



Editors of the country's regional newspapers at a roundtable titled "Challenges before Regional and District Newspapers: Problems and Way Forward" at The Daily Star Centre yesterday. The roundtable was moderated by Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star. PHOTO: STAR

Hurdles even stiffer for journos

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"We regularly face pressure and threats from criminals, political leaders and police after publishing news on their corruption and misdeeds. This leaves us insecure," said Ekram-ud-Daullah, editor of Dainik Kalyan, Jessore.

Two well-known journalists were killed in Jessore in the last several years, but justice has been denied as the murder cases have been "politicised", he added.

Sardar Al Amin, editor of Chudanga-based Daily Mathabhanga, said there were instances that regional papers had to run "prescribed reports" due to pressure from certain quarters.

"Most of the time, we remain under pressure. Still we try to hold our head high," he said.

Mobinul Islam Mobin, editor of Dainik Gramer Kagoj of Jessore, said pressure from influential quarters and threats of implicating in false cases over running reports on anomalies were quite usual in his district.

Fazle Alahi, editor of Rangamati-based Dainik Parbatya Chattagram, said two journalists were killed in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region since 1989, but justice was not served in the cases.

"It is sad that we don't get justice for any killing in the hill districts," he said, adding that he does not expect justice would be done for the murder of two journalists.

Saying that revenue is an important aspect of a local newspaper, Akbarul Hasan Millat, acting editor of Dainik Sonar Desh of Rajshahi, said the local administration stopped giving ads in this paper for running reports on cor-

ruption and anomalies.

MA Malek, editor of the Chittagong-based Dainik Azadi, said regional newspapers need to continue running reports on anomalies even if they were put under pressure.

"What else I would write about if I don't write on the anomalies at my municipality?" he questioned.

Md Mozammel Haque, editor and publisher of Bogra-based Daily Karatoa, said journalists have to look at the "news behind the news" while the media outlets have to recruit skilful newsmen which would help them improve quality of journalism and increase circulation.

AHM Moazzem Hossain, editor of The Financial Express, said various professional challenges would be there and the journalists would have to see those off through improving their skills.

Praising the roundtable as a good initiative, Matiur Rahman, editor and publisher of Prothom Alo, said the challenges faced by the regional editors were similar to those experienced by the newsmen in the capital.

Journalists would be under pressure from influential people and government bodies and would also face non-cooperation from them in getting information, he said.

"We have to move forward overcoming all the obstacles," added Matiur, also the president of the Newspaper Owners Association of Bangladesh (Noab).

He said the Noab would gradually include regional papers in the organisation as associate members in future.

Moderating the roundtable, Editor and Publisher of The Daily Star

Mahfuz Anam said cooperation between regional papers and the Dhaka-based national dailies should be strengthened to overcome the threats facing journalists.

If the national and regional papers publish reports on harassment of journalists simultaneously, it would create more pressure on the authorities concerned and help journalists get justice promptly, he observed.

Kyaw Thein Aung, editor of Daily Samudra Barta of Cox's Bazar; Dishari Chakma, editor of Hillbd24.com of Rangamati; Hasina Begum, editor of Daily Rupashi Bangla of Comilla; Pankaj Kanti Dey, editor and publisher of Sunamganjer Khobor of Sunamganj; SM Sanalal Bakshi, editor of Daily Kurigram Khobor of Kurigram; Aminul Haque, editor of Weekly Alapon of Saidpur, Nilphamari; Liaquat Ali, editor of Dainik Sonali Sangbad of Rajshahi; Mostafa Satez, editor of Daily Ichhamati of Pabna; Abdul Matin Khan, editor and publisher of Daily Jorebangla of Pabna; Muhammad Abul Kalam Biswas, acting editor of Daily Shirsha Barta of Manikganj; MA Jalil, editor and publisher of Daily Ajker Jamalpur of Jamalpur; Rezaul Karim Reza, editor of Daily Uttar Kantho of Natore; Sohrab Hossain, editor of Daily Mukto Sangbad of Gazipur; Nurul Alam Farid, editor of Dainik Biplabi Bangladesh of Barisal; KM Enayet Hossain, editor of Daily Rupantar of Patuakhali; Jahangir Hossen Monju, editor of Dainik Shatakantha of Jhalakathi; and Md Matiur Rahman, editor of Daily Uttar Bangla of Dinajpur, were present.

BNP's terror link now proved

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the BNP for "resorting to terrorism".

At least one MP went on to demand the cancellation of BNP's registration with the Election Commission.

Earlier in the day, the BNP denounced such interpretation of a Canadian court's observation and called it a government plot to confuse people.

On January 25, a Canadian court, while disposing of an asylum seekers application, observed that, "... the BNP was, is, or will be engaged in terrorism is reasonable; it is supported by the evidence having regard to the broad definition of terrorism under Canadian law."

THE VERDICT

Mohammad Jewel Hossain Gazi, a BNP man from Bangladesh whose plea for permanent residency in Canada was turned down in May last year, appealed before Canada's federal court.

The court mentioned that he admitted his membership with the BNP on several occasions and that he joined the student wing of the BNP in mid-1997. In 2004, he went to South Korea to study and had returned. He left for Japan in 2005. Upon expiry of his visa, he was arrested and deported to Bangladesh in 2008. He later joined Swechhchasebak Dal.

Justice Henry S Brown dismissed the appeal for judicial review and observed, "In my respectful view, the Officer's conclusion [the findings of a senior immigration officer] that he had reasonable grounds to believe that the BNP was, is, or will be engaged in terrorism is reasonable; it is supported by the evidence having regard to the broad definition of terrorism under Canadian law ... I also note that the Officer stated there was 'little evidence before me to find that the applicant personally engaged in violence for the BNP'."

The observation was obtained from the Canadian federal court's website.

Jewel reached Canada on January 18, 2013, and made a refugee claim the same day. On September 26, 2013, he was found to be a refugee and on February 27, 2014, he applied for permanent resident status, according to the verdict.

The verdict quoted CBSA National Security Screening Division's obser-

vation, "The applicant indicated that the BNP is a 'party that uses armed struggle or violence to reach political objectives.' He specified that when there is a strike, the party uses ammunition and arms. The BNP, like the opposition party, 'uses arms like a war. They use hand bombs, pistols, and big swords...'"

"Regarding the BNP's engagement in acts of subversion or terrorism, the Officer cites several reports, news articles and studies, as well as 'general information' found online on Wikipedia. The Officer acknowledges searching for and finding this general information on the internet by using the search term 'Bangladesh nationalist party terrorist acts'..."

JS DISCUSSION

Claiming that a Canadian court has recently branded BNP "a terrorist party", Bangladesh Tariqat Federation Chairman Syed Nazibul Bashar Maizvandary yesterday demanded cancellation of BNP's registration with the EC.

The chief of Tariqat, an ally of ruling Awami League, speaking on a point of order in parliament, said, "I want to know why BNP's registration should not be scrapped as we demand Jamaat-Shibir to be banned on the same ground."

He also demanded arrest of the BNP chief to expedite the trial against her and other "BNP leaders who were engaged in arson terrorism".

He claimed that no BNP man gets political asylum in any country because the BNP has been branded as a terrorist party.

"A GOVT PLOT"

The BNP yesterday termed the matter a part of the government's plot to confuse people, reports UNB.

"What we have understood going through the court verdict is that it is a part of a conspiracy drama. We think the government has fabricated the drama with a motive to create confusion among people. They [the government] will stage some similar incidents before the election," said BNP senior leader Ruhul Kabir Rizvi.

He came up with the remarks while speaking at a press conference at BNP's Nayapaltan central office.

Rizvi said even though the verdict was delivered a month ago, former vice-president of Chittagong University Chhatra League unit

Shawkat Ali Sagar made a report for a Canadian website on Wednesday and the pro-government media in Bangladesh jumped on it.

"Sagar and the ruling party men are making various plots and propaganda against the BNP from Canada."

He questioned why would a person seek political asylum calling his party a terrorist outfit?

"The immigration department presented the false and fabricated information before the court. The department was provided with the information as part of the drama."

AL'S REACTION

AL spokesperson Hasan Mahmud claimed that the BNP has become a terrorist party.

At a press conference at the party president's Dhanmondi office, Hasan said, "We have been claiming that the BNP is a terrorist party for a long time and now it has been proved after Canadian court's verdict."

We're worried

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the website of Combating Terrorism Center (CTC), an academic institution at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York.

He is currently serving as the commander, Resolute Support and US Forces-Afghanistan.

The general's comments about Bangladesh were based on "materials" found in a raid conducted in October of 2015 in Shorabak district of Kandahar in Afghanistan that "uncovered a camp where AQIS and Taliban were working together".

"In this Shorabak objective, there were congratulatory notes going back and forth about some of these activities in Bangladesh," the interview read.

"They [AQIS] have a regional agenda, but this region is very important to the United States," it added.

He told CTC that AQIS had linkage to core al-Qaeda.

"Of course, al-Qaeda is very focused right now on the survival of their senior leadership, but they are connected to these guys as well. They all share the same agenda and the same focus," it added.

Asked about the matter, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said it was a "propaganda".

He was into

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Dhaka court placed Rana, a death row convict in the blogger Rajib Haider murder case, and his associate on five-day remand each.

Investigators also found Rana's connection with Quazi Mohammad Rezwanaul Ahsan Nafis, who had been detained in New York over an alleged bomb plot.

According to CTTC officials, Rana and Nafis were friends while studying in North South University and they had a good communication until Nafis' arrest.

During interrogation, Rana confessed to police that he was aware that Nafis wanted to do something in New York, but he claimed he did not know what exactly Nafis would do, said DC Mohibul.

Nafis went to the US on a student visa in January 2012. He was sentenced to 30 years in prison.

Mohibul said Rana was being quizzed and that they hope to glean more information from him.

Rana, 34, is also a charge-sheeted accused in another case filed for planning to kill an assistant headmaster of Monipur High School in the capital in 2013.

About this, the CTTC official said Rana did not admit to his involvement in any of the cases.

Asked if Rana had any links with Nibras Islam, one of the Gulshan café attackers, who once studied at a Malaysian university, Mohibul said they were yet to find any connection.

Rana went to Malaysia on February 15, 2014, managing a passport where he faked his present and permanent addresses, police said.

Asked how Rana could get a passport with fake information, Mohibul said they were investigating it.

Another CTTC official, who is involved in the investigation, requesting anonymity, told The Daily Star that they had come to know that a broker helped Rana get the passport.

Police were trying to identify the broker, the official added.

AL may face

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a strong hurdle in the next polls," another MP quoted Hasina as saying.

"Canadian court's verdict clearing any corruption allegation in the Padma Bridge project has held our heads high," she added.

Media played

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the culprits to justice.

He said pressure and threats from the administration and political goons are still there, putting obstacles to journalism at the local level.

Matiur was speaking at a roundtable titled "Challenges before Regional and District Newspapers: Problems and Way Forward" held at The Daily Star Centre. The event was organised on the occasion of the daily's 26th anniversary.

"After so many years of the tragic incident, we feel happy that the rapists and killers of Yasmin were hanged. And the country observes the day [August 24] as the Resistance Day against Repression of Women," he said.

"It was August 25 morning. We were returning to Dinajpur from Dhaka. Manoranjon Shill Gopal, now a lawmaker of Dinajpur, informed us that police raped and killed a girl in Dashmile area. When we wanted to know from the police about the matter the next day, they called Yasmin a prostitute and buried her hurriedly."

He said, "After getting the identity and photo of Yasmin the next day [26 August], we were preparing to publish the news with eight column banner. Knowing about it, police asked me not to publish the news and threatened me with dire consequences."

At night, police cut power supply to his press.

"But the next day, we published the news that Yasmin was raped and murdered, borrowing electricity from a neighbour. People took to the streets, laid siege to the police station and looted it. The local administration imposed curfew. Police opened fire on the agitating people, killing seven and wounding around hundred others," Matiur recalled the incident that happened 22 years ago.

He said if they did not report the incident correctly and if they bowed to the pressure, the truth would have never come out and there would have been no justice.

Matiur said the three policemen were awarded death penalty and hanged accordingly. But those officials who tried to protect them did not get punishment.

Yasmin, a 14-year-old house help, was picked up on a police van over an assurance that they would drop her home in Dashmile area in Dinajpur on August 24, 1995. She was on her way to Dinajpur from Dhaka. A day later her body was found by the side of a road, bruised and battered.

Nasa's 'holy grail'

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contain so many Earth-sized and rocky planets, of the kind thought to be necessary to contain aliens.

The researchers might soon be able to find evidence of life on the planets, they have said. British astronomer Dr Chris Copperwheat, from Liverpool John Moores University, who was part of the international team, said: "The discovery of multiple rocky planets with surface temperatures which allow for liquid water make this amazing system an exciting future target in the search for life."

Any evidence of life is likely to be "strong, very strong or conclusive", the scientists said. It will be done by looking for what molecules are in the atmosphere - if they were to find things like oxygen, and in the right amounts, then it would probably indicate that there was biological activity.

Co-researcher Dr Amaury Triaud, of the Institute of Astronomy in Cambridge, said: "We hope we will know if there's life there within the next decade."

Even if life isn't ever found near TRAPPIST-1, it might eventually develop there. The star is relatively young - even when our own Sun has run out of fuel and our solar system is destroyed, the newly-discovered one will still be in its early infancy.

TRAPPIST-1 "burns hydrogen so slowly that it will live for another 10 trillion years - more than 700 times longer than the Universe has existed so far, which is arguably enough time for life to evolve", wrote Ignas AG Snellen from the Leiden Observatory, in an accompanying article about the discovery.

All of the planets were found using a method called "transit photometry". That works by watching out for when a planet passes, or transits, in front of its host star - blocking out a small amount of light, allowing us to see the planet and learn about its size.

Scientists first found the star TRAPPIST-1 in 2010, after monitoring

Gaibandha SP

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The HC bench of Justice Obaidul Hassan and Justice Krishna Debnath had passed the order after holding a brief hearing on the inquiry report prepared by the chief judicial magistrate of Gaibandha.

The chief judicial magistrate in his report said three policemen, one of whom was from the DB, and some locals were directly involved in the torching of houses, but he could not identify the people.

The CJM said when he had asked the Gaibandha SP for the names and designations of the policemen and the DB official concerned, the police official did not provide those.

The HC had also directed the authorities concerned to withdraw all police personnel who were on duty on November 6 in Changari Beel, where the Santal houses were set on fire.

After the Santal incident, law and order in Gaibandha again came to the fore after the Awami League lawmaker from Gaibandha-1 Manzurul Islam Liton was shot dead in his Sundarganj house on December 31 last year.

Pope meets

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revenge, but you have embarked, with the pain inside, on the path of love to build and help the people of Bangladesh, especially young people so that they can study: this is to sow peace and I thank you, for me it is an example."

The bishop of Alife-Caiazzo, Valentino Di Cerbo, was present at the meeting and presented profiles on the lives of the nine victims to the Pope. During the visit, Francis was also presented with nine olive tree seedlings with the names of the victims written on pictures of doves attached.

Those present also shared about special projects they are working on following the tragedy as a way to honour their loved ones: one brother of a victim is leaving soon to volunteer in Dhaka with Aid to the Church in Need and another family has helped to build a church in a small town in the south of Bangladesh.

Another project provides study grants for young people in Bangladesh. A day after the attack, the Pope sent a letter expressing his heartfelt condolence and condemning the "barbarous" act as an offence "against God and humanity."

It is believed that Pope Francis may make a trip to Bangladesh sometime this year, although no dates have been announced.

Newly installed Cardinal and Archbishop of Dhaka, Patrick D'Rozario, the first prelate from Bangladesh to receive a red hat, told journalists in November that if the Pope comes, it would likely be towards the end of 2017, after the country's monsoon season.

Pope Francis' visit to Bangladesh would be "a great event for the whole Church in the country, especially for interreligious harmony, the rights of government workers and for climate change," Cardinal D'Rozario said.

the smallest stars close to the Sun. Since then, they have been watching out for those transits - and after seeing 34 of them clearly, they proposed that they can be attributed to the seven new planets.

They then worked to understand the size and composition of each of the worlds. That work is still continuing, but the researchers believe that the planets have large oceans, are temperate and other conditions that could make way for alien life.

Dr Michael Gillon, from the STAR Institute at the University of Liege in Belgium, said: "This is an amazing planetary system - not only because we have found so many planets, but because they are all surprisingly similar in size to the Earth."

If a person were on one of the planets, everything would look a lot darker than usual, the scientists said. The amount of light heading to your eye would be about 200 times less than you get from the sun, and would be comparable to what you can see at sunset.

Despite that relative darkness, everything would still feel warm, the researchers said. That's because roughly the same amount of energy would be coming from the star as warms our Earth - but it does so infra-red.

Expatriate real

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allegedly by his landlord following a dispute over paying rent, reports NBC New York, quoting local police and victim's family.

Police found Zakir with multiple wounds to the torso in front of 1001 Logan Avenue in Throgs Neck. He was taken to Jacobi Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead.

Law enforcement sources said Zakir was a tenant who had been living in an apartment inside the Egyptian landlord's home for the last nine months, promising to buy the place but not paying the rent.

When the 51-year-old landlord, identified as Taha Mahran, confronted him about it, the two got into an argument, and Mahran allegedly began stabbing Khan in front of his 12-year-old son, according to a family friend of the victim who wished to be unnamed.

"The landlord just came out, and from the car he pulled the gentleman who got killed, and he stabbed him multiple times," he said. "And within two hours, he was gone. It's shocking." NBC New York reports quoting the family friend.

Police arrested Mahran on charges of murder, manslaughter and criminal possession of a weapon.

Hailing from Fenchuganj upazila of Sylhet, Zakir immigrated to the US in 1992. He studied at the City College of New York, and then started his real estate business.

Zakir was well-known in his community and involved in different social activities in Bronx.

As the news of his death spread, hundreds of expatriate Bangladeshis thronged the hospital.

Zakir left behind his wife and three children.

Shafik Rehman

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Rehman, cleared him for going abroad while Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court on February 16, directed detectives to return his passport.

Rehman got his passport back on Sunday.

Rehman blamed lack of knowledge and coordination among the immigration police for the harassment.

Police said they acted on directives from high-ups.

"This is bad. Police should know how to go about it," Rehman said.

"We did not allow him in the morning upon directive from high-ups," said an immigration officer preferring anonymity.

Rehman said an immigration police called him hours later and said "you are free to go. You may take the next flight". Shafik Rehman is now on bail in a case filed for his alleged attempt to abduct and murder prime minister's son Sajeeb Wazed Joy.

He walked out of Kashimpur jail in Gazipur on bail on September 6 last year, five months after his arrest.

"After completing all immigration procedure around 5:00am, I was waiting for my flight. I have by this time told my wife that I was going to meet her."

Suddenly, an immigration police official asked for the passport and court's clearance of going abroad. He walked away taking the documents.

As time was running out for boarding the flight and the official did not return, Rehman himself went back to immigration to look for the official.

He eventually returned home.

The flight was delayed for around 30 minutes so that his luggage could be unloaded, he said.

Replying to a query, Rehman said, "I am not fine as I could not see my wife who is scheduled to undergo surgery on Sunday."

The journalist, who faced similar barriers at least five times before, said he would attempt to get on a flight today.

"I do not know what will happen tomorrow [today]," he added.