

## Do media have full freedom?

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freedom faces a problem.”

Talking about the ongoing drives against casinos, he said, “Casinos were operated in Bangladesh for many years. Could journalists run reports on it? No, they could not.”

Journalists jumped on the issue after the prime minister said action would be taken against it.

“Then is there full press freedom in our country? Does it mean fear is at play among you [journalists]? [Do you apprehend] ‘if I do report I will fall in trouble or my editor may face a problem’,” he said.

His comments came amid concerns over media freedom as the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) this year shows Bangladesh’s position fell to 123rd from 119th last year.

Touching on the killing of Buet student Abrar Fahad, he questioned the inaction of Buet teachers over the ragging and torture in student dormitories even though the misdeeds were an open secret.

“We all are aware about ragging in universities. Newspapers like The Daily Star and Prothom Alo ran stories on the issue,” he said.

“But we were silent, administration was silent, the university authorities were silent. All were silent,” he said, adding that everyone started talking after Abrar was killed and the prime minister said justice has to be done.

“Where were the teaches when there were incidents of ragging, when the culture of torturing students was developing at every university?” he questioned.

“Today, the teachers’ association brings out processions over Abrar murder. Where were you then? What have you done when students faced ragging in your institution? What steps have you taken? Have you lodged complaints with police? You did not.”

Justice Hasan was speaking at a workshop on “Implementation of High Court Verdict to Prevent Sexual

Harassment and Role of Mass Media”.

Law Reporters Forum (LRF) and Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA) jointly organised the event in association with Fair Wear Foundation.

### ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Justice Hasan was critical of the absence of a complaint committee on sexual harassment in the Supreme Court, although the HC gave directives in this regard in 2009.

“We all know incidents of sexual harassment take place among lawyers. We also know such incidents happens among the staff of the Supreme Court. I personally heard one or two such incidents.

“But such issues were resolved somehow rebuking the accused when such incidents were exposed widely.”

Such incidents were covered up or the accused were just transferred, he said.

But the High Court has issued directives for constituting a complaint committee at every work place; carrying out probe into sexual harassment allegations; filing report to police if any allegation contains criminal ingredients, and starting disciplinary proceeding against the accused.

“The High Court said this in 2009 but if you ask the Supreme Court registrar whether a complaint committee has been formed, I guess he will not be able to reply in the positive.”

He said, “If we can’t purify my house, then how can I will be able to purify others. These words are applicable for the judges, the Supreme Court as it applicable for you [journalists].”

He asked journalists to inquire whether his or her newspaper or media house formed such a committee to resolve sexual harassment issues.

Also speaking at the workshop, BNWLA President Fawzia Karim Firoz urged the government to enact a law to prevent sexual harassment at workplaces on the basis of the guidelines issued by the HC.

## Beat him

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Investigators earlier had said Anik hit Abrar around 200 times with a cricket stump.

Abrar, a second-year student of Buet’s electrical and electronic engineering department, was beaten to death by a group of BCL leaders at the university’s Sher-e-Bangla Hall during October 6 night and early hours of October 7.

The next day, his father filed a murder case against 19 Buet students and several other unnamed accused with Chawkbazar police station.

The gruesome murder triggered a firestorm of protest on university campuses across the country.

Law enforcers suspect Abrar was attacked because of one of his recent Facebook posts, which seemed critical of some recent deals with India.

Yesterday, Anik told the court that he and some other students suspected Abrar to be a Shibir activist because of a Facebook post of the victim. They decided to beat Abrar up a few days before his murder.

After Abrar returned to his room at Sher-e-Bangla Hall from his home in Kustia on October 6, the accused decided to call him to a room.

As per the decision, Abrar was called in room number 2011 around 8:30pm that day. There, he was beaten indiscriminately for several hours which led to his death, said court and police sources.

Meanwhile, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police has formed a six-member committee, headed by joint commissioner of the detective branch, to assist the murder investigation.

### PROTESTS RELAXED

Agitating Buet students demanding justice for Abrar yesterday relaxed the protests for today and tomorrow taking the university’s admission tests into consideration.

At a sit-in, the demonstrators also said they would provide all sorts of assistance to the examinees and their guardians during the tests tomorrow.

“We are relaxing the protests for the time being as the process of implementing our demands has started,” a representative of the students said.

Meanwhile, Buet in a statement said the admission test would be held as per the schedule.

After the murder, the students were protesting over a 10-point demand. But after a meeting with Vice Chancellor Prof Saiful Islam on Friday evening, the protesters are now pressing for five demands, which could be met by the university authorities in a short time.

The demands include issuance of circular on expulsion of Abrar’s killers, cancellation of dormitory seats of illegal occupants, sealing of offices of political organisations and assurance from university that it will provide compensations to Abrar’s family and bear all the costs of running the legal battle over the murder.

The demands also include opening of a dedicated website for posting complaints about ragging and other forms of torture on the campus, installation of CCTV cameras on all floors of every hall.

The university authorities took steps to meet some of the 10-point demands. In line with one of the demands, Buet on Friday banned all political organisations and their activities.

The authorities yesterday issued five separate official circulars on the matters.

In one of the circular, the university’s Directorate of Students’ Welfare said it would start evicting illegal occupants from halls and seal off offices of student organisations yesterday.

Highest punishment would be handed down to those involved in

ragging.

The university has suspended 19 students. They will be expelled after an ongoing probe and in line with the decision of a disciplinary committee and the university syndicate, one of the circular said.

The university authorities will bear all the costs of running the legal battle over the murder and provide necessary compensations to Abrar’s family, another circular said.

The university also said a dedicated website for making complaints would be opened soon.

### BUET SEALS OFF THREE ROOMS

The Buet authorities yesterday sealed off three rooms of two dormitories for illegal occupancy.

BCL Buet unit President Jami-us-Sani told The Daily Star that he lived at room 321 of Ahsan Ullah Hall, but the room was sealed off yesterday as his studentship ended a while ago.

The room of BCL’s Buet unit General Secretary Mehedi Hasan Rasel -- room no. 3021 of Sher-e-Bangla hall -- was also sealed off over the same reason, Jami confirmed.

Rasel was arrested in connection with the murder.

Another room of Ahsan Ullah Hall -- room No. 121 -- was sealed off because it was being used as an office of BCL, Jami further said.

Earlier in the morning, the agitating students resumed the demonstration for the sixth consecutive day as per their earlier announcement.

The agitating students erased graffiti drawn by Chhatra League on the boundary walls of a hall and replaced it with another one depicting Abrar murder.

### ONE MORE ARRESTED

Police yesterday arrested another accused in the case -- Moyaj Abu Hurayra, 20, a Buet student -- from the city’s Uttara.

With Moyaj, the law enforcement agencies have so far arrested a total of 19 people in connection with the murder.

Besides, a Dhaka court yesterday put another accused in the case, Majedul Islam Majed, on a five-day remand. He was was arrested in Sylhet on Friday

### NO TO POLITICS BAN

Meanwhile, Pragatisheel Chhatra Jote, an alliance of left-leaning student organisations, yesterday protested the Buet’s move to politics on the campus.

Its leaders alleged that the Buet students did not have grievances towards student politics rather than Chhatra League.

At a press conference at the Madhur Canteen, they also demanded a ban on Chhatra league’s politics at all educational institutions of the country.

Ducus Vice-president Nurul Haque Nur, at a separate press conference, claimed that the demand to impose ban student politics was raised because of Chhatra League’s “terrorist activities”.

## Zeesan gets

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against Zeesan before the court, the source said, adding that he owns a businessman in the country.

Zeesan’s lawyer submitted documents to the court mentioning that he has been doing business in the country for the last 14 years and has a reputation.

The lawyer also said that he regularly paid his taxes and had never been involved with any criminal activities in Dubai.

Bangladesh has no bilateral treaty with the UAE on fugitive extradition. But Bangladesh is willing to sign an agreement with the UAE, foreign ministry officials said.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina holds a crest during the council of Mahila Sramik League at the capital's Krishibid Institution yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

## 1.38cr people underemployed

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hours, earnings, productivity and use of skills, and the person is looking for better or additional work in conformity with his or her education and skills.

Of the underemployed people, 19.7 percent are looking for new or additional jobs as their present jobs are temporary, while 15.8 percent are looking for new jobs to get higher salary, the study pointed out.

It further said 9 percent want to work for more hours, 8.7 percent wish to have better jobs and activities, 8.6 percent want to work in higher ranks and 7.7 percent are in fear of losing jobs.

The study will be used as an approach paper for preparation of the upcoming 8th Five Year Plan and background paper for preparation of the Vision 2041.

Talking to this newspaper, Prof AK Azad Chowdhury, former chairman of the University Grants Commission, said, “Underemployment is a less-talked-about issue in the country.

“In fact, underemployment is unemployment,” he noted.

### THE FACTORS

“There are many factors that cause underemployment. When workers outnumber decent jobs, they will take anything they can get to pay the bills. It forces skilled and educated workers to take low-skilled, part-time jobs,” Zahid Hussain, former lead economist at the World Bank’s Dhaka office, told The Daily Star.

Experts also blamed the mismatch between the skills offered by the country’s education system and the job requirements in various sectors.

The knowledge and skills that graduates acquire at educational institutions have little application in work, making them less relevant in the labour market.

Bangladesh’s tremendous economic growth has been unable to create jobs proportionately over the last decade. The country has seen little progress in the industry sector and 85 percent of the jobs are in the informal sector, mentions the government study.

“Mismatch between the skills demanded and the skills supplied is another major reason for underemployment in Bangladesh.

pipeline. “This is excessive given the volume of the economy.”

Individuals with strong links with the ruling party have managed to obtain licences to open new banks in recent times, Moynul said.

He went on to cite the case of a Chattogram-based business tycoon who has established ownership of seven private banks to further his point of poor-discipline in the banking sector. “Such an example cannot be found anywhere in the world.”

There were allegations that the businesspeople were siphoning off money from banks using fake names, Moynul added.

“The banking sector has become the ‘casino’ for the financial sector,” said Khondker Ibrahim Khaled, a former deputy governor of the Bangladesh Bank.

Looting money from the banking sector could be stopped only if the

Many college graduates with master’s degrees in subjects not in high demand in the job market take what they get,” said Zahid.

They may end up as caretakers of apartment buildings, waiters, or Uber drivers. Technological change causes underemployment as well. ATM machines and mobile banking, for instance, have replaced the need for many bank tellers, he added.

Prof Azad thinks most of the graduates lack both hard and soft skills.

### EFFECTS

The underemployed people often feel neglected and frustrated, and in the worst cases, they become addicted to drugs and indulge in criminal activities, say experts.

“Underemployment has effects similar to those of unemployment. Both underpin low living standards,” said Zahid.

“In extreme cases, youth underemployment can lead to deviant behaviour such as drug addiction ...”

They experience high stress and anxiety as a result of job insecurity and low salary, said the economist,

adding that some of them retrain for different fields, while others downscale their lifestyle and accept long-term underemployment.

### WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

The study recommended ensuring quality of education and training.

“The problem of skill mismatch needs to be reduced. Sector-specific training needs to be provided to the workers,” it says.

Steps need to be taken to create decent jobs with fair income and also ensure security at workplace, social protection for families, and better prospect for personal development, the study mentions.

Stressing the need for revamping the education system, Prof Azad said the universities should continuously update their curriculum and design it in line with the need of different sectors.

“Universities here do not update curriculum regularly. We need technology-based education system. The students need to have proficiency in English and acquire skills such as computer literacy and analytical ability,” he added.

## ‘Match-fixing’ in govt measures

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They would use their political influence to not pay back their loans. They would regularise their defaulted loans frequently, file writ petitions with the High Court and use relaxed rescheduling facilities from the central bank, he said.

“Besides, one of the top habitual defaulters in the country is now holding an influential position in the prime minister’s inner circles.”

Key people of a company should be brought to book if their defaulted loans stay in the bad-loan category for a year.

Besides, passports of habitual defaulters should be confiscated and the list of top 10 defaulters of every bank branch should be hung in front of the office, said Moynul, also a former president of the Bangladesh Economic Association.

The total number of banks now stands at 60, with three more in the

government had a strong will. “But how can that be possible if the country’s top habitual defaulter and a stock market scamster secures an important position in the government?”

If anyone raises voice against the irregularities, he or she has to face difficulties due to the “absence of democracy in the country since 2018”, Khaled said.

Political influence was the main reason for the escalation in defaulted loans in Bangladesh, said Syed Abu Naser Bakhtiar Ahmed, a former managing director of Agrani Bank.

The government was yet to take any action against BASIC Bank’s former chairman Sheikh Abdul Hye Bachchu despite his involvement in siphoning off about Tk 4,000 crore from the state-owned Tk.

Some Tk 10,000 crore was looted from Janata Bank by only two to three people, but no exemplary punishment

was handed down.

“Such impunity encourages the vested quarter to not pay back money to banks,” Abu Naser added.

Large sums were being laundered abroad, said Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir, a professor at the Dhaka University’s Development Studies department.

Against this backdrop, the country’s banking sector has failed to create fresh capital to make the economy vibrant, he added.

Badiul Alam Majumdar, secretary of Sujon, moderated the roundtable, while the organisation’s Chairman M Hafiz Uddin Khan presided over the event.

Abdullah Al Kafi Ratan, a presidium member of Communist Party of Bangladesh; Abu Sayeed, a leader of Gonoforum; and Inam Ahmed Chowdhury, an Awami League leader, spoke among others.

## Demands met, why continuing protests: PM

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PM issued a strong warning against any wrongdoing on the campus of educational institutions.

Stern actions would be taken against the wrongdoers whoever they might be, she said.

“We say it clearly that we will never tolerate any crime on the campus... we didn’t allow it in the past and will not accept it in future.”

Hasina, also the Awami League president, said the government did not hesitate to take action against Abrar’s killers. “We don’t see who belongs to which party... we treat killers as killers, wrongdoers as wrongdoers and torturers as torturers.”

She said she did not wait after being informed of the killing of Abrar.

“I immediately instructed the police to arrest the killers and collect all information regarding the murder from the video footage. But the police faced trouble while collecting the footage.”

The PM said the students obstructed the police when they were collecting the footage.

Hasina said the inspector general of police rushed to her after the October 6 incident and wanted to know what they would do.

The IGP informed her that students wanted a copy of the footage, she said, adding that she directed the police chief to give a copy to the students.

The PM said she also asked the IGP to identify and arrest the killers and take action against them.

She said the accused could have been arrested immediately if 3/4 hours was not wasted for collecting the video footage. “It seemed that a scope was given to the accused to flee. The protesters can say about it.”

Hasina said those who had grabbed power after the assassination of Bangabandhu in 1975 made the killers of the Father of the Nation heroes and rewarded the accused of seven-murder at Dhaka University.

“We had to wait for 38 years for the trial of the killers of my parents and brothers.... So, it has become a difficult task to eliminate the menaces from the society where the culprits committed such heinous killings and they were rewarded and protected.”

The PM said the country witnessed brandishing of arms on educational campuses during the rules of Ziaur Rahman, HM Ershad and Khaleda Zia.

She said none but the Awami League government held trials of the killings

on campuses. “The trial of the killing of Sabikun Nahar Sony, who died during an intra-party clash of Chhatra Dal at Buet, was not held.”

The premier said nobody protested at that time and the Buet Alumni Association didn’t speak about the incident.

Hasina said everybody enjoys the right to speak when the AL stays in power. “The people can speak... at least this scope is there.”

### DHAKA-DELHI DEALS ISSUE

The PM blasted those opposing the MoUs signed recently with India on the withdrawal of 1.82 cusec water from the Feni river by India and supply of bulk LPG from Bangladesh to India.

About water-sharing of the 140-km long Feni river, she said Bangladesh and India have equal right to use its water.

Hasina said Bangladesh would export LPG to Tripura after importing it.

Recalling the contributions of the people of Tripura during the Liberation War, she said they gave shelter to Bangladeshis and provided food.

The AL chief asked the Mohila Sramik League leaders and activists to create awareness among the people so

that nobody goes abroad by stepping into the trap of brokers.

Citing the selling of a Bangladeshi woman by members of her father-in-law’s family to a brothel in a foreign country, Hasina said the woman was rescued and brought back to Bangladesh.

“We are taking proper steps against those involved in such an offence and we will continue it... stern actions will be taken against the culprits in future.”

The PM also elaborated her government steps for the welfare of the women and said they have to create their own space in the society and build themselves through obtaining proper education.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader also addressed the programme, chaired by Mohila Sramik League President Raushan Jahan Sathi.

Earlier, the AL chief inaugurated the conference by releasing pigeons and balloons.

A minute’s silence was observed to show respect to the memories of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, four national leaders and martyrs of different movements, including the independence movement in 1971.

## Nepal hopes for Chinese finance during Xi visit

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal rolled out the red carpet on Saturday for China’s President Xi Jinping as authorities rounded up Tibetans to prevent protests during his stay.

Xi is making the first state visit by a Chinese leader to Nepal in 23 years following his two days of talks in India.

President Bidhya Devi Bhandari received him at Kathmandu airport as the army band played the national anthems of the two countries.

Xi is expected to use his time in Kathmandu to push Beijing’s controversial Belt and Road infrastructure projects.

The Chinese president said he would use the two-day visit to “renew friendship and explore cooperation

with my Nepali friends” in a signed article published in Nepali newspapers on Friday.

“It is important that we adopt a strategic and long-term perspective and draw up a blueprint for our bilateral relationship to take it to a new height in this new era,” Xi added.

The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) said at least 18 people

were arrested in the days ahead of Xi’s arrival, including two Nepali shopkeepers selling bags with Tibetan flags or slogans. Fourteen remained in detention on Saturday.

Nepal is home to around 20,000 exiled Tibetans, but under pressure from Beijing the communist government has taken an increasingly hardline stance on their activities.