

## Gaza Holocaust and Press Freedom: Drik calls a spade, a spade

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In a world where the power of storytelling shapes perceptions, the narrative spun by Western media often takes centre stage. But behind the lofty ideals of freedom of expression and press lies a shadow of hypocrisy, as revealed in a recent panel discussion titled *Western Hypocrisy on Press Freedom*, hosted by Drik Gallery.

The event, inaugurating the photo exhibition *Gaza Holocaust: Killing the Truth-tellers*, delved deep into the nuances of Western media's portrayal of conflicts, particularly the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Moderated by renowned photojournalist Shahidul Alam, the discussion brought together voices echoing a common sentiment: the West's selective adherence to its proclaimed values.

Political analyst Zahed Ur Rahman

set the tone by highlighting the biased nature of Western media reports. "The Western media reports based on their interests, geopolitical, political, and cognitive bias," he emphasised. Zahed pointed out the reluctance to use the term "genocide" and the rise of alternative social media channels as a response to mainstream media's narrative control.

"Today's discussion revolves around activities of the western countries that talk about democracy. As we speak, many people are dying. We have to digest a lot due to the hegemony of the West," said Shahidul Alam.

Research Initiatives, Bangladesh Executive Director Meghna Guhathakurta, who is also a former professor at Dhaka University, added depth to



PHOTOS: ARSHADUL HOQUE ROCKY

the discussion by highlighting the parochialism embedded within Western media. Sharing personal experiences from her own life, she said, "There is a deep-rooted concept of parochialism in the Western media from which this hypocrisy originates."

"Understanding their parochialism helps us comprehend their hypocrisy," she remarked, unravelling the layers of bias that influence media narratives.

New Age Editor Nurul Kabir drew parallels between how the then Pakistani government labelled the freedom fighters of the Bangladesh War of Independence as terrorists and how Palestinian freedom seekers are often portrayed as terrorists by the West. According to him, framing the conflict as an Israel-Palestine war is misleading because it suggests a parity in military capacity, which is not the case. He pointed out the significant power disparity between the two

sides, emphasising that the current situation is more about control, and power dynamics. He highlighted the underlying hypocrisy rooted in settler colonialism, describing Israel's actions in Gaza as a form of such colonialism supported by powers such as the US and the UK. "The conflict in Gaza was engineered by major powers to legitimise their authority," he said, adding, "The current situation is all about control, capital and power."

He also noted how powerful entities manipulate public opinion through propaganda to legitimise their actions and further explained the Western media's hypocrisy, saying, "To understand it, 'What Israel is doing is not war; it is aggression,' he asserted.

However, reflecting a glimpse of hope for the audience, he highlighted the widespread protests against Israeli atrocities in Gaza, comparing them to the anti-Vietnam War protests, noting, "This has instilled hope."

The panellists emphasised the need to decode the politics behind Western media's portrayal of conflicts. Zahed

remarked that renowned newspapers such as the Washington Post and the New York Times, often seen as authoritative sources, shape their narratives to serve their own agendas.

"They operate with double standards," Zahed noted, emphasising that all media organisations are influenced by economic and geopolitical factors, even Qatar-funded Al Jazeera that has been applauded for covering Gaza's developments exclusively.

The discussion extended beyond rhetoric, with the exhibition *Gaza Holocaust: Killing the Truth-tellers*, showcasing journalists killed while covering Israeli atrocities in Gaza. Curated by ASM Rezaur Rahman, the exhibition features photographs, identities and descriptions of the killings of 142 media persons in Palestine, a forensic investigation of the killing of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, and cartoons, amongst others. For those martyrs whose images couldn't be retrieved, fresh roses were placed in their honour.

Through poignant photographs and personal accounts, the exhibition served as a stark reminder of the human cost of media censorship and geopolitical agendas. The exhibition will remain open to all from 3pm to 8pm until May 11.

As the panel concluded, questions from the audience unveiled further layers of complexity. The inquiry into Bangladesh's business ties with Israel highlighted the global ramifications of political alliances and the need for transparency in governance.

In the face of mounting challenges to press freedom and the relentless pursuit of truth, events like these serve as beacons of hope. They remind us of the collective responsibility to challenge narratives, regardless of geopolitical interests. At moments like this, when we feel hopeless and helpless, we must raise questions, if nothing else.



## NEWS

### Freshers

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University of Science and Technology was the first university in the country that introduced dope tests for freshers.

The CU VC said, "We have talked to the dean of medicine [of Chattogram Medical College Hospital] to start the process. We are yet to decide who will pay the expenses for the tests. But we are trying to set a minimum cost between Tk 200 and Tk 500 for a test."

Prof Siraj Ud Dowla, dean of CU social science faculty, said, "We have made the move in the nation's interest."

"Male and female students will give their blood or urine samples to the Chattogram Medical College Hospital and later the results will be submitted to the university administration for preparing the final list. If someone is found positive, he or she cannot be admitted to the university."

He added that seats vacated by students failing the test would be filled by those in the waiting list and they would have to go through the dope test too.

CU's admission test was held in March.

### Columbia Univ

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underway to reach that goal," the university said.

Demonstrations against Israel's offensive in Gaza have rocked campuses across the United States for weeks, prompting crackdowns, mass arrests, and a White House directive to restore order.

Last week, police evicted protesters occupying a Columbia University building and cleared out an unauthorized encampment on the campus lawn.

Meanwhile, in-person classes will resume today at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), college officials said yesterday, after they were moved online following clashes on campus between pro-Palestinian protesters and police.

UCLA said it had moved classes online after a large police contingent forcibly cleared a sprawling encampment. Clashes have also broken out between the protesters and pro-Israel counter-demonstrators.

### Country facing

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always be some hesitation in allowing truly meaningful elections," added Zillur.

Talking about how democracy in Bangladesh performs, Prof Mushtaq Khan at Department of Economics, SOAS, University of London, said everything that is going on is not sustainable and it is not going to end well.

"If I compare Bangladesh in the 1990s and 2000s with the present time, two notable changes emerge. Firstly, political organisations have evolved significantly. Back then, we had two major coalitions, each relatively independent. One was led by the BNP while the other by the Awami League. Their power was not overwhelming due to a system of checks and balances."

The democratic period in Bangladesh originally reflected a broad distribution of power, he said. "However, since then, one of the parties has completely outwitted the other, essentially dismantling it."

### Ensure smooth power

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problem in the harvest of paddy as farmers in most of the haor areas completed their harvest. He thanked State Minister for Power Nasrul Hamid for ensuring smooth power supply to rural areas during the Boro season, the sources added.

The PM then asked the Power Division to provide uninterrupted power supply to the rural areas as it has been doing throughout the boro season. "Provide uninterrupted power supply so that rural people don't suffer," a minister quoted the premier as saying.

After the meeting, Nasrul Hamid told reporters at the Secretariat that they are working for zero load shedding.

He, however, declined to comment when asked about the discussion on load shedding at the cabinet meeting.

He added that they were trying to solve the issue of load shedding.

"We have been observing this situation for the last one month. Several [liquid] fuel-run power plants remain closed because of shortage of fuel," said Nasrul, adding that they are resuming operation of the plants gradually.

The prime minister is aware of the situation, he added.

He also said that the economic power became more consolidated in Bangladesh like it happened in many other countries.

"If you look at India today, two big business groups — Adani and Ambani ... it is not a surprise that Indian democracy has become very authoritarian. If the politicians can bring three or four business groups into their fold, they can dominate the economy. A similar thing is happening in Bangladesh. A few big businesses are all that you need to shift the power distribution to one side."

Professor MM Akash from economics department of Dhaka University, Professor Joe Devine from Bath University of the UK, Mirza Hassan from BRAC University, Naomi Hossain from department of development studies, SOAS, University of London, and Associate Professor Zulfan Tadjoddin of development studies at Western Sydney University, Australia, also spoke at the seminar.

### 5 UZ polls

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On the MPs' criticism over the load shedding in the House, he said their criticism was logical as they are accountable to their constituents.

Jatiya Party MP Mujibul Haque Chinnu told parliament that villagers have to remain without power for around 12 hours a day.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, Cabinet Secretary Mahub Hossain said the cabinet did not approve drafts of two proposed (amended) laws, which were scheduled to be okayed, as one was withdrawn and another was sent back to the ministry concerned with instructions.

### 5 UZ polls

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The Sirajganj deputy commissioner spoke at an urgent press conference at the DC office last night to inform the media about the arrests.

The upazila polls are going to be held in four phases, starting from tomorrow.

### Israel plays down Hamas nod to ceasefire

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Since then, all efforts to reach a new truce have foundered over Hamas's refusal to free more hostages without a promise of a permanent end to the conflict, and Israel's insistence that it would discuss only a temporary pause.

Taher Al-Nono, a Hamas official and adviser to Haniyeh, told Reuters the proposal had met the group's demands, including reconstruction efforts in Gaza, the return of displaced Palestinians and a swap of Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails.

The Hamas deputy chief in Gaza, Khalil Al-Hayya, told Al Jazeera television the proposal included three phases, each of six weeks, with Israel to pull its troops out of Gaza in the second phase.

Earlier yesterday, Israel ordered the evacuation of parts of Rafah, the city on Gaza's southern edge that has served as the last sanctuary for around half of Gaza's 2.3 million residents.

Asked during a media briefing

whether Hamas saying it accepted a ceasefire proposal would impact a planned offensive in Rafah, Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said: "We examine every answer and response in the most serious manner and are exhausting every possibility regarding negotiations and returning the hostages."

"In parallel, we are still operating in the Gaza Strip and will continue to do so," he said.

Israel's closest ally the United States has called on it not to assault Rafah, saying it must not do so without a full plan in place to protect civilians there, which has yet to be presented.

Israel said on Monday it was conducting limited operations on the eastern part of Rafah, following a rocket attack claimed by Hamas fighters that killed four Israeli soldiers at the main border crossing into Rafah the previous day.

"We've asked civilians to move out of harm's way. We've been extremely specific about the areas which we'll be targeting...," government spokesman

David Mencer said.

Israeli bombardment of eastern Rafah areas continued throughout the day on Monday.

"They have been firing since last night and today after the evacuation orders the bombardment became more intense because they want to frighten us to leave," Jaber Abu Nazly, a 40-year old father of two told Reuters via a chat app.

"Some families already left, others are wondering whether there is any place safe in the whole of Gaza," he added.

Overnight, Israeli planes had hit 10 houses, killing 20 people, Palestinian medical officials said. The Israeli military said it had struck the site in Rafah from which the previous day's rocket had been launched at its troops.

Instructed by Arabic text messages, phone calls, and flyers to move to what the Israeli military called an "expanded humanitarian zone" around 20km away, some Palestinian families began trundling away in chilly spring rain.

### 93 constituencies go to polls

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constituency in Jammu and Kashmir has been postponed.

Other leading candidates in the third phase are federal ministers Pralhad Joshi (Dharwad, Karnataka); Jyotiraditya Scindia (Guna, Madhya Pradesh); former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan (Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh); Congress leader Digvijaya Singh (Raigarh, Madhya Pradesh); Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav's wife Dimple Yadav (Mainpuri, Uttar Pradesh); and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Sharad Pawar's daughter and three-time sitting MP Supriya Sule (Baramati, Maharashtra).

The stakes are high for BJP and its allies in the third phase, as they had won 75 of the 93 seats in the last general elections in 2019, while INDIA bloc parties won 11.

With a platform that combines Hindu nationalism and development concerns, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is seeking a third consecutive term in this general election. Meanwhile, the opposition INDIA bloc is campaigning on a platform of caste, bread-and-butter

politics, and financial handouts to women.

A total of 190 seats went to the polls on April 19 and 27, with an approximate voter turnout of 66 percent, the Election Commission said. The number was lower than the last election in 2019. The BJP had been hoping for a high turnout, believing that it would signal that its supporters had voted in force.

The Indian election will come to a close on June 1, and votes will be counted on June 4.

The consecration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya on January 22 this year is set to play an important role in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's quest for a rare third term. He offered prayers at the temple for the first time yesterday, after the grand shrine was inaugurated more than three months ago. After offering prayers, Modi held a road show in Ayodhya.

Modi's visit to the temple follows an assessment by several political observers that the party would have reaped rich gains had the election been held during February-March when the fervour over the temple was at its peak.

In the absence of a single issue or a wave dominating the electioneering so far, Modi needs to fire up BJP workers and supporters if he hopes for a sweep.

A lack of momentum has been partly attributed to indifference among party workers, who have been lured into believing that victory is assured. The absence of a wave on a single issue in the first two phases of the polls has dampened BJP's hopes of securing a two-thirds majority (362 seats) in the Lok Sabha.

This, most political analysts say, has prompted Modi to change tack in his campaign speeches after the first phase in a bid to energise the party's committed support base, and get them out to polling stations. Accordingly, much of Modi's speeches in the campaign for the second and third phases shifted from the success stories of his governance in his decade-long tenure to polarising issues when targeting Congress, accusing the party of planning to dilute job reservations for scheduled caste, scheduled tribes, and other backward members and give them to Muslims.