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Muzzling freedom of expression

Govt should reconsider the proposed Act

THE draft Digital Security Act 2018 was approved by the cabinet on January 29. It has caused widespread consternation not only among journalists, but also free thinkers, rights activists and public in general. It is basically old wine in a new bottle and the much-criticised Section 57 has been carefully divided and kept separately in four sections of the draft Act, with an even more draconian character.

The proposed Act, if passed into law, will curb freedom of speech and expression. It will also hamper independent journalism. There are sections that would prevent reporters from collecting information from government offices as this might fall under "spying" as mentioned in the draft—a punishable offence where an accused may face up to 14 years in jail or Tk 20 lakh fine or both. Precisely how is a reporter to write if s/he has no access to government documents?

The draft law is only going to create more ambiguity thanks to the use of vague terms, which human rights experts believe will be used to intimidate and harass people, including journalists. There are a host of other provisions that deal with many matters, including freedom of speech. It is severely curtailed in the online sphere (which includes social media like Facebook) and effectively muzzled because we are looking at heavy fines coupled with, should authorities deem fit, incarceration.

The most damaging part of the proposed Act of course is that it does away with the need for arrest warrants, which means the courts are made redundant. The police are to be conferred carte blanche whereby law enforcers may incarcerate anyone on the mere suspicion of that person having committed a crime or suspected to be plotting to commit a crime. This is a draconian measure that is unthinkable in any country that claims itself to be democratic and goes against the universal principle of law that no one is presumed guilty unless proven so.

We urge the government to reconsider the Digital Security Act 2018 and appeal to the parliament, especially the leader of the House, to scrap the provisions that could throttle freedom of expression.

Workers' safety must come first

Deaths at shipbreaking yards

WE are shocked at the recent deaths of two workers at the shipbreaking yards in Sitakunda. According to our report, one worker was killed at Premium Trade Corporation Shipbreaking Yard after being hit by an iron plate and the other one, a worker of RA Shipbreaking Yard, was killed after inhaling poisonous gas. But as usual, the owners of the yards claimed that these deaths were due to other reasons, which is outrageous.

Deaths and injuries at shipbreaking yards are a regular phenomenon in Bangladesh. According to Shipbreaking Platform, an international organisation working for safety at shipbreaking yards, at least 16 workers were killed and more than a hundred others were injured in accidents at different shipbreaking yards in Sitakunda last year and a staggering number of 181 workers died between 2005 and 2016.

Needless to say, shipbreaking is a hazardous job and workers at the yards are exposed to all kinds of toxins which can cause serious damage to their health. Toxic materials such as asbestos, mercury and lead have serious health hazards and regular exposure to such toxins can lead to severe illnesses and even death.

While the shipbreaking industry is booming in our country, the safety of the workers has not been given a priority by the owners of the scrap yards. We believe that these two deaths could have been avoided, if the workers had protective gear which their employers should have ensured. Thus we demand that the authorities take proper precautionary measures for the workers' safety. Also, the relevant laws must be implemented by the government so that workers' rights are protected in the industry

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Ensure security before repatriation

The Daily Star published an op-ed titled "Rohingya repatriation must be voluntary" on January 25. The writer has raised some important points about the Rohingya repatriation process that, in my opinion, must be addressed. He rightly pointed out that Rohingyas were still trickling into the country which clearly points to the continuing repression by the Myanmar military and the Buddhist extremists. To prevent more atrocities, the UNHCR should oversee the entire process of repatriation. In addition, international aid organisations such as the Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders (MSF) should be involved in the process. If Myanmar restricts access to international bodies, then the option of third country resettlement for Rohingyas ought to be seriously considered. The international community has so far done nothing but fail the Rohingya people. They must open their doors now.

Mahmood Elahi, Canada



RUBANA HUQ

face, we crawl back, secure our own space, and say: "Not my problem. I have too much on my own platter."

One of my most favourite poems, Yeats' *Second Coming*, comes to my mind today, which refers to everything falling apart and the ones with the deadliest and most passionate intensity continuing to dictate terms. What is it about powerful spaces that corrupt the conscience? Why are we all falling short of vision and unwilling to invest into making changes around us?

While we look at our own selves and wonder what we have done so far has just not been enough even to last our own lifetime, we also wonder about the gradual erosion of our values and dreams. We may not have only compromised our morals, but have also forgotten to dream and to have a vision. That's why while we "ah'h'ed" and "oh'h'ed" throughout our lives, transgressions have continued to happen and progress has been halted.

On January 21, an online version of a daily newspaper posted a video of a man wearing white pants and brown jacket dragging a woman by her hair and hitting her with a sandal (www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDfG2AOtZUg&time_continue=1%29&app=desktop). There were people standing all around them, videoing the scene and yet no one confronted the man; none questioned him and the atrocity went unchallenged. The person trying to digitally capture the moment had, for sure, felt that something was going wrong there, but did not have the courage to correct the wrong. The audience there must have felt curiosity but had fallen short of empathy. Let's just include *all of us* in the audience. In spirit, *we were all there*. That scene is a specific representation of a collective failure of the conscience of our times. And worst is, this is not the only example.

According to Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), there have been 749 rapes, 97 attempts to rape, 39 deaths after rape,

SOMEHOW, we are not reacting fast enough. Somehow complacency is setting in. With every setback that we face, with every major slap that we receive on our

and 11 committed suicide after rape in Bangladesh between January and November 2017. Out of this, 53 raped were under six years of age, 132 between the ages of 7-12, 170 between 13-18, 25 in the age range of 19-24, 13 in the range of 25-30 and 14 in the 30+ age range. These statistics evoke fear.

Meanwhile, there's the other side of reality that moves on and gives us hope. Female empowerment, through the readymade garment sector, continues to be the driving force of the economy. But it is also on our shoulders to take their empowerment to the next level. We must also notice that there is an entire generation of silent, struggling women putting in at least 20 years of their lives

Bangladesh way better than how we go about it now. Let's imagine telling the stories of the women in the most creative manner to the rest of the world while the world would read and raise their glasses in their honour.

Well, how do we share the tales of the millions of women who work for us?

The process may also incentivise the workers to be more efficient. The most efficient worker could be rewarded with the opportunity of being filmed. The short clip may cover the worker and her story. The story may be shared through a QR code, which could give the conscious consumer a chance to watch the story of his/her apparel being stitched in a factory that is situated thousands of

beyond these 20 years? Life could very well re-begin then. We could get these women together post-retirement and ask them if they are interested to set up a production line along with other women in the model of a cooperative. We could also arrange the finance for them and claim an equity in their company, at our end. Just imagine, a separate production line, attached to our own floor spaces, filled with women who have just retired or their nominees turning into entrepreneurs, backed by us and our collateral and giving us stakes in the company.

Injustices continue to happen all over the world but have seldom halted progress. Showcasing success stories in the best possible manner is on our shoulders. I shared these two proposals risking being labelled as a utopian. But that's exactly what has gone wrong with where we live. We have stopped dreaming. A level of comfort today has crippled our imagination and expectations both. And quite unfortunately, we are giving in to being just who we are. A lack of creative vision continues to paralyse us and stops us from yearning for more. This must come to a full halt as we must creatively pine to change the stories around us. The deadliest curse on a nation can be nothing but the state of lame acceptance. Creative juices must flow; changes must happen; and we must come to a full bloom. A new normative expectation must be formed and new behavioural rules must set in.

A new normal Waste Land can't be our choice of landscape. We were born to be forever new, "forever panting, forever young."

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PHOTO: MUNIR UZ ZAMAN/AFP

in the readymade garment industry who could have done more. After 20 years of service, if they don't wish to put in more hours behind the sewing machines, then where do these women go? If we challenge our complicit selves and indulge in vision, maybe we could find a way of helping them redesign their future path but also brand Bangladesh in the process through portraying women who toil in our factories. Thus, I propose two ideas to work with.

QR branding

We have often wondered if the stories in Bangladesh could be better packaged and if we could just find a way of telling our stories better.

I have always said that we could brand

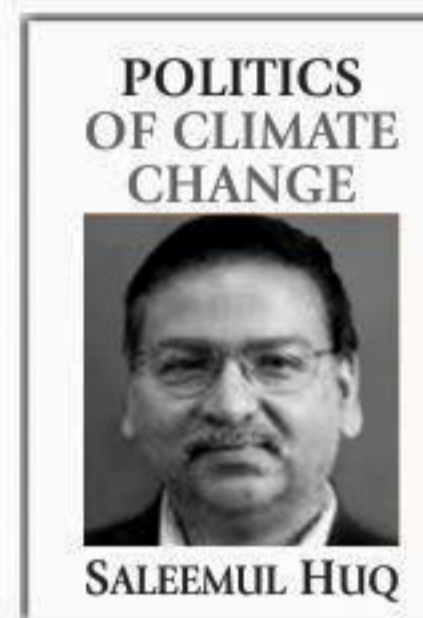
miles away from him/her.

For every style being produced in our factories, we could film the top performer, even with our basic phones for about 20 seconds, and link it to a QR code. This QR code would be printed in a saateen label on the garment that we produce. This label wouldn't cost us more than 8-10 cents a dozen. Tell me, what could be more relevant or apt than sharing the stories of millions of women engaged in the industry?

A new line of entrepreneurs

These women working in our factories could all turn into entrepreneurs once they retire. Joining a garment factory at the age of 18 and continuing up to 38 may be a usual scene. But what about

How financing to tackle climate change can be mobilised



SALEEMUL HUQ

government officials, researchers and private sector representatives shared their experiences and knowledge about raising and spending money to tackle climate change around the world. The conference was organised by the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) with the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) and the Centre for Climate Change and Environmental Research (C3ER) at BRAC University. Over two days, a number of very interesting papers were presented in both plenary and parallel sessions.

I would like to talk about some of the main outcomes of the discussions at the two-day conference.

The first point I want to make is that tackling climate change both for mitigation and adaptation will cost the world trillions of dollars over the next decade, not just billions. Hence the 100

AT the recently concluded two-day international conference on climate finance in Dhaka, about a hundred national and 50 international experts,



PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA

Last year's flash floods caused by intense rainfall damaged crops of most of the farmers in northeastern Bangladesh.

billion dollars a year from 2020 onwards promised by the developed countries to be provided to the developing countries to tackle climate change, through the Green Climate Fund (GCF), will hardly suffice for all developing countries.

Domestic finance in every country needs to be tapped along with innovative funds and private sector investors at the global and national levels. This is beginning to happen but needs to be scaled up very quickly.

The second point is that while private sector finance is suitable for—and indeed is already flowing towards—mitigation activities, which include renewable energy such as solar and wind power, it does not flow into adaptation for the poorest countries and communities as there is little profit incentive there.

Hence for poor and climate-vulnerable countries and communities, the finance will have to come mostly

from public funds, both national and global. So public finance should focus mainly on adaptation rather than mitigation.

The third point that emerged during the discussions is that while money is indeed needed and is a very important element in tackling climate change, it is not of much use if we don't know what to do with it!

Climate change is a new issue facing the world and we are still in a learning-by-doing mode, which is why we need to emphasise knowledge generation and sharing in order to learn to use money most effectively to both mitigate and adapt to changes in climate that continue to take place.

It is in this context that Bangladesh has emerged, and is recognised globally, as a pioneer in initiating climate finance from its own national exchequer and for development of adaptation technologies while also having the world's biggest

solar home systems programme.

The main outcomes discussed in the presence of the finance minister of Bangladesh were that while Bangladesh and other vulnerable developing countries should aim to get better access to global funds like the GCF, they should also mobilise their own national finance, from both the public and private sector.

The most vulnerable countries in particular now need to look beyond only mitigation and adaptation to also finance for loss and damage which is fast becoming a reality.

In this respect the government of Bangladesh has an opportunity to become a pioneer by using the reserve funds in the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCTF) to set up a national loss and damage fund or mechanism.

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