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Fear and Freedom Thresholds

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On the 29th December with Khaleda Zia's house under police siege, watching television at the day's end was an eye opener to a positive professional trend. This had to do with the way the electronic and print media journalists were performing their duties.

Seeing the anchor men and women of TV channels in opposition leader's residential compound freely reeling off details, most of them unsavoury, and some routine, well within the earshot of cops in uniform or plainclothes, it struck me as a sign of progress. It was as though the police were reconciled to the ways of the media and the latter for its part let the police be insofar as that particular area was concerned. Although the authorities faced unpalatable interpretations in matters of sand-laden trucks being placed in front of the leader of the opposition's residence, generally it passed without any torrid face-off.

Of course, in an era of instant communication just as exposure is risked by any offending party, there is also an uncanny craving for visual publicity. The photo opportunity is enjoyed by most people unless caught on the wrong foot.

The Sunday's media coverage is a far cry from breathing down the necks of journalists on news trail or on spot reporting assignment during dictatorial or autocratic regimes in different forms we have had to live with. At those times, establishments would not let go of anything that was even remotely adversely reflective on its image. So, it was excitingly revealing to see how the media personnel worked unperturbed by any distracting thoughts or fear of the unknown.

This is not to, however, minimise the risks they are taking day in and day out for reporting from virtual battle zones created by chase and counter-chase between the law enforcers and the extremist elements and hired goons who would stop short at nothing to destroy, burn, kill and maim.

The full glare of the media was a guarantee against any cloak and dagger policy conceived to be put to work by any agency of the government. As they say, press freedom is like electricity lighting the darkness around and a sunshine healing any scar or wound on the body-politic.

Like freedom, fear too has taken on some newer meanings and hues, a few producing positive emotions and the rest negative -- terrifyingly so. Hurled from one panicky situation to another, our fear threshold has stretched to a new length. It resonates with you when one says that Dhaka has become as dangerous as Lebanon.

Denizens brave outings in a private car, CNG three-wheeler, or on board a bus or even on foot, taking lives literally in their hands. They know full well that they might be targets of petrol bombs and cocktails thrown at any stationary or a moving transport yet they take risk. Isn't life all about movement?

The political leaders owe a responsibility to those who have been crippled, burned or laid off to rehabilitate them as a cost of reparation for the violation of the constitutional right to live. Also, the families left bereaved need to be looked after by the state

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