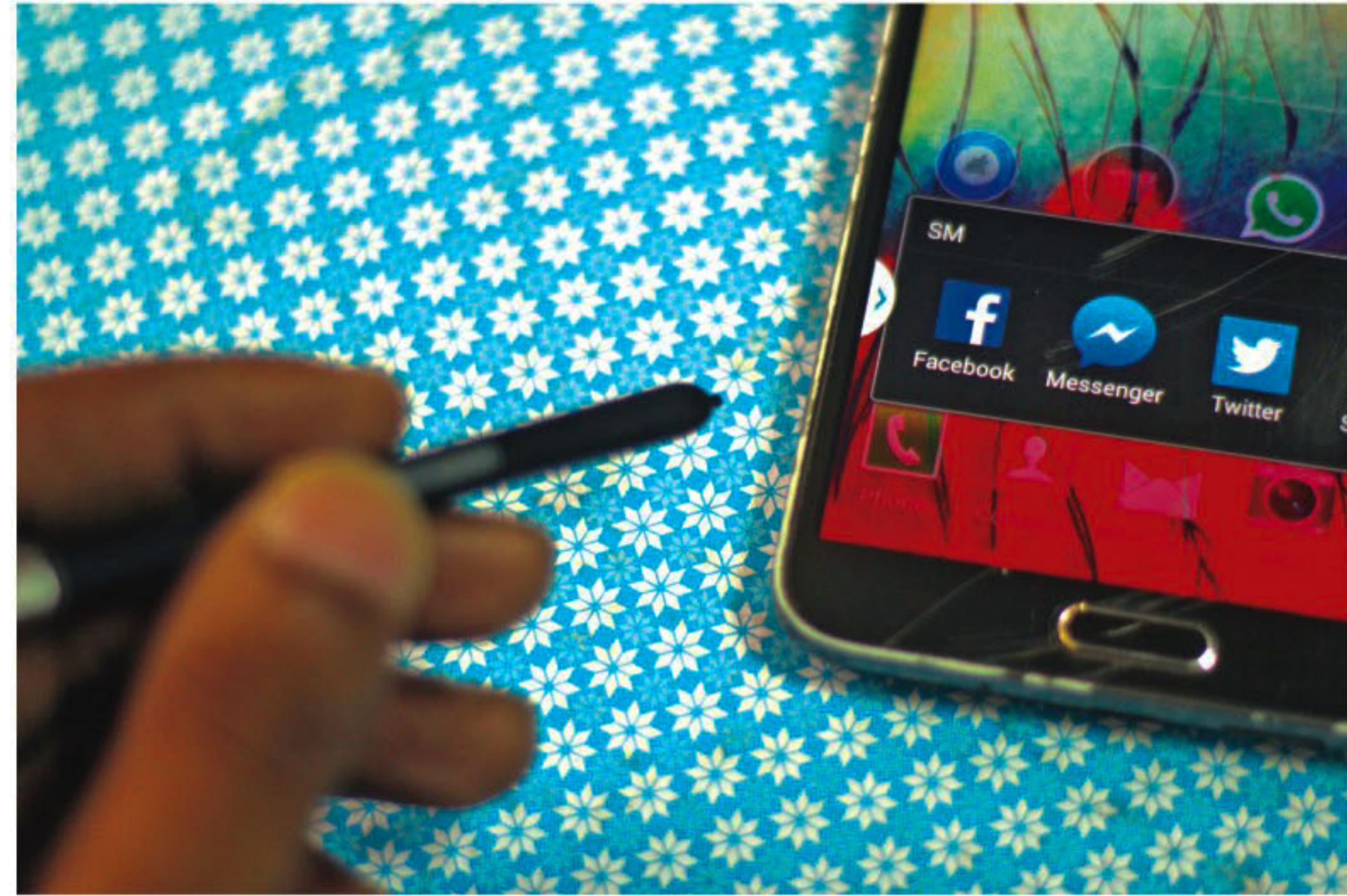
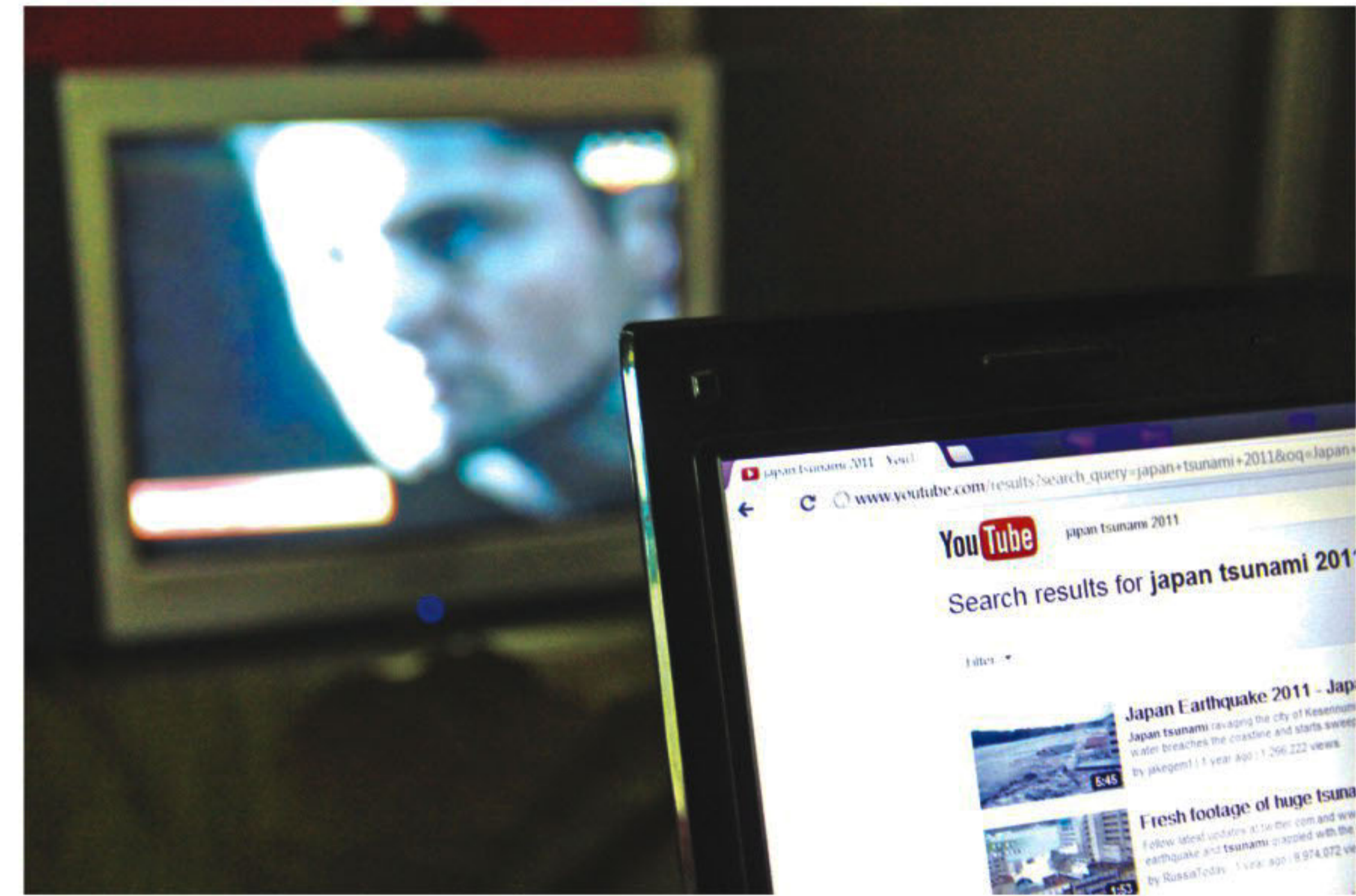


SPOTLIGHT



social media than any national daily," says Rezwan Adnan, a blogger and cricket fan. "Our social media users, including different pages and groups, prodigiously make negative and humiliating posts on their online profiles which are scrolled, scrutinised and shared by thousand others," he continues. "We often fail to identify the fact that those demeaning opinions and memes are visible to every one including the victim and his family, which might affect his mental health, future performance and personal relationships," he says. For a better online environment, it is important to find the balance between what to post or what not to post. On the

FOR A BETTER ONLINE ENVIRONMENT, IT IS IMPORTANT TO FIND THE BALANCE BETWEEN WHAT TO POST OR WHAT NOT TO POST.



# TO POST OR NOT TO POST

FAYEKA ZABEEN SIDDIQUA

PHOTOS: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

While social media has facilitated people's right of expressing their opinions on different issues, at times users' personal opinions, or extreme views on issues like sexism, racism, religion, politics, even cricket, also stir controversy leading to a conflict. As Bangladesh has made a substantial advancement in ICT access in the last few years, the increase of online hate speech, cyber bullying and misuse of personal information and pictures have left many of our social media users paranoid, to say the least.

"Freedom without responsibility is a disaster," comments Shafiu Alam

Bhuiyan, founder chair of the Department of Television and Film Studies, University of Dhaka. "One of the major problems with social media is that, unlike print media and television it does not have any gatekeeper to filter and select the posts making the users fully liable of their expressed views," says Bhuiyan.

"When any of our national cricketers fail to perform well in a tournament, we see the rise of unhealthy criticism more on

## BANNING NOT A SOLUTION

NAZIBA BASHAR

Bangladesh is well known to have a culture of 'banning'. During a recent dispute between the ruling party and the opposition in January 2015, apps such as Whatsapp, Viber and Tango were shut down temporarily - primary modes of communication for most in Bangladesh. Facebook was made temporarily unavailable country-wide when there were satirical images posted by an individual on the site. Many online activists were prevented from posting about selected issues, such as the TSC incident in Pahela Baishakh.

Moktadir Dewan Shanto, also known as BeatBaksho, made his music popular amongst the young Bangladeshis by sharing through social media. "Thanks to social media, everyone has something to say and we say it-- some logical or illogical. But when it comes to talking about the greater good, it gets banned or blocked or ridiculed," he says. "Through Twitter, Facebook and

“THE MAIN THING TO ESTABLISH IS NOT THAT THE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IS BEING CONTROLLED BUT THAT THE CULTURE OF IMPUNITY IS TO BE REMOVED FROM THE SAID 'EXPRESSION'.”

Blogs – we express what goes in on our mind, we rebel, we appreciate, and agree/disagree. Where is the freedom of those thoughts and opinions if they get banned or even threatened? Why can't we speak our mind? If it can't be dealt with, at least provide an answer or solution instead of oppression or murdering that freedom of expression!"

When the freedom of expression or speech is in question it is for the authorities to be responsible- those who are giving the freedom and those who are getting it. It is of course the government's responsibility to let its people have the basic right to the freedom, but it is our responsibility to use that freedom wisely.

"Social networks have become a platform to voice out opinions and for the disseminating of information, and as informal as it is, it has become a very integral part in the media," says Professor Muhammad Jahangir, renowned journalist and Director of Center for Development

Communication. "The problem with banning is that it is a one party decision- the Government decides it is wrong, and they ban or block websites and platforms, without reason and leaving questions unanswered. People will always have opinions, and the Government can never do anything to stop that, and no amount of banning will help," he says. "But what they can do is bring discipline to it by setting laws for how the opinion is conveyed, what language is being used," he adds. "My suggestion would be to create and establish a Press Council with three wings- print media, electronic media and social media, and that Press Council will create laws for the use of all three. When any law is violated, the accused and the accuser must both be allowed to speak and defend their cases. The main thing to establish is not that the freedom of expression is being controlled but that the culture of impunity is to be removed from the said 'expression'," he says.

users part it is important to reflect the same morality and common sense in the virtual platform that they would have applied in real world issues while practicing their freedom of expression.

"Only online control laws and regulation cannot make social media a better platform for expression," says Bhuiyan. "Inclusion of different aspects of freedom of expression in our education system could be considered one way to act responsibly on the social media."

On the other hand, our government needs to be more flexible to let its citizen practice their democratic right of expressing their views digitally.

"With the increase of connectivity and electronic transactions most South Asian countries including Bangladesh, India and Nepal have their own ICT laws," informs Tahmina Rahman, director, Article 19.

"They primarily facilitate e-commerce, however almost all of them have penalised expressions relating to decency and morality, those that hurt the image of the state, persons and are hurtful to religious sentiments," she continues.

"This is deeply problematic as these laws neither provide any guidance as to what constitutes these grounds nor do they contain the protections afforded in other laws of the land for these offenses, leaving it widely open to arbitrary application."

This trend of arbitrary use promotes a culture of fear and shrinks the space for



online expression, tacitly forcing online activists, users, and bloggers to resort to self-censorship when expressing their opinions, believes Tahmina Rahman.

Laws and legislations should encourage us to use electronic media as a platform to disseminate information and invoke healthy debates on different issues, not the other way around.

Let's hope for a digital Bangladesh where we can make proper use of a digital platform without being in constant