

Only free media can help fight corruption

Speakers tell roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a roundtable yesterday said the most important role the media plays is the watchdog role and so the journalists should be allowed to work without any political and economic pressure or harassment of any type.

It is important to ensure an environment where journalists can work freely, use their freedom shrewdly and do not face any control of the government or owners, they added.

Held at a city hotel, the roundtable titled 'The Role of Media in Anti-Corruption Reform Efforts' was the second event of the Anti-Corruption Week that kicked off in the city on Wednesday.

Promoting Governance, Accountability, Transparency and Integrity (PROGATI), a project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), organised the week.

Speaking as the chief guest, Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad said corruption does not have a geographical boundary. It is now a global issue.

Apart from promoting good governance and rule of law, media plays a significant role in every national event and will be playing the same role in fighting corruption, he added.

The minister underscored the need for a concerted effort of the government, media and citizens to root out corruption.

Noted journalist Abed Khan said the media of the country from its beginning has been playing a positive role in curbing corruption that resulted in many positive changes in the political arena.

Apart from the electronic media, printing media is also evolving in the South Asia which is really incredible, he said, adding that but there are many impediments that hold back professionalism, including extremely limited rights of the journalists.

Journalism remains no longer journalism when the dream of media owners become the dream of the journalists or when the journalists become employees of the owners, he said, adding: "These are the darkest side of Bangladesh's journalism and soon it will take a terrifying turn if things are going on in this way."

Abed Khan went on saying: "Though it is a creative and sensitive profession, journal-



PHOTO STAR

Dr Salehuddin Ahmed speaks at a roundtable in the city yesterday. On his left are Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad, Denise Rollins and David A Pottebaum.

ists are working amid fears of losing their jobs. Owners can remove anyone anytime if their interests are not served."

"Both the print and electronic media are going through an extremely dark time," he said, adding that though the Right to Information Act (RTI) is on the cards, the authorities keep the right to suppress voice of the

journalists. "The only dream I dream is for the professional, of the professional and by the professional and only these media will play its proper role in curbing corruption," he said, adding, "Nothing will change unless we develop professionalism."

In his keynote paper, Moazzem Hossain, editor of

The Financial Express, said free and responsible media can have a positive influence on any country on efforts, as part of winning public trust, to uproot and expose sources of corruption.

He further said that such media can perform two major roles -- being a watchdog over the government and educating people about how corruption and other related issues affect their lives.

Free, independent and responsible media can be a strong force along with other stakeholders to help build integrity into the rules of governance.

Human rights activist Dr Hameeda Hossain said Bangladesh has actually been in the forefront of news on corruption.

It is unfortunate that when the international organisation like Transparency International blames Bangladesh for very high level of corruption and the government, instead of taking that seriously as indicators of reform, laments them as blasphemy or conspiracy, she said.

Here media can play an important role in trying and influencing the government to act totally neutrally, she added.

A 'culture of secrecy' has been grown in the society, Hameeda said, stressing the need for immediate enactment of RTI.

Moderated by Dr Salehuddin Ahmed, province chancellor of Brac University, Denise Rollins, mission director of USAID, and David A Pottebaum, chief of party of PROGATI project, also spoke.

Fire drill at Secretariat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A fire drill was conducted at the Secretariat yesterday, the government's administrative headquarters, to familiarise the staffs with emergency procedures so that they can respond quickly in case of any fire incident.

The exercise was the first since a devastating fire in the country's largest shopping complex, Bashundhara City, killed seven people and burned down properties worth crores of taka.

"The firefighting system in Secretariat was satisfactory," Director General of the Fire Service and Civil Defence Brig Gen Abu Nayeem Md Shahidullah told reporters while supervising the drill at the 21-storey and adjacent nine-storey buildings on the Secretariat premises.

He said the water reservoirs of the buildings were full, while the extinguishers kept at every floor of the buildings were functional.

The firefighters managed to extinguish the mock fire and evacuate the trapped officials and staffs within around 20 minutes as they could reach the scene in only 10 minutes after being informed at about 12:30pm.

As smoke was coming out of the buildings, siren started ringing at the scene. But there was no panic among people as the authorities announced for the drill beforehand.

Firefighters could reach up to the 17th floor of the 21-storey building to douse fire on the 20th floor. They also rescued a person from the 17th floor. In the nine-storey building, firefighters evacuated dozens of trapped people.

People appreciated such drills as the firefighters put their ample efforts in dousing flames and evacuating people in the quickest possible time. "The drill should conduct regularly. Today's one make us aware of facing situation during a fire," said an officer.

"One of the main goals of the drill was how we can extinguish fire if it breaks out simultaneously in the 21-storey and nine-storey buildings," said the DG, adding: "The other goal was to evacuate people safely."

The DG said a similar fire drill would be carried out at the Bangabhaban, the official residence of the President, on March 22.

Pvt medical college flouts bldg construction rules

Local people allege

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

The authorities of a private medical college and hospital have been constructing a six-storey building close to Maghbazar Ispahani Colony in the city in violation of building construction rules, causing suffering to the colony residents.

Residents of the colony alleged that Ad-din Hospital had started constructing its medical college building about a year ago very close to the boundary wall of the colony without leaving any 'setback space' between the building and the boundary wall as required by the rules.

'Setback space' refers to the gap between the boundaries of two buildings. According to the Building Construction Rule 1996 (amended in 2006), it is mandatory for commercial buildings of four floors and above to leave 1.5 metres (around 5 feet) of 'setback space' around the building.

The colony residents also alleged that rubbish and other waste materials have also been thrown into the colony, damaging roofs of several houses.

Moreover, solid and liquid wastes are also dumped in the colony area, they said.

Construction workers trespassing on the colony area and nighttime construction accompanied by loud music are a regular nuisance disrupting the peaceful environment of the 60-year-old colony, the residents alleged.



PHOTO STAR

The under-construction building of Ad-din Hospital stands close to the boundary wall of Ispahani Colony at Maghbazar.

Dr Shamim Ahmed, a resident of the colony, said, "Construction materials regularly land on my lawn. As a result, walking on my own garden has become risky. They cannot do whatever they want to."

Another resident Syed Munir Khasru, a teacher of Institute of Business Administration, Dhaka University, said, "Ispahani Colony is one of the last remaining patches of land in the city that offers serenity to its residents. This kind of open

space is rare in Dhaka. But the peaceful ambience of the colony is being spoiled."

Ispahani Colony was constructed in 1950 on 9.4 acres of land. Currently the colony houses 54 families residing in 34 buildings and bungalows.

Management of the colony said the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) issued a notice in January asking the hospital authorities to remove illegal structures within 15 days and not to go ahead with the construction until the matter is resolved, but to no avail.

Sayed Hasan, general manager of the Ispahani Group, said, "More than two months have passed since the notice was issued, but the hospital authorities are still carrying out the construction work."

When contacted, Dr Sheikh Mohiuddin, executive director of Ad-din Hospital, denied the allegations of violation of building construction rules.

However, he could not give any satisfactory answer as to why there is no 'setback space' between the boundaries.

About other allegations, he said, "We have already taken several measures to address the problems. We have installed safety net and scaffold around the building so that construction materials do not fall in the colony. We have also repaired the damaged roof and stopped nighttimes construction and also asked labourers not to play music."



PHOTO STAR

A fire drill was conducted at the Secretariat yesterday.



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Principal Ahad Chowdhury addresses a roundtable at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. On his left are Humayun Kabir and Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique.

'Reform in education a must to make digital Bangladesh'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a roundtable yesterday underlined the importance of reforming education sector, fighting against fanatic forces and ensuring accountability and transparency in governance to make Digital Bangladesh.

They said this at the roundtable styled 'Digital Bangladesh: Nepotthy Badha (Digital Bangladesh: Drawbacks from behind) organised by Amra Muktijoddhar Santan at the National Press Club in the city.

Speaking at the programme, Dhaka University Vice Chancellor (VC) Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique stressed the need for reforming education sector to fulfil the dream through introducing modern curricula and methods of study.

"Digital Bangladesh is not a concept of only computerised system, rather the term denotes the prosperous nation maintaining the rule of law and ensuring

accountability and transparency in governance," he added.

Regarding the issues that could obstruct fulfilling such dream, the VC said the way of thinking of the common people should be changed.

Barrister Tania Amir disagreed with the title of the roundtable, saying that there are no drawbacks that can exist against the new generation's dream for successful Bangladesh if the government is successful.

Highlighting the nature of the obstacles in digitising Bangladesh, Golam Mortuza, editor of Shaptahik, said the obstacles have couple of natures from internal and external problems of the government.

Syad Ashrafur Islam Nayan, general secretary of the organisation, presented a keynote at the roundtable with its President Md Humayun Kabir in the chair.

Noted economist Atiur Rahman, columnist Mostafa Jabbar, Organising Secretary of Bangladesh

Treatment of women with urinary incontinence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A huge number of women have been suffering from urinary incontinence following obstetric labour, which make their personal and family life unbearable.

Gonoshasthaya Nagar Hospital has been performing transvaginal tension-free tape (TVT) procedure on such patients to fully cure them, says a press release.

The TVT operation has been developed in the United States and proved effective.

Interested patients are requested to contact Gonoshasthaya Nagar Hospital at Dhanmondi (Phone: 9673512 and 9673507) or Gonoshasthaya Hospital near Savar National Mausoleum. Phone: 7791886, 01711847731.

For the first time ever the National Crafts Council of Bangladesh (NCCB) and the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facility - UNDP, will be hosting

Bain: Weaving the Past, Present and Future

Regional Conference and Workshop on Backstrap Looms

The aim of the event is to highlight the exquisite and endangered weaving traditions of the indigenous of nine countries of the Asia Pacific Region -

Bhutan, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Nepal, Thailand & Bangladesh

The finest indigenous artisans of these countries will be demonstrating their unique skills during the three-day workshop from 22nd to 24th March, 09 at the **Spectra Convention Centre** House, # 18, Road # 7, Gulshan-1

22nd March: 1 pm to 6 pm followed by Cultural Programme

23rd March: 10 am to 6 pm followed by Cultural Programme

24th March: 10 am to 3 pm

You are cordially invited to attend with family and friends.

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