

One year without Shoikot



SABRINA AFROZ SABONTI

It has now been one full year since we lost Shoikot. But to those of us who loved him, it feels like much more than that. It feels as though time has stood still since that day. Every moment has been heavy with grief, every day a reminder of what we lost—not just a beloved brother, son, or friend, but a symbol of courage, conviction, and hope.

Shoikot was not an ordinary young man. He carried within him a deep love for this country and a strong sense of justice far beyond his years. He stood on the frontlines of the student protests—not for personal gain, not for recognition, but because he genuinely believed that Bangladesh could and should be better. He believed in peaceful protest, in democracy, and in the power of people's voices to bring about change.

But on that dark day, his voice was silenced. Shoikot was killed during a peaceful demonstration, and his death broke our hearts and shook the nation. The most painful part is that he was not killed in an accident or by some unknown threat—he was shot and killed by the police. The very force tasked with protecting our citizens became the cause of his death. That truth is difficult to accept. It has changed our lives forever.

In the face of such tragedy, it would be easy to fall into hopelessness and despair. But that is not what Shoikot would have wanted. He was brave and optimistic. Even in the face of injustice, he believed change was possible. And it is that same belief that keeps us moving forward today.

Over the past year, we have continued to ask hard questions—

not out of bitterness, but out of love for our country. We want to know what steps have been taken to ensure that what happened to Shoikot will never happen again. We believe that no family should ever have to experience the pain of losing a loved one in this way.

We recognise that police reform is not an easy task. It is a long and complex process that requires structural change,

no longer be with us in body, but his spirit, his voice, and his dream for a better Bangladesh are still very much alive.

We often say that the youth are the future of a nation. Shoikot lived that truth. He was a student, but he was also a leader. He was young, but his sense of justice was mature and unwavering. Even now, we feel his presence in the streets, in the speeches, in the hearts of those who continue to march for fairness, safety, and dignity.

We want the country he dreamed of to become a reality—a Bangladesh where freedom of speech is protected, where peaceful protest is respected, and where no one is punished for demanding justice. A Bangladesh where the police serve the people with dignity and professionalism, and where no mother has to fear sending her child out to speak the truth.

We still believe that such a Bangladesh is possible.

We call on the interim government to take this opportunity to lead with courage and vision. We urge them to continue the work of police reform—not just on paper, but in practice. Build a force that earns the trust of the people. Offer training that teaches empathy, not fear. Enforce laws that protect rather than punish.

Let the memory of Shoikot—and others like him—guide us towards a brighter, safer, more just nation.

To the people of Bangladesh, we say this: do not forget Shoikot. Do not forget what he stood for. His story is not just a personal tragedy—it is part of our national history. And it is also a reminder of the power of young voices, the strength of peaceful movements, and the urgent need for compassion in governance.

To Shoikot, we say: you are not forgotten. Your dreams live on. Your name lives on. And your fight is now our fight.

Sabrina Afroz Sabonti is a student, who lost her brother, Mahamudur Rahman Shoikot, during the July Uprising.

The Forgotten Frontline

Madrasa Students in the Uprising



MD HIFJUR RAHMAN CHOWDHURY

Nine-year-old Salfkat Samir was a fifth-grade student in an Ibtedayi (primary) madrasa. He was the apple of his parents' eyes—Sakibur Rahman and Faria Ilnat. They had a thousand dreams centred on him. They hoped that one day, their son would grow up to become a great Islamic scholar. On that day, his father imagined he would proudly wipe away his tears and say to everyone, "I am the father of Maulana Mufti Salfkat Samir."

But Samir had not yet outgrown his childhood. In madrasa, when he recited:

"I shall not remain confined within four walls,
I shall see the world,
How people move in the whirlpool of time,"

—he didn't want to stay trapped within the four walls of a traffic-choked, chaotic Dhaka flat.

He longed to go outside, to play with his friends, to laugh and be happy. But the fascist government left no room for such wishes. His parents strictly ordered him not to step outside those four walls. Obediently, with teary eyes, he would stand by the barred window and gaze out towards the open horizon. But standing by that window proved fatal for him.

On July 19, 2024, the brutal forces of Hasina's regime were carrying out a violent crackdown outside. Gunfire rang out constantly. As Samir stood at the window, a bullet struck his head. He collapsed on the floor instantly. Along with him collapsed the deep desire to discover the world—and the dreams of his parents.

To carve the path to triumph in the 2024 mass uprising, thousands like Salfkat had to lay down their lives. Salfkat became a living symbol of the sacrifice of madrasa students.

Jatrabari and Uttara were two key strongholds in the 2024 movement. The active and brave presence of madrasa students in these areas shocked everyone. In addition, madrasa students played vital roles in major locations throughout the country, including Cumilla, Habiganj, Narsingdi, Chattogram, and more.

Since the movement was quota-focused in the beginning, madrasa students were not deeply involved from 1 to 16 July. But after 16 July, when Hasina's government began killing students indiscriminately, they could no longer stay inside. With flags of the nation tied to their foreheads, they came out onto the streets to defend their country. Their voices rang out:

"We may give our heads, but never our dignity;
We may give our lives, but never our honour."

Those who dare sell off our sovereignty and kill our people indiscriminately would no longer be tolerated. Teachers from madrasas in Jatrabari, Tongi, Baridhara, and many other areas joined the streets with their students. They provided food, water, shelter, and every possible form of support.

resistance.

In countless such movements, madrasa students have shed their blood and made their presence known. But the state has never truly recognised their sacrifices. Generation after generation, they have been neglected. With no government support or patronage, nearly five million students across the country are being educated in Qawmi madrasas through donations from devout, working-class people. If the students of Alia madrasas are taken into account, the number rises even higher.

After 5 August, madrasa education leaders hoped this discrimination would end. But they were wrong. Even now, there has been no visible change. When the state organised celebratory events with the stakeholders of the July–August movement, madrasa students were not included. Only after widespread criticism did the Ministry of Culture feel compelled to declare



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

According to a report by the Centre for Social Studies (CSS), 42 madrasa students were martyred in the movement. Another organisation named Tarun-Alim Projonmo (Young Scholar Generation) published the names of 77 martyrs. These numbers are not just statistics; rather, they represent the deep sense of responsibility that madrasa students feel towards the state.

From the time of British rule until today, whenever the motherland has faced crisis, the community of Islamic scholars and madrasa students has given everything they had. From the *Reshmi Rumal* (Silk Letter) Movement to the Farazi Movement, from the 2013 Shapla Chattar protest to the anti-Modi protests of 2021—these are but a few chapters in a long history of

July 21 as "Madrasa Resistance Day."


If given proper state recognition and support, madrasa students have the potential to become shining examples of success, serving the nation with unwavering honesty and dedication. In a Muslim-majority country, the continued neglect of Islamic education leaves nearly 90% of the population disheartened and unheard.

We urge the interim government to recognise madrasa education not as a fringe component, but as a vital pillar of the national education system—one that deserves focused attention and meaningful inclusion.

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WHERE ARE THE JOBS,

where is the justice?



MOSHAHIDA SULTANA

The powerful waves of the July uprising swept through Bangladesh, igniting hopes for a better future and demanding justice, employment, and dignity for the masses. Yet, in this turbulent period, the promises made by the interim government remain unfulfilled, and the people's expectations continue to be dashed—especially in the realms of employment opportunities and social justice.

The movement, which initially arose from the fundamental demand for equality in employment opportunities, eventually shifted to calling for the resignation of the autocratic government. After the uprising, when the interim government was formed, people from various classes took to the streets demanding what they had been deprived of under the autocratic regime. They protested for dignified jobs, job security, and fair wages—basic rights essential to social justice. However, despite these noble aspirations, the interim government has completely failed to prioritise employment creation or address the needs of workers and farmers. Instead, it has persistently ignored their interests, deepening disillusionment across the nation.

The significant movements that have marked this year's struggle cannot be overlooked. Some of these trace back to the remnants of autocratic rule, while others have emerged in response to the shutdown of factories owned by beneficiaries of the previous regime. Throughout the year, garment workers have sustained their demand for unpaid wages, taking to the streets as numerous factories closed without fulfilling their financial obligations. Similarly, tea workers continue their protests,

insisting on decent wages and better working conditions. Teachers and academic staff across various educational institutions have voiced their discontent over irregularities in appointments, promotions, and layoffs, demanding proper employment policies and job security. From primary school teachers and madrasa educators to nurses, and both private- and government-sector employees, the cry for fair treatment and stable employment has resonated across all sectors.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

One of the most significant movements during this period has been that of the Palli Bidyut Samity (PBS), demanding the merger of the Rural Electrification Board (REB) with the Palli Bidyut Samity. This demand is rooted in the long history of rural electricity crises. The crux of the problem lies in the dual control of the power distribution system—the REB and the PBS—which has led to ongoing conflicts and frustrations. REB's control over PBS has resulted in strained relations, inefficiency,

and corruption. The Rural Electrification Board has dismissed many employees, issued stand releases, and unfairly transferred staff, creating an environment of fear. The most affected are the lower-level workers. The people's grievances about transformer failures, irregular line designs, and technical faults have often gone unaddressed because frontline technicians and workers lack institutional autonomy to voice concerns. They operate under an environment of fear, and their complaints rarely reach decision-makers—this has stifled technical problem-

solving and deepened service disparities.

The garment workers' movement, once a symbol of Bangladesh's economic prowess, has seen its demands for fair wages and safer working environments met with indifference or superficial responses. Despite their crucial role in the nation's economy, workers continue to labour under unsafe conditions and with little security, feeling betrayed by government commitments.

The primary teachers' movement emerged as a voice of frustration against inadequate salaries, poor working conditions, and the neglect of basic educational needs. Teachers, who are the backbone of the nation's future, continue to demand their rightful due, but their cries have largely gone unheard. Similarly, farmers have been protesting against unfair pricing, credit shortages, and a lack of infrastructural support—a stark reminder that the agrarian economy remains fragile and neglected.

The two-month-long sit-in of Tothyo Apa is another movement that has recently attracted widespread attention. The protesters, commonly known as Tothyo Apa, are women employed under a government project run by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, working tirelessly to empower women through digital services in rural areas. They have been peacefully protesting since 22 May at the Press Club—including on Eid day—and have travelled from distant districts like Kurigram, Khagrachari, and Jhalokathi, hundreds of miles from the capital. Many of them are the sole breadwinners for their families, managing their children's school expenses, household needs, and medical bills single-handedly. Despite their dedication and long-standing service, the government now plans to dismiss them on grounds of suspicion and political bias, merely because they are part of a government project and not permanent employees.

When they sought justice and their rightful employment, they were met with violence—police intervention, injuries, and arrests—including pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, cancer patients, and persons with disabilities. The government's brutal response to their peaceful demonstration not only violates their constitutional rights but also reveals a deep disregard for their dignity and contributions. Instead of addressing their legitimate demands—for job security, fair treatment, and recognition of their work—the authorities have subjected them to harassment, violence, and dehumanisation. This blatant cruelty underscores a broader pattern of unfair treatment, whereby the government marginalises and mistreats those who advocate for their rights, branding them as enemies and systematically silencing their voices. Such actions not only suppress genuine protests but also betray the very principles of justice and equality that these women seek to uphold.

The interim government, often unable or unwilling to implement reforms to protect the interests of factory workers, trade unions, employees across private and public sectors, and outsourced workers, has frequently questioned the legitimacy of their protests. Rather than addressing their grievances, the government has arbitrarily labelled protesters as collaborators of the previous autocratic regime. Support for any particular political party should never serve as a criterion for unfair transfers, stand releases, or dismissals. Regardless of any political affiliations, individuals may have had in the past, the state has a fundamental responsibility to treat all workers with fairness, dignity, and respect. Unfortunately, we have witnessed the government exploiting political connections as a basis for mistreatment, further deepening the sense of insecurity and injustice among these workers.

While these movements reveal a collective yearning for justice, employment, and dignity, the interim government's response has been tepid at best. Many expected that the government would prioritise creating jobs, reform policies, and meet the genuine demands of the people. Instead, the measures taken so far have fallen short, lacking a cohesive strategy to address the root causes of unemployment and social disparity. The interim government's inability—or perhaps unwillingness—to act decisively has led many to believe that it is incapable of fulfilling the aspirations of the masses.

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