



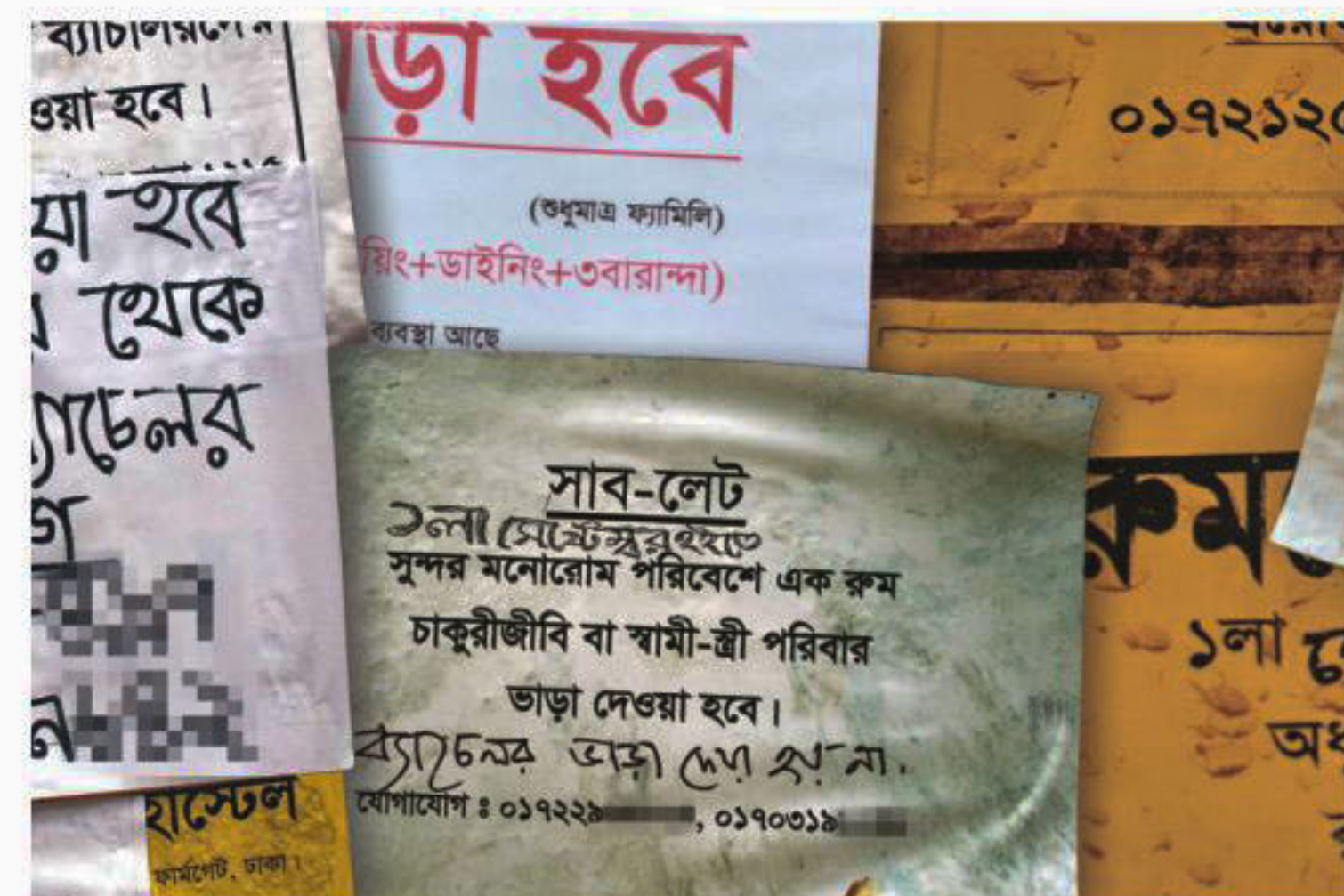
PHOTO: NAYEEM JABAZ

“We can regard our life as a uselessly disturbing episode in the blissful repose of nothingness.”
— Arthur Schopenhauer

SNAPSHOT

MAILBOX

Please note we have a new email address:
starweekendtds@gmail.com



At the mercy of landlords

This is regarding an article published in the *Star Weekend* titled “Tenants: At the mercy of landlords” on January 26, 2018. Every year, more and more people from the countryside come to the cities in search of higher incomes and a better life. They seek homes near their workplace for convenience. But, not only is house rent increasing but certain people are denied places to live because they don't fit criteria set by homeowners. Rent increases also means, as is mentioned in the article, that tenants have to compromise on other necessities such as food and education. The law is not being implemented in this regard. I would like to request the government, through The Daily Star, to enforce the house rent act.

Mohib Billah
Islamic University
Kushtia

Nuclear power: Surviving on secrecy and misinformation

Regarding nuclear power in Bangladesh, both hype and opposition have been stirred up. On a positive note, it could potentially be beneficial for our country. But as we have seen in the past, developed countries such as Japan and the Soviet Union have experienced a debacle with nuclear power. In Chernobyl, for instance, radiation is still active almost 32 years after the incident. Countries such as Germany, which have previously adopted nuclear power, are trying to switch to renewable energy sources.

Worryingly, we the public are yet to officially learn of many disclosures regarding the nuclear power plants. Our country is densely populated and the people who are living adjacent to the site are yet to know of any emergency evacuation procedures. If something goes wrong, is our state ready to be able to evacuate millions of people and compensate their losses? Whether these projects turn out to be a milestone or a fiasco for our country, we are yet to know.

Rafid Alam
Mohammadpur, Dhaka



PHOTOS: COURTESY

The opinions expressed in these letters do not necessarily represent the views of the *Star Weekend*.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

“From a love for our language, for the Liberation War, and for the nation has arisen a shared sense of democracy and freedom of speech,” writes Ahmedur Rashid Chowdhury Tutul about the impact of the Boi Mela via email. But, he writes on, increased censorship and violence towards writers and publishers have jeopardised free thinking in the country.

Before, and during, this year's Amar Ekushey Boi Mela have come repeated warnings from the police that action would be taken against writers and publishers with books that could hurt religious sentiments. Whilst no incidents have happened so far this year, the much-awaited fair—a mainstay of the publishing industry—has a blood-spattered history for writers, bloggers and publishers.

The years 2013 through 2016 marked particularly turbulent times for the writing and publishing community with the killings of bloggers and attacks on writers. Books on sensitive or controversial issues such as religion, atheism, or sexuality have been banned previously at the month-long Boi Mela and their publishers threatened with the closure of their stalls.

All this has contributed to deteriorating freedom of expression and a climate of fear and self-censorship among writers and publishers. Many feel that diverse views are no longer welcome. Writers cannot speak and write freely. Dissenting voices have been clamped down on, or have fled into exile.

While the Constitution establishes freedom of speech and expression as a fundamental right in Article 39, it can be restricted in the interests of the “security of the state” and “incitement to an offence” among other exceptions.

The colonial era Penal Code and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Act 2006 are similarly limiting. Section 295A of the penal code considers an offence, any writing or speech which is insulting to religious beliefs. The latter penalises those “hurting religious sentiments” in the infamous Section 57.

Fatal speech

Over the years, writers have been subject to threats from extremists with little to no intervention on their behalf by the state. 2015 proved most fatal for writers, starting with Avijit Roy, a Bangladeshi-American secularist blogger and writer, murdered while leaving the Boi Mela. Roy managed the blog *Mukto-Mona* (Free Thinker).

Months later, Roy's publishers, Faisal Arefin Dipan and Ahmedur Rashid



Boi Mela guidelines prohibit books that “hurt religious sentiments” from being sold at the fair.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

CENSORSHIP AND THE BOI MELA

MALIHA KHAN

Chowdhury Tutul were attacked on the same day. Dipan was killed but Tutul, along with two bloggers in his office at the time, survived with severe injuries. Continued attacks that year saw three other bloggers killed.

Both Niladri Chattopadhyay Niloy (known as Niloy Neel) and Dipan, shortly before their murders, had requested police protection after receiving multiple death threats but been turned away. The police had told Niloy

to refrain from writing or leave the country instead.

Even earlier, prominent writer Humayun Azad had been attacked fatally, like Avijit on his way back from the Boi Mela, by machete-wielding as sailants, in 2004. In the mid-90s, Taslima Nasreen left Bangladesh after receiving death threats from extremists. Back in 1973, Daud Haider was first taken into custody and then had to leave the country, following death threats because of one of his poems. Both have never been allowed to return to the country for writing critically on religion.

Following the attacks on Tutul and Dipan, not only writers but publishers

had now come under fire. Thus, even writers brave enough to pen criticism of orthodox religious beliefs for one may no longer manage to find a willing publisher.

Self-censorship has become the norm

Far from providing protection, or at the very least, assurance to the writing and publishing community, the police and government have been slow to unequivocally condemn the killings and ensure justice. As a result, secular writers have been leaving the country. Tutul, who has since moved to Norway, was the editor and publisher of Shuddhoshor (Pure Voice) Publications in Dhaka.

Those who remain, are silent. Arif Jebtik, a blogger, found himself under threat and had to leave his job and change his son's school. His fellow bloggers have been leaving the country these last few years. Self-censorship, he

Continued to page 4



বিশ্ব বলেছিলো- পদ্মা সেতু ‘সম্ভব না’
একজন প্রধানমন্ত্রী আর ১৬ কোটি বাঙালি বলেছিলাম-
‘কেন না!’

