



Eight of the 12 thought leaders pose for a photo after they were recognised for their contribution to the progressive journey of Bangladesh by The Daily Star at its 32nd anniversary event at the Radisson Blu Water Garden Hotel in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

12 champions of freethought honoured

The Daily Star recognises their contribution to society at its 32nd founding anniversary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Daily Star, which promotes freedom of thought and expression, recognised some of the country's thought leaders who contributed to the progressive journey of Bangladesh, at the 32nd anniversary event of the newspaper at the Radisson Blu Water Garden Hotel yesterday.

The ability to think is something that distinguishes humans from all other living beings. The thinking can take place only in a free environment. Thus, freedom of thought is one of the fundamentals for the progress of civilization, said the honourees.

The 12 eminent citizens honoured are: jurist Dr Kamal Hossain, Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury, cartoonist Rafiqun Nabi, Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed, Prof Rehman Sobhan, writer and researcher Jatin Sarker, writer and political activist Badruddin Umar,

language movement veteran Ahmed Rafiq, human rights activist Hameeda Hossain, artist Mustafa Monowar, educationist Sharifa Khatun and women rights champion Noorjahan Bose.

The event began by paying respect to Abdur Rouf Chowdhury, the founding director of The Daily Star, who passed away yesterday. All stood for a minute in silence.

Simeen Rahman, on behalf of the Mediaworld Ltd board of directors, presented framed photos and crests as tokens of love and appreciation to the trailblazers of freedom of thought as the audience, who gave them standing ovations.

Addressing the event, Rokia Afzal Rahman, chairperson of the board of Mediaworld, the parent company of The Daily Star, said over the years, the newspaper greatly consolidated its position as a beacon of intellectual freedom and upholder of

human rights.

In a video message, she said the future of the newspaper is full of challenges that came following the coronavirus pandemic, the Ukraine war, and its consequent chaos in the global economy.

"However severe the crisis, we promise to continue to serve our readers with the latest and most authentic news available," she said.

The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam then introduced the extraordinary personalities recognised by The Daily Star amid rounds of applause.

He said, "By honouring them, we not only honour ourselves, but also raise a very pertinent question as to how we can do more to create an environment that will produce more thinkers like them."

"Through their writings and artistic creations, these people have helped us to open our minds, to become aware of the

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oppressive environment from which we needed to free ourselves, and have the vision of the future towards which we must strive.

"This legacy we must not only honour but also nurture to enable our present and future generations to follow and aspire to become like them."

In a video message, Badruddin Umar said freedom of thought and freedom of

expression are necessary to live as human beings. "The question, however, is whether there is any freedom of thought [in the country]."

He stated that there is a need for a conducive environment for free thinking. "It is very disappointing that there is no such environment in Bangladesh... The situation is getting worse day by day. People's freedom of thought and expression is completely under threat."

Hameeda Hossain said the freedom to think, the freedom to write, and the freedom to discuss with everybody are very important elements for making society more democratic.

Language movement and the student movements of the 1960s were for the struggle for independence in which people talked about nationalism, socialism, and so on.

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"Freedom of thought and freedom of expression are nobody's gift to you. It will only come if you assert your rights to exercise that freedom. This means if you do so in sufficient numbers, you will then capture freedom and no one will be able to take it away from you."

Rehman Sobhan

"I think the young generation should fight for their freedom of speech, freedom of writing... I want them to stand up and fight for their freedom and for the country."

Noorjahan Bose



The Daily Star's anniversary event began by paying respect to A Rouf Chowdhury, the founding director of the newspaper, who passed away yesterday. All stood for a minute in silence. *Inset*, the distinguished guests at the event.

PHOTO: STAR

'Where's the infrastructure for intellectual growth?'

Asks Mahfuz Anam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Intellectual freedom is crucial for a nation's advancement, Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said yesterday.

"We are building roads, bridges, tunnels, etc for the growth of our economy -- all necessary, and we commend the government for it. But where is the infrastructure for the intellectual growth -- quality education, qualified teachers, 21st-century suited schools, colleges, universities?" he asked while speaking at the 32nd anniversary function of The Daily Star at a hotel in the capital.

"Where are the research grants that bring in new knowledge? Where is the incentive for scholars to devote their lives in pursuit of knowledge?"

"The space, the environment, the laws, the institutions, the resources, most importantly, the culture of acceptance of multiplicity of views are needed most to reach the new stage in our development journey," he said.

"Most importantly where is that respect, that dignity, that prestige for scholars?"

"Where is their place of honour in the hierarchy of our society, government or the state? I repeat, we must bring back the culture of respect into the mainstream of our society, especially respect for teachers and scholars. We are sick and tired of reporting how school teachers,

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