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Unite for freedom of expression

Discussants urge freethinkers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a discussion yesterday opined that a greater unity among the country's freethinkers -- including public intellectuals, writers, journalists and artistes -- for a common cause is required to ensure freedom of expression.

For this, freethinkers need to optimise the use of social media to reach mass people, alongside taking the opportunity to express their thoughts in the mainstream media, they said.

Rashtrachinta, a journal, organised the discussion on "Existing political reality: Role of intellectuals-writers-artistes-litterateurs" at the capital's Jatiya Press Club.

An oppressive state machinery can create a "strong storyline" for its own cause and to materialise different objectives, said urban planner Khandaker Niaz Rahman.

The role of freethinkers in such a situation should be to counter the storyline and deconstruct it, he said.

He added that due to an increase in

surveillance, people have become more indifferent.

Prof Asif Nazrul of Dhaka University's law department said freethinkers need to be united and demonstrate their courage.

He laid emphasis on freethinkers' ability to utilise their access to social media properly.

Moshreka Aditi Huq, associate professor at anthropology department of Chittagong University, said an undemocratic situation can give rise to "political apathy" among people.

This could create an inertia in terms of political expectation, she said, stressing for freethinkers to work on a

common platform. Litterateur Rakhal Raha said irrespective of the nature of a state machinery, there have to be freedom of expression and people's right to vote.

Freethinkers should work to ensure people's voting rights and freedom of expression, he also said.

Rakhal Raha stressed that freedom of expression for journalists is crucial.

"An oppressive state machinery can create a "strong storyline" for its own cause and to materialise different objectives".

KHANDAKER NIAZ RAHMAN
Urban planner



Covering her nose with her saree, a woman walks through a gust of dust on the busy Beribadh road in the capital's Mohammadpur. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Raushan assures PM of JP support

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition Leader Raushan Ershad yesterday assured Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that the Jatiya Party, the main opposition in parliament, will provide all support and cooperation to the PM.

Raushan, also the chief patron of the party, said this while meeting with Hasina at her Gono Bhaban residence.

After meeting the PM, Raushan shared the meeting's excerpts with her political secretary Golam Moshi, her son Rahgir Al Mahi Ershad, and JP lawmaker and the spokesperson of the opposition leader Kazi Mamunur Rashid. The Daily Star learned about the discussion after talking to one of them.

During the meeting, the PM extended thanks to Raushan for her role in the last five years in and outside the parliament, said the JP leader.

Raushan also reciprocated that she would extend all support and cooperation to PM.

During the hour-long discussion, the premier hoped that the main opposition party in parliament would participate in the upcoming general election in line with the constitution while thanking their role in strengthening parliamentary democracy.

The PM exchanged pleasantries and inquired about Raushan's physical condition, said the PM's Deputy Press Secretary, KM Shakhawat Moon, reports BSS.

Different issues, including the current political situation and forthcoming polls, were discussed, he said.

Earlier in December last year, PM Sheikh Hasina, during a courtesy call with Raushan and JP chairman GM Quader, called upon them to patch up differences, be united, and prepare to take part in the next general election independently.

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Held hostage and tortured for ransom in Myanmar

Family of a Malaysia-bound victim shares ordeal; 3 traffickers held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Allured by the promise of a better life in Malaysia, the victims are first taken to Teknaf using public transport. They are then transferred to Myanmar via small fishing dinghies manned by "Rohingya" boatmen, only to be held captive by the syndicate until their families agree to pay heavy ransoms.

A transnational syndicate, reportedly led by Rohingya members, has emerged, utilising a new route to traffic individuals from Bangladesh to Malaysia via Myanmar.

Rab yesterday arrested three members of the racket from Narayanganj and Narsingdi on Friday while investigating a trafficking case filed by one Abul Kalam Azad with Araihazar Police Station following the tragic demise of his younger brother Jahirul Islam.

The arrested are Md Ismail, 45, ringleader of the syndicate's Bangladesh part, and his associates, Jasim, 35, and Md Elahi, 50.

For this perilous journey, a

preliminary deal is struck, involving a payment of Tk 3.2 lakh from the aspiring migrants. The payment is to be made once they reach their destination.

Upon arriving in Myanmar, the victims are handed over to a syndicate, which sends videos of them being tortured to their

second ransom is paid. However, they are left to struggle without proper documentation and lack of employment opportunities.

During a media interaction at Rab's media centre in Karwan Bazar, Azad recounted the harrowing ordeal experienced by his family.

Once in Malaysia, the syndicate members demand a second ransom from the victims' families. They are released only after the second ransom is paid. However, they are left to struggle without proper documentation and lack of employment opportunities.

families.

Following the payment of ransom, the fortune seekers are transported to Malaysia through larger sea vessels, where they are handed over to the counterpart syndicate.

Once in Malaysia, the syndicate members demand a second ransom from the victims' families. They are released only after the

They took Tk 4.20 lakh as ransom in the first phase, and then again 2,000 Malaysian Ringgit, said Azad.

"But my brother died. Our entire family is now struggling," said Azhar.

Jahirul has a one and a half-year-old son and a seven-month-old daughter.

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WORLD HUMANITARIAN DAY Prioritise safety for local aid workers

Speakers tell discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a discussion yesterday said the safety and security of aid workers in Bangladesh, especially those involved in humanitarian responses to the Rohingya crisis, should be given the highest priority.

They also urged international development organisations to take leadership role and provide support to the local non-government organisations in planning and implementing any humanitarian activities for the best outcome.

COAST Foundation, Cox's Bazar CSO-NGO Forum (CCNF) and BDCSO Coordination Process organised the virtual discussion titled "No Matter What - Together We Stand Beside Affected Communities - Empower Local Actors," marking World Humanitarian Day 2023.

M Mustafa Kamal Akanda, director of COAST Foundation, and Md Iqbal Uddin from the same organisation, presented a keynote at the event.

In his keynote presentation, Md Iqbal Uddin laid emphasis on the importance of advocating for the well-being, dignity, and survival of all humanitarian workers, while also ensuring their fair compensation, adequate facilities, life insurance, and comprehensive support.

He also emphasised dedicating 25 percent of direct funding to local organisations.

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Still far away from ideals of Bangabandhu

Speakers tell roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh is still far away from implementing the ideal of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, about democratic freedom and the country's four principles, said speakers at a roundtable yesterday.

They also said the country is now backtracking from the spirit of the Liberation War.

"We are remembering our Father of the Nation every August, but we are not following in his footsteps," said Syed Anwar Husain, a prominent historian and a professor of Dhaka University.

Sammilito Samajik Andolon, a platform of social movement, organised the roundtable titled "In the question of democratic freedom: Bangladesh and the present reality", marking

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Constructed to serve pedestrians and prevent erosion, the walkways along the river Turag dilapidate as large vessels continue to dock its bank illegally. The photo was taken recently from the capital's Gabtoli.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

JP delegation may visit India today

RASHIDUL HASAN

A three-member delegation of the Jatiya Party is likely to visit India today.

JP chairman and deputy leader GM Quader will lead the delegation which also comprises his wife Sherifa Quader, also a woman lawmaker from reserved seats, and his international affairs adviser Masroor Mawla.

The JP delegation's India visit comes at a time when the country's forthcoming national election is very near.

"I haven't been to India in a long time. That's why I am travelling to India with a delegation from my party. We will speak with different officials from the Indian government and the ruling party," GM Quader told The Daily Star.

"Besides, I'll be there for treatment," he added.

Quader, however, said it was yet to be finalised who they will meet in India.

Masroor Mawla said the JP delegation will likely meet India's Ministry of External Affairs officials during its three to four days of stay.

"We will also likely meet India's ruling BJP leaders, but this is still to be finalised," he also said.

Political analysts term the JP chairman's visit to New Delhi ahead of the national polls to be politically significant.

Earlier, a five-person Awami League delegation, led by party praesidium member Md Abdur Razaque, went to New Delhi on a four-day visit on August 6, upon invitation by BJP President JP Nadda.

During that visit, the AL delegation called on top BJP leaders, India's external affairs minister S Jaishankar, and important government officials.

Meanwhile, GM Quader recently held several meetings with foreign ambassadors, including the United States

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