Drik Round-Table on Press Freedom

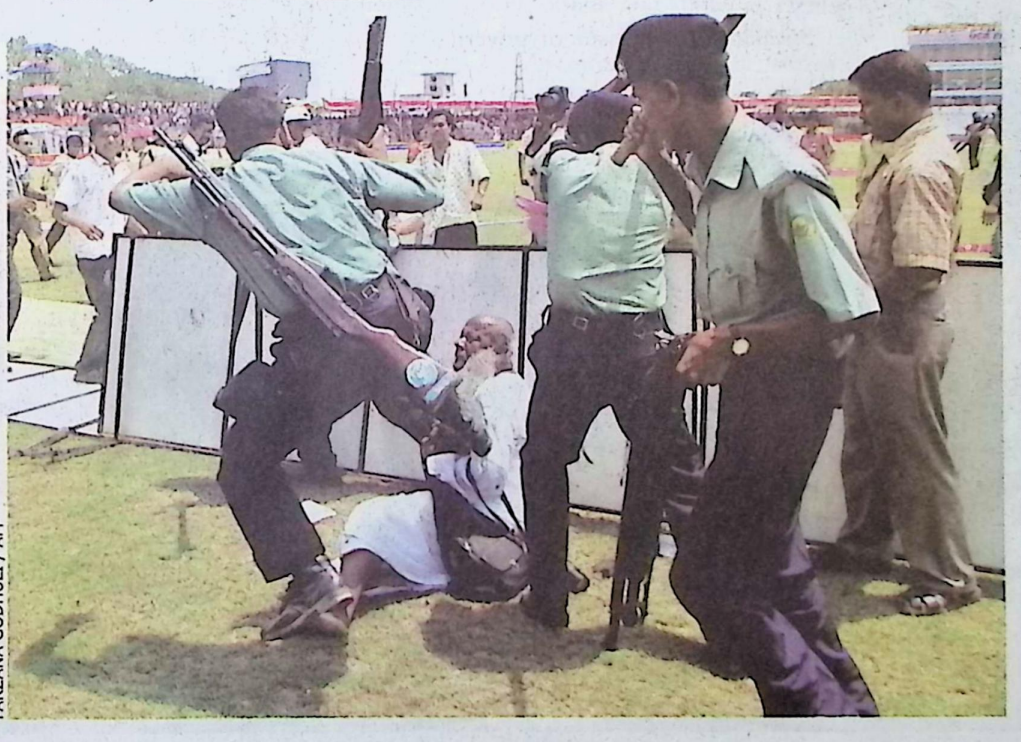
Humaira Fatima Jalil gives us a ring-side account of the round-table discussion and live web-cast

AS I took my seat in the second round row, **Shahidul Alam (Drik)**, after a short introduction, offered the floor to **Afsan Chowdhury (Brac)**. Journalists, according to Mr. Chowdhury, regard themselves as social reformers -- good people who want to do good. It is an ideology that is quite doubtful.

However, **Khaled Mohiuddin (BdNews24)** saw no problem in journalists considering themselves as social reformers, and wondered how they were overlooking or ignoring their responsibilities to society.

Adding to this, **Munni Saha (ATN Bangla)** stated that we are at crossroads, so even if journalists are social reformers at present their roles are under tremendous restraint.

The next to speak from the panel was **Probir Sikdar (Jonokontho)** who viewed many journalists as victims of terrorism. As a journalist, Probir Sikdar felt that his freedom had been vastly curbed when he was not even allowed to name his assailants. So he felt perplexed concerning what he ought to say or protest about the safety of journalists when the newspaper he works for apparently values his assailants' integrity and anonymity more than it does his attack and loss of legs. He vehemently stated: "I don't believe in the protection of journalists but in the safety of the masses, because I am part of that mass."



FARZANA GODHULI / AFP

Mainul Islam Khan the next panelist to speak highlighted the repressive environment of the media at present. But he felt sure that if we work together than this environment might change.

Last but not least, **Tipu Sultan (Prothom Alo)** said that in most events such as this, speakers usually discuss the lack of safety and the repressions imposed by bureaucracy on journalists. Recently, editorial teams are briefed and it is high time to address this issue. Journalists are repressed, manipulated and usurped by their own media (professionally, financially, and socially) in the form of lack of job security, frequently changing rules of engagement, etc. And the main victims of this process are rural journalists who are ill-paid and pressurized from various sectors. Sadly the media they work in exploits journalists the most.

After these brief opinions of the panelists the audience present at the session was invited to exchange their views. The first contributor was **Tanvir Siddiqi** who emphasized the role of the corporate world (especially the mobile phone companies) on the media.

This naturally created a mixed reaction amongst the panelists. Khaled Mohiuddin felt that since newspapers feel that they are dependent on corporate magnets they printing a negative report about them. But media should realize that they have no reason to continue with this trend.

Munni Saha, on the other hand, disagreed with Khaled Mohiuddin stating that this may be possible for big media houses but not for smaller ones. And, moreover, even the big ones have never set such an example.

This was supported by **Syed Ahmed**, who said that it was true that most corruption cases cannot be often published because of pressure from government or society but in other cases they cannot be published against