

The holy Prophet of Islam

SYED ASHRAF ALI

THE 12th of Rabiul Awal is a red letter day not only in the history of Islam but also in the annals of civilisation. It was on this fateful day in 570 Anno Domini that the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was born as mercy and guide for all mankind, nay for the entire creation. "The advent of this great teacher, whose life from the moment of his ministry is a verifiable record", says Syed Ameer Ali in *The Spirit of Islam*, "was not a mere accident, an unconnected episode in the history of the world. The same causes, the same crying evils, the same earnest demand for an 'assured trust' in an all-pervading power, which led to the appearance on the shores of Galilee, in the reign of Augustus Caesar, of a Prophet, operated with greater force in the sixth and the seventh century."

The end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh centuries stood for an epoch of disintegration – national, social, moral, spiritual and religious; its phenomena were such as have always involved a fresh form of positive faith, to recall all wandering forces to the inevitable track of spiritual evolution towards the integration of personal worship. They all pointed to the necessity of a more organic revelation of Divine Government. The holy flames kindled by Zoroaster, Moses, and Jesus had unfortunately been distorted and quenched in the blood of man. Under the over-powering influence of the sickly imaginations, the sublime and glorious moral teachings of Gautama had been almost hid from view. Mrs. Rhysse Davies very rightly points out: "Theories grew and flourished, each new step, each new hypothesis demanded another, until the whole sky was filled with forgeries of the brain and the nobler and the simpler lessons of the founder of the religion were smothered beneath the glittering masses of metaphysical subtleties."

Some of the happiest portions of the globe into a veritable Acedama. Incessant war for supremacy, perpetual internecine strife, combined with the ceaseless wrangling of creeds and sects, had sucked the life-blood out of the hearts of nations, and the people of the earth, trodden under the iron heels of a lifeless sacerdotalism, were crying to God from the misdeeds of their masters. Never in the history of the world was the need so great, the time so ripe, for the appearance of a deliverer.

The annals of history testify eloquently to the fact that the Voice of God, though unheard, has always sounded the call to truth. In hours of crises, the servants of the Great Unknown, the "Messengers of Heaven," inevitably rose to proclaim the duties of man to himself and to his creator. They came among their people as the children of their time, they represented the burning aspirations of the human soul for truth, purity and justice. Each was an embodiment of the spiritual necessities of his age; each came to purify, to reform, to elevate a degraded race, a corrupted commonwealth. Some came as teachers of a smaller culture, to influence a

smaller sphere; others came with a wider horizon of thought and action, a world-wide message – message not confined to one race or nation, not confined to any particular country or continent, but intended for all humanity. Such indeed was Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) whose Mission was not to the Arabs alone. The Most Gracious and the Most Merciful Alalh, in His infinite Mercy, sent Muhammad (pbuh) as Rahmatul-ili-Alameen – mercy not only for the entire humanity but also for each and every creation in every nook and corner of the infinite universe.

The Holy Prophet (pbuh) with his amazing soberness and incomparable self-control, with which he entertained his all-absorbing visions, rose to the occasion with all the sincerity, conviction and determination under the sun. The challenge was dreadful, the task stupendous. "Many a less sincere man, many a real hero," says Major Arthur Glyn Leonard in *Islam – Her Moral and Spiritual Value*, "would have shrunk from and succumbed before an ordeal so terrific, a contest so supremely titanic. But Mohammed was made of

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sterner stuff, of the spirit gods are made of. Failure was a word that he did not recognise. With God at his back success was an absolute certainty – a foregone conclusion."

It was indeed a unique success! Even a devout Christian like Rev. Bosworth-Smith unhesitatingly admits in *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*: "Islam is the most complete, the most sudden and the most extraordinary revolution that has ever come over any nation on earth." Thomas Carlyle analyses this success beautifully in *On heroes, Hero-worship and the heroic in History*: The Hero as Prophet, "A poor shepherd people roaming unnoticed in its deserts since the creation of the world. A Hero Prophet was sent down to them with a word they could believe. See, the unnoticed becomes world noticeable, the small has grown world-great; within one century afterwards, Arabia is at Granada on this, and Delhi on that; grasping with valour and splendour and the light of genius, Arabia shines through long ages over a great section of the world." Philip K. Hitti also acknowledges in *History of the Arabs*: "The sterile Arabia seems to have been converted as if by magic into a nursery of heroes the like of whom both in number and quality is hard to find anywhere."

The teachings of Muhammad (pbuh) had indeed wrought a marvellous and mighty work.

There must be something so fascinating, so arresting in the personality of this great Arabian who without any

standing army, without any palace, without any huge resources to fall back upon, without the slenderest human backing and against the heaviest material odds could so effectively revolutionise the social, political, moral and spiritual outlook of the wild hordes, the barbarous savages of Arabia, creating a new orientation, developing a new phase of action, a new angle of vision, giving a new direction to human thought, a new bond to world civilisation, a new interpretation of human life and destiny.

There must be something so chivalrous about this giant among men that alone among the great teachers of mankind he conferred the first legal status of honour and responsibility upon women making them Sui-Juris, ensuring their economic independence and providing them opportunity in all spheres of human activity, guaranteeing their rights in the properties of the deceased parents, of the dead husband and children – rights and privileges which could not be conceived of before the enactment of Married Women's Property Act in England by

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the middle of the 19th century, rights which are being conceded to them by the civilised nations of Europe and America even in the twenty-first century.

There must be something so generous and magnanimous about this Seer of Arabia that alone among the Prophets of God he sympathised with slaves in their deep distress and did not merely liberate thousands of slaves after the Battle of Hunain and inspire his companions to emulate his noble example, but also laid down principles with proper religious sanctions with a view to emancipating them for good.

There was something so noble and human in this orphan child of the desert, bereft in infancy of the father's care and the mother's affection, that he responded so readily to the cry of distress from orphans, soothed their troubled hearts, enjoining upon his followers genuine sympathy and punctilious regards for their just right, giving strict orders against encroachment upon their rights and properties in any shape or form, creating the noblest urge for the establishment of orphan-ages all over the world.

There was something so constructive and creative in the amazing genius of this great man of vision and imagination that he reconciled the divergent claims and conflicting interests of all classes and conditions of people, combining various aspects of human life.

There was something so rational, so dynamic, so material, nay so original, in

his magnificent conception of God and His relation with man and the system of universes that he could with his simple humanity, with his democratic conception of the Divine Great, with his unerring appeal to reason and the ethical faculty of mankind, lay the foundation of the modern world, establishing both in theory and practice liberty, equality and fraternity at least 12 hundred years before the French Revolution.

No wonder, it is not the Muslims alone who claim that the holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was the greatest and most influential among the salt of the earth in the annals of civilisation. Even the non-Muslim saints and seers unhesitatingly admit that there was none greater than the Prophet of Arabia. Michael Hart, a devout Christian and a renowned astronomer, has chosen the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as the most influential person in the history of mankind. In his world-renowned *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History*, he has marked out the Prophet of Islam as the number one whereas Jesus occupies the third position. In his own words: "My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world's most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels."

John William Draper, who claims that Renaissance owes its birth to Islam, shares the same view and acknowledges in *A History of the Intellectual Development of Europe*: "Four years after the death of Justinian, in AD. 569, was born at Mecca, in Arabia, the man (Muhammad) who, of all men, has exercised the greatest influence upon the human race."

Alfred de Lamartine sums up the great virtues and the excellent qualities of the Last and the Greatest Prophet (pbuh) in *Historie de la turquie* when he claims: "If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astounding results are the three criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in modern history with Muhammad?... Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational dogmas, of a cult without images; the founder of two terrestrial empires and of one spiritual empire, that is Muhammad."

Syed Ashraf Ali is former Director General, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh

MAJOR GENERAL (RETD.) SYED MUHAMMAD IBRAHIM

P D Cummins writing a chapter on *Mohammad* (peace be upon him-Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam) comments "Of all great leaders, none has been so much maligned as Mohammed. Many of his detractors have called him an arch-impostor, an accusation to which his tremendous achievement gives the lie. Only a man of burning sincerity, utter integrity, could have established a Faith, which today draws more converts than any other religion." This was published in a book named 'Hundred Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World' edited by John Canning, which was first published in 1973. The 'today' of Cummins applies to our 'today' in 2004 also. Why is the religion of Islam drawing more converts than others?

While searching an answer, at least three aspects should come under focus. First aspect is the personality of the preacher i.e. Prophet Mohammad (SAW), the second aspect is the content of the preaching and lastly the performance of the followers. Indeed, because of the poor and miserable performance of the followers, the preacher and the content of the preaching get maligned, as also attract others because of the positive aspects of the conduct of the followers. Nonetheless, in my view we could have been better. It is therefore time for the followers to correct themselves in the true spirit of the preaching.

One of the foremost ingredients of self correction is having a role model. Abraham Lincoln may be copied, but that will be done by the statesmen and the politicians. Alexander the Great or Hannibal or Julius Caesar may be copied by the warriors and campaigners or commanders. Shakespeare or Rabindranath Tagore or Ferdousi may be copied by poets. Akbar the Great or Queen Victoria may be copied as great rulers. But, how many examples are there in history to find at least a dozen facets of personality and faculty at their best exposure under the full light of historical autopsy. Why should we, being followers (Ummah) answer, we may be accused of being partisan?

Let us see what Michael H. Hart has to comment? Michael Hart authored a great book titled 'The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons of History'. The book was first published in 1989 from the USA. The first fifteen names in serial order are: Mohammed, Isaac Newton, Jesus Christ, Buddha, Confucius, Saint Paul, Ts ai Lun, Johann

Gutenberg, Christopher Columbus, Albert Einstein, Carl Marx, Louis Pasteur, Galileo Galilee, Aristotle and Lenin. While authoring all these historical personalities Michael Hart had to make comparative weighing in order to put them in hierarchical slots. Michael Hart said that his book is solely involved with the question of who were the 100 persons, who had the greatest effect on the course of the world. Michael Hart ranked these persons according to the total amount of influence that each of them had on human history and on the everyday lives of other human beings. "These are the top hundred people of the history, who have shaped our lives and formed our world" – finally said Michael Hart. At the top of 'this top 100' is Mohammed, according to the declaration of Almighty Allah, the last Prophet, the leader of all Prophets, the leader of humankind for all times to come and since the time of cre-

to know our Prophet and follow his teachings? Indeed every Muslim worth his name has two bright options in front of him. First option is, to accept his fate as a Muslim by birth casually and make no effort to improve. The second option is, to accept his fate for being born as a Muslim, and add value to it by finding out what will make a good Muslim out of him or what is expected out of him as a Muslim by the Creator or by fellow human beings. Allah designated the Holy Prophet as "witness, a bearer of glad tidings, a Warner, and as one who invites to Allah by His Leave, and as a Lamp spreading light (through instructions from the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah)". Allah has commanded all faithful to obey and follow Prophet Mohammad (SAW). Allah's words are as follows. "Say (O Mohammad to mankind): If you (really) love Allah than follow me (that is Islamic Monotheism, follow the Qur'an and the Sunnah), Allah

his life as Prophet in Makkah, not for once he cursed anyone, never prayed to Allah for punishing anyone; on the contrary he continued the work of preaching as instructed by Allah.

The same Prophet while in Madinah for the last ten years of his life had much more varied, busy and different roles to play. He was the head of the city state of Madinah for all political purposes, he was the Commander-in-Chief of the Madinite Muslim Army in all the defensive battles to begin with, he was the leader of the Muslims for all religious purposes, he was the social reformer reforming bunch of nomadic tribes into a community bound by love and law. Prophet was a man not of words alone, he believed in deeds. He believed in the motto, examples are better than precepts. He took part in battles and was severely injured during the Battle of Uhud. He signed peace accords, he signed charter of human rights, he governed through consultations, and he conducted foreign policy and always cared for the wellbeing of all people in the city state of Madinah, which in his lifetime became a large state covering the entire Arabian Peninsula. In his personal life, he was a husband and a father, so loving and caring that is difficult to describe. He spent larger part of the nights in prayers to Allah, while he spent the day busily for the state. He was illiterate according to present day definition, but Allah made him the wisest man to do or achieve the greatest deeds. He was a teacher also, teaching the Holy Qur'an as he received it, and explaining various matters in the light of that Qur'an.

We mention all the above to give a background to what we will say now as the last word for the moment. The Prophet was meant for peace. He preached peace, he urged peace; indeed Islam means peace. We repeat verse 107 of the 21st chapter i.e. Surah Al Anbiya of the Holy Qur'an: "And We have sent you (O Mohammad) not but as a mercy for the A'lamin (mankind, jinn and all that exists)". If our Prophet was for peace, why some of us are proponents of violence, either by mouth or by weapons? On the occasion of the birth of the Holy Prophet (SAW), we need to vow to shun violence and know the Prophet.

Major General (Retd.) Syed Muhammad Ibrahim is a national security analyst

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ation, "a mercy for the entire creation", and to whom singularly, uniquely and unprecedentedly "Allah sends his Salat (meaning Graces, Honors, Blessings and Mercy) and also do the Angels ask Allah to bless and forgive him; therefore for all times to come our prayer— Peace Be Upon Him— Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam.

How much do we the Muslims know of the Holy Prophet? Will it be too much to say that, we know very little? Than why do we know little, why not more? We are followers or disciples of the Prophet (SAW), who began his life as a Prophet, with the first ever divine revelation saying "Recite or Read! In the name of your Lord, Who has created (all that exists). He has created man from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood). Read! And your Lord is the most Generous. Who has taught (the writing) by the pen. He has taught man that which he knew not"; yet we are shy of reading, diffident of pursuing knowledge and uncompetitive in research. That is why we know little. Isn't it time enough that we wake up

will love you and forgive your sins. And Allah is off-Forgiving, Most Merciful." Do we the Muslims, have any second choice other than following the Prophet (SAW)? We do not have a second choice but we have usurped our liberty and decided not to follow the Prophet. On the contrary, we are neither making much effort to follow the Prophet, because we do not know about him.

If we made efforts to know him, then, we would have known how Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (SAW) lived his life as an orphan child, how did he lead his life as an adolescent as a shepherd as well as volunteer social service person, what was his way of conduct as the manager of business of the richest lady of Makkah, how did he adjust himself as the husband of same richest lady also 15 years older in terms of age and finally how he was prepared by Allah for Prophet-hood. Having become a Prophet the sacrifices he made, the patience he showed, the tact he employed, the conviction he displayed in preaching Islam is unprecedented in the annals of all preaching. In the thirteen years of

Former Prime Minister of India and renowned politician of this subcontinent Jawaharlal Nehru once said, "I would rather have a completely free press with all dangers involved in the wrong use of the freedom than a suppressed or a regulated press."

But as newsmen we don't like to use the media wrongly. Because we think the absolute freedom of the media creates sense of responsibility among journalists and it would happen only when our government would accept the media criticism ungrudgingly.

So on this day, let us think that people have the right to freedom of expression and government accepts media as an ally to establish true democracy in the country. We also hope that no attackers on journalists would go unpunished in the greater interest of the country as mass people rely on media as their last resort to seek justice.

Akbar Hossain is a reporter of The Daily Star.

Message of Buddha Purnima

Buddhism and human values

DR. SUKOMAL BARUA

ONCE again the sacred Buddha-Purnima has come with the message of Lord Buddha. On this full moon day of Vaishakha the Goutama Budha was born (624 BC) in the royal Lumbini Garden at the foot of the Himalayas, attained Enlightenment (589 BC) under the Bo-tree at Gaya and passed into Mahaparinibbana (544 BC) at Kushinara. The three-sacred memorable events of Buddha Purnima is of great significance to the Buddhist world as well as the people all over the world. This day brings peace, harmony, brotherhood, universal love and compassion for all sentient beings of the world.

After his Enlightenment, the Buddha delivered his first sermon as follows: "Go ye O Bhikkhus, for the gain of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, for the gain, for the welfare of men. Proclaim O Bhikkhus the doctrine glorious, preach ye a life of holiness, perfection and purification."

The heart of the Buddha's teaching lies in the Four Noble Truths which he expounded in his very first sermon to his disciples. The Four Noble Truths which he expounded in his very first sermon to his disciples. The Four Noble Truths are: (1) Dukkha, (2) Dukkha Samudaya the arising or origin of Dukkha, (3) Dukkha Nirodha - the cessation of dukkha, (4) Dukkha Patipada Magga – the way leading to the cessation of dukkha. Among these, the fourth noble truth, maga – is very important for everybody, because it is known as the 'Middle Path'. It avoids two extremes: one extreme being the search for happiness through the pleasures of the senses, which is low, common, unprofitable; the other being the search for happiness through self mortification in different forms of asceticism, which is painful unworthy and forgettable.

Having himself first tried these two extremes, and having found them to be useless, the Buddha discovered through personal experience the Middle Path which gives vision and knowledge, which leads to Calm, Insight, Enlightenment, Nirvana. This middle path is generally referred to as the Noble Eight-fold Path because it is composed of eight categories or divisions: namely, (1) Right Understanding, (2) Right Thought, (3) Right Speech, (4) Right Action, (5) Right Livelihood, (6) Right Effort, (7) Right Mindfulness, (8) Right Concentration.

The eight factors aim at promoting and perfecting the three essentials of Buddhist training and discipline: namely (a) Ethical conduct, (Sila), (b) Mental discipline (Samadhi) and (c)

Wisdom (Panna). Practically the whole teaching of the Buddha to which he devoted himself 45 years, deals in some way or other with this path.

According to Buddhism, for a man to be perfect there are two qualities that he should develop equally: compassion (Karuna) on one side, and wisdom (Panna) on the other. Here compassion represents love, charity, kindness, tolerance and such noble qualities on the emotional side, and wisdom (Panna) on the other. Here compassion represents love, charity, kindness, tolerance and such noble qualities on the emotional side, or qualities of the heart, while wisdom would stand for the intellectual side or the qualities of the mind. If one develops only the emotional, neglecting the intellectual, one may become a good hearted fool; while to develop only the intellectual side neglecting the motional may turn one into a hard-hearted intellect without feeling for others. To be perfect, therefore, one

According to Buddhism, for a man to be perfect there are two qualities that he should develop equally: compassion (Karuna) on one side, and wisdom (Panna) on the other.

has to develop both equally. That is the aim of the Buddhist way of life.

Those who think that Buddhism is interested only in lofty ideals, high normal and philosophical values and that it ignores the social and economic welfare of people are wrong. The Buddha was interested in the happiness of men. To him happiness was not possible without leading a pure life based on moral and spiritual principles. But he knew that leading such a life was hard in unfavourable material and social conditions. Buddhism does not consider material welfare as an end in itself: it is only a means to an end – a higher and nobler end. But it is a means which is indispensable, indispensable in achieving a higher purpose for man's happiness. So Buddhism recognises the need of certain minimum material conditions favourable to spiritual success.

A man named Dighajanu once visited the Buddha and said: "Venerable sir, we are ordinary lay men leading the family life with wife and children. Would the blessed one teach us some doctrines which will be conducive to our happiness in this world and hereafter?"

In reply the Buddha tells him that

there are four things which are conducive to a man's happiness in this world.

First: He should be skilled, efficient, earnest, and energetic in whatever profession he is engaged, and he should know it well.

Second: He should protect his income, which he has thus earned righteously, with the sweat of his brow. This refers to protecting wealth from thieves etc. All these ideas should be considered against the background of the period.

Third: He should have good friends who are faithful, learned, virtuous, liberal and intelligent, who will help him along the right path away from evil.

Fourth: He should spend reasonably in proportion to his income, neither too much nor too little, i.e. he should not hoard wealth avariciously nor should he be extravagant – in other words he should live within his means.

Then the Buddha expounds the four virtues conducive to a lay man's happiness hereafter: (1) Saddha: He should have faith and confidence in moral, spiritual and intellectual values; (2) Sila: He should abstain from destroying, from adultery, from falsehood and from intoxicating drinks; (3) Caga: He should practice charity, generosity without attachment and craving for his wealth; (4) Panna: He should develop wisdom which leads to the complete destruction of suffering to the realisation of Nirvana.

Buddha encouraged and stimulated each person to develop himself and to work out his own emancipation for man has the power to liberate himself from all bondage through his own personal effort and intelligence.

Today, we hope, with a better understanding of our common humanity and common values, we can say "hatred does not cease by hatred, but it ceases by love and compassion". Buddha's verse is as follows:

*Nahi verena verani
sammantidha kudha canam
Averena ca sammanti
eso dhammo sanamanto.*
Conquer anger by love and compassion, evil by good; conquer the miser with liberality and the lair with truth. Let us think good, do good and pray good for the welfare of mankind.

Sabbe sattva sukhitva bhavantu – May all beings be happy. Nibbanam Paramam Sukham – Nirvana is the supreme bliss of the world.

Dr. Sukomal Barua is Professor, Department of Sanskrit and Pali, University of Dhaka

AKBAR HOSSAIN

FREEDOM of expression in every democratic country is taken for granted. Despite that in every democratic country journalists are assaulted or harassed for their writings. The forms of harassment on journalists differ from country to country.

On May 3 every year, since 1991, the World Press Freedom Day is observed to recognise the sacrifices made in the struggle for freedom of the press and to put pressure on the numerous countries where the basic human rights of the citizens are denied by the state.

In 1993 the United Nations General Assembly declared May 3 as World Press Freedom Day, a tribute that came from UNESCO General Conference in 1991 recognising a free, pluralistic and independent press as an essential component for any democratic society.

The Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly states "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of opinion."

Without free, independent and pluralistic media, how can the public make informed electoral choices, review the public decision-making process or have effective input into public affairs? Consequently, journalists play a vital role in the democratic process, but it may attract certain risks.

Since the inception of democracy (although it is debatable whether true democracy has been established) in the country, the print media have been enjoying more freedom compared to that during the autocratic rule.

But control over print media still exists. The government tries to suppress the voice of print media through unjust distribution of government advertisements and allocation of newsprint.

But the case of freedom in country's electronic media is different than that of print media. It is better not to discuss about the state owned Bangladesh Television (BTV) as the only task of BTV is to serve the interest of the government.

The BTV and Bangladesh Betar hardly reflect the opinions and wishes cherished by the mass people. The BTV and Bangladesh Betar are run by the money of the mass people of the country but their opinions are ignored by these two state owned media.

During the mass upsurge in 1990's, major political parties of Bangladesh pledged to give autonomy to the state owned electronic media. But even after 13 years of establishment of democracy in the country, the autonomy of BTV and Bangladesh Betar is not in sight. It seems that ruling parties, whenever and whoever in power, cannot imagine to give autonomy to state owned media. They think that their control over information dissemination would be lost if the BTV and Bangladesh Betar are given autonomy.

It is a matter of great hope that currently there are three Bangladesh private satellite television channels are in operation. Another popular private television channel, which had been under operation for about three years, had to close its operation as a sequel of legal battle.

World Press Freedom Day

Contain the threat to freedom of expression

unpunished because of biased investigation and lengthy process of country's judicial system.

Sometimes statements of political leaders encourage the criminals to attack journalists. Leaders of the ruling parties allege that journalists always expose the wrong things of the government. But politicians should keep in mind that it is not the duty of the journalists to write in favour of or against the ruling party or government. The duty of journalists is to reveal incidents objectively. While doing so, if any report goes against anybody, then what the journalists could do?

Journalists are often accused by the government of tarnishing the image of the country. But who should take the responsibility of improving the image of the country? Is it the responsibility of government or journalists? Newsmen are interested to expose the success of the country. But for that reason, government has to create the ground reality.

It is a matter of regret that ruling parties in Bangladesh always perceive the mediemen as their enemy. Although they do not say it publicly but their activities prove it well.

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), a New York based organisation termed Bangladesh as the Asia's 'most dangerous country for journalists'. This judgment of CPJ drew severe reaction from the government side. There might be a debate centering the word 'most dangerous country' but there is no denying the fact that journalists are still subjected to harassment in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is a country where half of the population still live under the poverty line. We have a lot of work to do in the days to come for establishing good governance and achieving freedom from hunger. The role of free press in establishing a prosperous society cannot be underestimated. Free press is a powerful catalyst of economic and social development.

