INTERNATIONAL DAY TO END IMPUNITY FOR CRIMES AGAINST JOURNALISTS

Journalism remains fraught with risks and persecution



was nothing unusual about October 11— until things took a deadly turn. On his

⊢ 45-year-

Hossain, there

old Ilias

way back from work, Hossain was brutally stabbed and then left on the street to die in a pool of his own blood. His fault? He was a journalist who had exposed the crimes of a local drug and illegal gas connection racketeering gang. Hossain's report had landed two brothers—Tushar and Turjoy—from Narayanganj in jail. Upon securing bail, the brothers decided to settle their scores with Ilias.

Post the gruesome killing of Ilias Hossain—correspondent for *Dainik Bijoy*, a local Bangla daily—three people have been arrested, including Tushar. But five other accused remain at large. And there remains the possibility of this case getting buried under the growing pile of unresolved cases in the country, of journalists getting victimised.

The gruesome murder of journalist couple Sagar Sarwar and Meherun Runi—the brutality of which shocked the nation in February 2012—is a case in point. The couple's five-year-old son discovered his parents' dead bodies in the morning. The then home minister had confidently vowed to catch the killers within 48 hours. Those 48 hours never ended; eight years into that dreadful incident, investigators are yet to find who killed the two and why.

And not just murders, journalists in this country face persecution in many forms and scale. According to a report by Reporters Without Borders—also commonly known as RSF (Reporters sans frontiers)—titled "Bangladeshi reporter slain by local gangsters in Dhaka suburb", published on October 12, 2020, "at least 16 journalists have been the victims of serious violence in Bangladesh since the start of the year."

The RSF report—although alarming—comes as no surprise. On April 19, 2020, the police registered a case against the editor of an online news portal, along with three others—Mohiuddin Sarker, acting editor of jagonews24.com, Rahim Suvho, Thakurgaon correspondent of the online news outlet and local journalist Shaown Amin—under the draconian Digital Security Act, after the news-

intimidated, harassed, or arrested for reporting on pilferage, corruption, and lack of accountability in food aid meant for the poor during the lockdown", as mentioned in the above cited report, published on April 29, 2020.

And the country is familiar with the sudden disappearance of Shafiqul Islam Kajol, photojournalist and editor of fortnightly magazine "Pakkhakal", who reappeared after 53 days in



A country without a strong fourth estate is a country that is vulnerable to exploitation.

portal reported on the misappropriation of relief funds. The report apparently had "false, offensive and defamatory content". The person who filed the case was affiliated with Baliadangi Upazila's Swechchasebak League in Thakurgaon.

police custody. According to reports, a defamation suit was filed against Kajol under the DSA on March 9, on the 10th he vanished. As per a report by CIVICUS—an international alliance of civil society organisations and activists

This—unfortunately—is not an isolated incident, rather it is symptomatic of the systemic suppression of free press in the locality. According to a *Daily Star* report, police in Thakurgaon "assaulted the district correspondent of Bangladesh Pratidin and private TV channel News 24 at a checkpost." On April 15, the police sued Dainik Odhikar's district correspondent for "criticising the district administration on Facebook." And Forum for Freedom of Expression, Bangladesh data suggests that around 20 journalists were "attacked,

police custody. According to reports, a defamation suit was filed against Kajol under the DSA on March 9, on the 10th he vanished. As per a report by CIVICUS—an international alliance of civil society organisations and activists to strengthen citizen action—"Human rights groups believe he was subjected to a suspected enforced disappearance." Kajol was slapped with four cases, one also suing Motiur Rahman Chowdhury, prominent journalist and editor-in-chief of Bangla newspaper *Manab Zamin*.

Apart from these, there have been numerous incidents of journalists being subjected to attacks and harassment across the country since January this year. For instance, in Sylhet, Mahibur Rahman, chairman of Aushkandi Union Parishad in Nabiganj—who also happens to be

a ruling party local leader—assaulted district correspondents of three news outlets—Dainik Protidiner Sangbad, Dainik Amar Sangbad and private TV Channel-S—with a cricket bat because they reported on irregularities in relief distribution in the area during the Covid-19 general holidays. The Dainik Protidiner Sangbad correspondent, Shah Sultan Ahmed, had sustained critical injuries and had to be taken to Osmani Medical College for treatment.

Also in April, Golam Sarwar Pintu, a journalist of a Bangla daily, *Dainik Bangladesher Alo*, had been arrested by the police in a case filed in Dhaka under the DSA by an influential ruling party leader, Sheikh Salim. Pintu had reported on the protests by poor people in the locality seeking food aid during the Covid-19 general holidays.

The growing tendency to systemically suppress free press is not unique to Bangladesh. From the United States to India—two of the more powerful democracies in the world—to the more repressive regimes across the globe, the fourth estate is at risk of being smothered. And with governments assuming more powers to restrict the movement of their citizens in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, organisations such as RSF fear that the media might be suppressed further.

"The coronavirus pandemic illustrates the negative factors threatening the right to reliable information, and is itself an exacerbating factor. What will freedom of information, pluralism and reliability look like in 2030? The answer to that question is being determined today," said RSF secretary-general Christophe Deloire.

In the context of Bangladesh, the DSA is an additional mechanism that makes sure journalists stay within the line. It is unfortunate, how an act that was supposed to have enhanced digital security of citizens is apparently being used to deprive them of correct and unbiased information.

On this International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against

Journalists—in the midst of such uncertainties and unpredictability—one can only hope that governments would realise the folly in suppressing free press. A country without a strong fourth estate is a country that is vulnerable to exploitation. In order to overcome the unprecedented challenges that are being posed by the ever-spreading pandemic, governments should support free press in their quest for truth and accountability. Without having unbiased information about the state of affairs, are we not hamstringing our own exit out of this pandemic?

Governments, that define themselves as democratic especially, across the world, are obligated to ensure the security of journalists and to carry out vigorous investigations when crimes are committed against them. Thus impunity for crimes against journalists must end. Governments must stop the statesponsored agencies from victimising journalists, which would send a strong message to the other actors—politicians, criminals, vested groups—who are engaged in such criminal activities. They should also fast track the disposal of cases for crimes against journalists and bring the criminals to justice irrespective of their identity and/or political affiliations. Instead of clamping down on journalists, governments should hunt down those criminals who are involved in the suppression of freedom of expression.

But to be able to do this, governments need to overcome their inherent fear of truth and accountability. Governments must realise that truth will not always go in their favour, but they need to know the realities nonetheless to address the problems facing the people, especially in times such as these. And it is only through a strong fourth estate that governments can access unbiased information. And it is only when journalists are allowed to do their job without fear that democracy can thrive.

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Circular economy is here to stay, so embrace it!



overwhelming commitments made by the global apparel industry towards circular economy and

12 months,

we have seen

Mostafiz Uddin making fashion circular. We all know that we cannot continue along the present "make-consume-dispose" business model and circularity appears

business model and circularity appears to offer us a way out of that. There has been a major growth in the number of initiatives in this area and, in this space more than any other, investment appears to be flowing.

The discussion around recycling has

not really involved Bangladesh very much—until now. That changed recently with the launch of a new partnership by Global Fashion Agenda with the BGMEA and funded by P4G Partnerships. This is a collaboration project and call to action to initiate and scale up the recycling of textile waste in Bangladesh. The first signatories of this new initiative include Bestseller and OVS. In all, the partnership aims to invite 10 brands in the programme who would all, as one of their first commitments, introduce three first suppliers in Bangladesh to start segregation of waste at source and tracing it to recycling.

I will not go into the more specifics of that programme, other than to say it

looks very promising. Instead, here is what I believe Bangladesh needs to do as a garment sourcing hub to lead the

world in the textile recycling revolution. One: Education. If we want to shift the linear economy to the circular, we have to start right from the beginningand that means sensitise and educate our youngsters about these issues. The basics of recycling—the recycling hierarchy for instance—should be drilled into the minds of young people from a young age. As children get older, why not teach them more about circularity, about how new processes are being developed to recycle old fibres into new ones. Perhaps this could even be introduced into the science syllabus—in chemistry and physics. Further, it is time our universities and colleges embraced recycling issues in terms of their learning and training. We should aim to be leading the world in research textile separation techniques. And, of course, links should be built between recycling learning in universities and industry.

Two: Collecting waste. If we want our industry to go circular, we have to get the logistics right. What is the current state of our textile and clothing collection services and how could it be improved? Do we know and understand the difference between different grades of fibre? Many other countries are lightyears ahead of us on this, and that is obviously a concern. But why not bring in some outside consultants to look at what we are doing wrong in this



We all know that we cannot continue along the present "make-consume-dispose" business model and circularity appears to offer us a way out of that.

area and where we can improve? This includes textile waste from the public but also textile waste from our RMG industry, huge quantities of which is discarded each year—what is happening to this? We need far more traceability on the best bet for in need to consider support us here.

Four: Getting present, I would understanding a

this issue.

Three: Waste sorting. This is a challenging area which goes hand in hand—or works alongside—textile waste collection services. Sorting textiles into different waste streams has traditionally been done by hand, although new, infra-red sorting technologies are being introduced in this area. My guess is that the cost of such technologies would be prohibitive and that, given Bangladesh's low wage rates, manual sorting will be

the best bet for now. Again, we may need to consider outside expertise to

PHOTO:

PALASH KHAN

Four: Getting owner buy-in. At present, I would say there is a lack of understanding about circularity and recycling issues among the RMG sector in Bangladesh—and that needs to change. This space has moved on at a huge pace in the past 18 months. Every time I travel or pop in a Zoom call, circularity is one of the issues being discussed. If Bangladesh is going to be at the head of the queue on these issues, our industry leaders need to be embracing it now. They need to be getting an understanding of the technologies involved, exploring ways

in which they could partner with some of the leading technology providers in this industry, and seeing if there are opportunities to put out one-off pilot lines to test the waters in this area. They also need to understand how the technology works. There is already talk of recycling technologies being licensed to fabric makers—but how would that work and what are the economics of it? My message to my fellow factory owners is that circularity is here to stay—embrace it, for if you do not, others will.

Five: Marketing and promotion. This is arguably the most important area of all. I look around at our competitors in terms of apparel production—Vietnam, China, India and so on—and I do not see them as having made very much progress in terms of recycling. Let us be realistic—so far, this has been a discussion which has mainly taken place among brands and their technology partners. The time is right for manufacturers to come on board and the opportunity is there for Bangladesh's RMG manufacturers to lead the way. But to do that, we need coordination and teamwork. We need to get the message out within our industry that circularity, in all likelihood, is here to stay. This is where the investment is taking place, this is where the money is flowing, and this is where the opportunities lie. So what are we waiting for?

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WILLA CATHER (1873-1947) American author.

There are some things you learn best in calm, and some in storm.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

34 Kickoff aid

ACROSS
1 Tag info
5 Cook's spice
10 Poppy yield
12 Ridiculous
13 Singer Nellie
14 Civil wrongs
15 Furious feeling
16 Calendar box
18 Model buy
19 River crafts
21 Sparklers
22 Denude
24 Provinces
25 White mammal

29 Earth neighbor

32 Important age

33 Field worker

30 Gambler's

secret

35 Passionate dance
37 Full of energy
39 Periphery
40 Apartment sign
41 Reacts to a punch
42 Choir member

DOWN
1 Amusing

DOWN

1 Amusing
2 Met shows
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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS HONOR RANUP ABIDE Е L WEETIE SAP AGE READY NODE ARMBRON DRAIN KA COTNORT NIMATE GOODS E S A R I T L E ANNI

BEETLE BAILEY





BABY BLUES

SO, ARE YOU GOING TO BUY ME

SOME PURPLE HAIR DYE? BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

BY MORT WALKER

