

# Does media have full freedom?

FROM PAGE 1

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

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

"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 a report I will run into trouble or my editor may face a problem,'" he said.

His comments came amid concerns over media freedom with the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) putting Bangladesh at 123rd place this year from 119th last year. The country scored 49.3 in the freedom of the press this year, according to the GCI.

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

"We all are aware of ragging at 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 teachers 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 did you do when students faced ragging in your institution? What steps did you take? 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 High Court gave directives in this regard in 2009.

"We all know sexual harassment takes place among lawyers. We also know such incidents happen 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 those were exposed widely."

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

But the HC has issued directives for constituting a complaint committee at every workplace; 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 affirmative."

He said, "If we can't purify my house, then how can I be able to purify others. This is applicable to the judges and the Supreme Court, as it is applicable to you, journalists."

He called upon journalists to enquire whether his or her newspaper or media house has formed 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.

LRF President Wakil Ahmed Hiron, BNWLA General Secretary Seema Zahur, Country Representative of Fair Wear Foundation Bablur Rahman, among others, spoke while LRF Training and Welfare Secretary Mas Udur Rahman moderated the event.



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

PHOTO: PID

## Demands met, why continuing protests: PM

FROM PAGE 1

Krishibid Institution, Bangladesh, the 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 in collecting the footage."

The PM said the students obstructed the collection of the footage by police. Hasina said the inspector general of police rushed to her after the murder. 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 premier said she also asked the IGP to identify and arrest the killers and take actions against them.

She said none but the Awami League government held trials of 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."

Nobody protested at that time and the Buet Alumni Association didn't

speak about the incident, the PM added.

**DHAKA-DELHI DEALS ISSUE**

The PM criticised those opposing the MoUs, signed earlier this month in New Delhi, 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 Feni river, she said Bangladesh and India have equal rights on using 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.

The PM elaborated her government's steps for the welfare of the women and said they have to create space for themselves 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 of the Mohila Sramik League 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.

## Beat him

FROM PAGE 1

Investigators had earlier 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 men at the university's Sher-e-Bangla Hall during October 6 night and early hours of October 7.

Later, his father filed a murder case against 19 Buet students, mostly BCL leaders of the Buet unit, 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 magistrate that he and some other students suspected Abrar to be a Chhatra 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 Kushtia 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.

already taken steps to meet some of the demands. For example, the VC on Friday announced that all political organisations and their activities are banned on the campus.

Yesterday, the authorities issued five circulars on the demands.

In one of the circulars, 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, it said.

The university has suspended 19 students. They will be expelled following an ongoing probe and in line with the decisions of a disciplinary committee and the university syndicate, one of the circulars 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 lodging complaints would be opened soon.

**BUET SEALS OFF THREE ROOMS**

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

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

The room of the unit's General Secretary Mehedi Hasan Rasel -- room number 3021 of Sher-e-Bangla Hall -- was also sealed off over the same reason, Jami said.

Rasel has recently been arrested in connection with the murder.

Another room of Ahsan Ullah Hall -- 121 -- was sealed off because it was being used as an office of the BCL, Jami added.

Earlier in the morning, the agitating students resumed the demonstration for the sixth consecutive day.

They 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 one more accused in the murder case in the capital's Uttara area. The arrestee is Buet student Moyaj Abu Hurayra, 20.

With him, a total of 19 people have been arrested over the murder.

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

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

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

At a press conference at the Madhur Canteen, they also demanded a ban on Chhatra League's politics at all educational institutions across the country.

Ducusu Vice-President Nurul Haque Nur, at a separate press conference in the capital, claimed that the demand to ban politics was raised because of BCL's criminal activities.

## 1.38cr people underemployed

FROM PAGE 1

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. 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

FROM PAGE 1

business community and the majority of them are habitual loan defaulters."

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

"Besides, one of the top habitual defaulters in the country is now holding an important position in the prime minister's inner circle."

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 their offices, said Moinul, also a former president of the Bangladesh Economic Association.

The total number of banks is now 60

and three more in the pipeline. "This is excessive given the volume of the economy."

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

He went on to cite the case of a Chattogram-based business tycoon who has ownership of seven private banks to substantiate 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, Moinul added.

"The banking sector has become the 'casino' for the financial sector," said Khondker Ibrahim Khaled, a former deputy governor of the Bangladesh Bank.

Stealing money from the banking

sector could be stopped only if the government had a strong will, he said. 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 behind the worsening of the defaulted-loan situation 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 Bacchu despite his involvement in siphoning off about Tk 4,000 crore from the state-owned bank.

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 quarters not to pay back money to banks," Abu Naser added.

Large sums were being laundered abroad, said Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir, professor of development studies at Dhaka University.

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.

The others who spoke include Awami League leader Inam Ahmed Chowdhury, Gonoforum leader Abu Sayeed, and Communist Party leader Abdullah Al Kafi Ratan.

## Zeesan gets 'out on bail in Dubai'

FROM PAGE 1

prove the allegations against Zeesan before the court, the source said.

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 built a reputation.

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

There is no bilateral extradition treaty between Bangladesh and the UAE. But Bangladesh is willing to sign an agreement with the UAE. The home ministry and police headquarters are preparing documents in this regard,

foreign ministry officials said.

A delegation of Bangladesh Police will participate in an Interpol conference in Chile on October 15.

The delegation will talk about the issue with the UAE officials on the sidelines of the conference, an official said.

Sources said Zeesan had an Indian passport which expired this year. Since then, he has been using a passport of the Dominican Republic.

He is on the home ministry's list of 23 top criminals published a decade ago.

There is a reward on his head.

He was notorious in Gulshan, Banani, Badda, Motijheel and

some other areas of the capital. He manipulated tender bids and extorted money from people and businesses, officials said.

The transnational police organisation Interpol also issued a "Red Notice" for him. The Interpol website mentions that he has murder charges against him and he is accused of possessing explosives in multiple cases.

Zeesan formed a killing squad with members of another top criminal Sanjidul Islam Emon's gang, they added.

He controlled Dhaka's underworld and came into public focus after he allegedly gunned down two DB

officers at a hotel in Malibagh in 2003.

He went into hiding afterwards. He was believed to have left the country after law enforcers launched a crackdown in 2005.

Zeesan went to India and changed his name to Ali Akbar Choudhury, officials said.

The Daily Star obtained a copy of his supposed Indian passport but could not verify its authenticity.

Zeesan's name resurfaced during the ongoing drive against illegal casinos and arrest of two Jubo League leaders GK Shamim and Khaled Mahmud Bhuiyan.

Officials believe that Zeesan was in close contact with them.