a prayer. "On 5 August, when victory came, I was in the streets too. But I was proud that my daughter was a part of making it happen."

Luthfun Nessa now believes that by learning to raise a voice against injustice, her daughter has gained a lifelong skill — one that will serve her in the years to come.

Md Abu Yusuf Khan, father of Motaher Khan Tanvir, a Jahangirnagar University alumnus, shared, "I always supported him because I believe if you're doing something for others, for society, not for yourself, then it is the right thing."

Khan was devastated to learn that his son had been hit by five bullets on 19 July, but seeing him wounded and still determined to return to the streets, shook him. "I was a child during the Liberation War, and I remember carrying water and food for the freedom fighters. He did it because he believed something must change. And I shared his belief," he said.

"Who am I to stand in the way of that kind of courage?" the freedom fighter added.

For Lipi, the mother of Mohammad Mehedi Hasan, the journey was filled with fear and initial reluctance.

She confessed, "I was hesitant at first. There is good and bad in everything. I didn't know if what he was doing was safe. But deep inside, I had faith in him. I knew my son wasn't doing anything wrong. It's just that I am a mother, you know."

Her fear, however, pierced her heart the day he went missing. "It was 26 July when I learned he'd been taken," she recalls, her voice trembling. "I rushed from one police station to another, desperate, but I couldn't find him anywhere."

Hasan had been tracked through a friend and detained by the police. The weight of uncertainty nearly crushed her.

"I was ready to give up everything," she says. "If it meant getting him back, I would have done anything."

Two days later, a call from the DB brought relief to her aching heart. Hasan had been released. He was a changed person, and so was she.

"I didn't want him to go," she shares. "But now I understand. Sometimes, even a mother has to learn to let go."

These stories are not coincidental — they are the voices of thousands of parents and the weight of countless sleepless nights. Behind every protester stood the silent strength of a family. For July 2024 was not just about the youth rising; it was also about families filled with hope, fear, and the painful courage to let go.

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