

SENTINEL OF FREEDOM OF THOUGHT



ABDULLAH ABU SAYEED

Once your values are gone, it is hard to get them back. It is possible to rebuild if you lose infrastructure -- as Japan and Germany did after World War II -- but if you lose your sense of collective morality, it takes a lot longer to stand back up again.



AHMED RAFIQ

Free speech is very crucial to tackling any crisis. That the state must allow it is a matter of its "common sense". Ultimately, it's the government that benefits if truth is allowed to be told in a society.



BADRUDDIN UMAR

It is very disappointing that there is no conducive environment for free thinking in Bangladesh. The situation is getting worse day by day. People's freedom of thought and expression is completely under threat ... Resistance is necessary to get relief from such a situation. But this is not happening yet ... Hopefully, people will stand against it in the near future.



HAMEEDA HOSSAIN

We can see from Bangladesh's struggle for independence how important it was to have freedom of thought, freedom of expression and for people to discuss their various diverse views and opinions. The freedom to think, write, discuss with everybody is a very important element in making society more democratic.



JATIN SARKER

Had thought not been free, doing anything would not be possible for humans. Humans are the only animal who can think and express themselves in language. It is thought that creates relations between people. Debate is not possible without free thinking.



KAMAL HOSSAIN

Controlling a society becomes possible when freedom of thinking does not exist. Different kinds of views, opinions and counter-opinions can be expressed in an independent society, through which it makes progress.



MOSTOFA MONWAR

Free thought is ultimately beneficial to the people. Whoever believes in free thought can never think only for their own sake. Free thinking, probably, is the best necessity. When people lose the power to think, their free thought gradually turns into parroting.



NOORJAHAN BOSE

In an independent country, freedom of thinking is important to build a creative nation. I don't want to live by an ideology or in a country where I cannot speak, write and express my thoughts freely. If necessary, I will live in a hut or go hungry but I must have the right to express my free thought. I believe I'm ready to sacrifice my life for free thinking.



RAFIQUN NABI

Common people who do not have any academic knowledge on political science can think about politics. Their free thinking stems from their experiences. We have not yet achieved everything after the Liberation War ... For that we'll have to think freely.



REHMAN SOBHAN

Independence of thinking is only meaningful if you have got an independent medium of expression. Those who wish to express themselves freely and independently through an independent media found that their voices were suppressed because the media itself faces dangers of suppression.



SERAJUL ISLAM CHOUDHURY

Freedom of expression is closely connected with the evolution of thinking and moves ahead in a dialectic manner. Dissent is essential. Democratic culture grows when newspapers have the freedom to express opinions and publish news independently.



SHARIFA KHATUN

A citizen of an independent country has the full right to express opinion. Citizens play their due role when they enjoy their rights. Therefore, a country has to give its citizens this right. Freedom of expression, opinion, conscience and media are crucial. Without these there will be no creativity. Without creativity, this country will not progress.

12 champions of freethought honoured

FROM J1
"We can see from this struggle for independence in Bangladesh how important it was to have freedom of thought, freedom of expression, and for people to have the freedom to discuss their various diverse views and opinions," she said.

"And I think, along this line, it is the very important freedom of thought in which the media, both the print and electronic, have played a very strong role."

Jatin Sarker said he has dedicated all his life to the freedom of thought.

"Had the thought not been free, doing anything would not be possible for humans. Humans are the only animal who can think and express themselves in language," he said, adding that it is the thought that creates relations between people.

"Debate is not possible without free thinking," he added.

Eminent jurist Dr Kamal Hossain said controlling a society becomes possible when freedom of thinking does not exist.

He said that different kinds of views, opinions, and counter-opinions can be expressed in an independent society with which it can make progress.

Mustafa Monwar said freedom of thought is ultimately beneficial for the people.

"Whoever believes in the freedom of thought can never only think for their own sake," he said.

When people lose the power to think, they repeat what others say, he said.

"Such a person can be very cruel ... there must be free thought and cultural development..."

Noorjahan Bose said, "I don't want to live by an ideology or in a country where I cannot speak, write, and express my thoughts freely. If necessary, I will live in a hut or go hungry but I must have the right to express my free thought."

"I believe I'm ready to sacrifice my life for free thinking," she said.

Rafiqun Nabi said, "We have not yet achieved everything after the Liberation War... We must progress... For that, we'll have to think freely."

Prof Rehman Sobhan said freedom of thought is only meaningful if there is an independent medium of expression.

The greatest beneficiaries and supporters of independent thinking should be the government itself.

"Those who wish to express themselves freely and independently through an independent media found that their voices have been suppressed because the media itself faces the dangers of suppression."

Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury said the freedom of expression is closely connected with the evolution of thinking and moves ahead in a dialectic manner.

He said freedom of thought is as necessary as one needs two legs to walk. Democratic culture grows when newspapers have the freedom to express opinions and publish news independently.

"A society that lacks thoughtfulness is called a lifeless society... We cannot protect humanity if there is no freedom of thinking," he said.

Sharifa Khatun said freedom of expression, opinion, conscience, and the media are crucial.

"Without these, there will be no creativity. Without creativity, this country will not progress," she said.

Eight of the 12 champions of freedom of thought were present at the event in person and they gave messages to the young generation.

Prof Rehman Sobhan said, "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."

"Keep in mind, you have to always speak up and assert yourself. That is how freedom is earned."

Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury said three things are required: first is the pursuit of knowledge, without which people will not be able to flourish. Second is socialisation because knowledge cannot be pursued alone; this knowledge has to be acquired from others and disseminate to others.

"The third thing that the young generation should especially have is courage. I wish that you will have these three things combined in yourself."

Among media personalities present were Prothom Alo Editor Matiur Rahman, Acting Editor of Samakal Muzzammil Husain Monju, Jatiya Press Club President Farida Yasmin and General Secretary Shamol Datta, Jugantor Editor Saiful Islam, novelist Anisul Hoque, magician Jewel Aich, filmmaker Amitabh Reza Chowdhury, Tariq Anam Khan, actors Shahnaz Khushi, Brindabon Das, and journalist Sabir Mustafa.

Awami League lawmaker Saber Hossain Chowdhury, BNP leaders Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku, Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, Zahir Uddin Swapan, Shahiduddin Chowdhury Annie, former president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry AK Azad, former special adviser at the ILO Rizwanul Islam, former ambassador Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury, and Russian Ambassador Aleksandr Mantysky were also present.

Pran-RFL Group Chairman and CEO Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, Eastern Bank Managing Director and CEO Ali Reza Iftakhar and Bangladesh's first finance secretary Mohammed Matiuul Islam were also there.

The Daily Star Executive Editor Syed Ashfaqul Haque spoke at the event moderated by singer and journalist Elita Karim.

'Where's the infrastructure for intellectual growth?'

FROM J1
college lecturers and university professors are treated in an undignified manner and even insulted. This is not our tradition and this will not lead us to the 21st [century] world," he said.

"We take a lot of pride, and justifiably so, in telling the world that we sacrificed our blood for

our struggles, our dreams and our protests are we able to articulate? Here comes that crucial question that sustains our intellectual life -- freedom of thought, how much are we able to exercise [it]?"

"The Pakistanis were trying to put the chains to keep us enslaved."

"We are now putting chains to keep us ignorant, unquestioning,

life." Pointing out the journey of the newspaper, he said it has come at a cost -- of denigration, of maligning, of creating obstacles at every corner, non-cooperation, curtailment of advertisement, not being allowed to cover state functions at the highest levels, personalised abuse of the paper's leadership, direct and



A few of the champions of freedom of thought at The Daily Star's anniversary celebrations yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

our mother language. Now that we have the right to speak in Bangla, what do we say in that beautiful language of ours? Is it to only utter platitudes and pleasantries? Or to hurl abuse or profanities? Or is it to express something more profound, substantive, sensitive, meaningful and beautiful? How much of the creativity, originality and insightful ideas are we able to express in them? Of course there are exceptions but we must mainstream them.

"How much of our sorrows,

devoid of curiosity and given to intellectual slavery of various kinds -- ideological, political, faith-based, personality-based, etc.," he added.

"If life is about change, if change comes from knowledge, if knowledge comes asking questions, and if questions come from a mind that is able to think freely, then doesn't 'freedom of thought' constitute life itself? Conversely doesn't the absence of freedom of thought constitute the total antithesis of life? No questions, no new knowledge and as such no

indirect pressures on our day-to-day functioning, etc.

"Yet, the paper, and those who work in it, happily paid the price and served its readers without fear or favour."

"It is in that spirit -- of service to the nation -- that we honour today 12 extraordinary individuals whom we call 'sentinels of freedom of thought' and pay tribute to them for what they have stood and struggled for throughout their lives as torch bearers of freedom of thought."