



‘What can’t we say anymore?’ ask experts

When this reporter asked a protester what their demands were, he said, “Our demands are those things that must be met.” Several other protesters seemed to be similarly confused.

JEAN PAUL SATIRE

Who would have thought? From the yoke of authoritarianism, where everything you said had to be checked for the presence of words that could anger the powers that be, today, Bangladeshis can say whatever they want to.

While freedom of speech is vital for a free society and vibrant democracy, this new set of circumstances seems to have given some people the idea that they can say literally anything that tickles their fancy.

From conspiracy theories and blatant lies to terrible opinions and absurd satire articles that should never see the light of day, everything is now out on the internet. And unprepared following years of repression, people don't even know what to take seriously and what to ignore.

For example, in a press conference on Wednesday, a former security guard laid out his vision for the nation in the upcoming future.

The 60-year-old man, named Comeon Touchme, made a series of suggestions, the most shocking of which was changing Dhaka's name to something more to his personal liking.

“The name Dhaka is okay, of course, but imagine if our city was instead called Dangerland, or Dhamaka City, or Land of the Barely Alive, or something more exciting. Wouldn't that be fun?” he said.

He also suggested creating a provision in the judiciary for trial-by-rap battle, and raising tax rates for everyone who isn't a 60-year-old former security guard.

When asked why he was saying such ridiculous things, he said, “Are you trying to shut me up? Is this the freedom we wanted?”

In response to Touchme's demands for higher tax rates, a group of 59-year-old former security guards staged a protest in front of the press club yesterday.

“We want justice,” they chanted. “Our demands must be met.”

When this reporter asked a protester what their demands were, he said, “Our demands are those things that must be met.”

Several other protesters seemed to be similarly confused.

Over on social media, almost everyone seems to have taken it upon themselves to become news sources, other than carry on as mere consumers. Every second post on Facebook is a thread about a shocking new discovery about the country's politics and history, and the sources to many of these outlandish claims are other such threads.

This reporter attempted to fact-check one such thread that provided 97 links worth of proof that several former ministers and MPs are currently hiding at the bottom of the Buriganga river after a mystic sorcerer from Kamrangirchar transformed them into mermen and mermaids.

The Pandora's box of internet filth that was unleashed by this paper's investigation of this claim was best described by one shocked intern as “the reason human beings must one day be taken over by a smarter, better species”.

However, the dubious nature of these Facebook threads does not seem to be having

an effect on netizens, who continue to think any information is worth believing as long as someone puts it in a comment thread.

In fact, some individuals have begun to speak in the language of Facebook comment threads, like my wife last week, who instead of texting me a list of groceries like usual, posted on Facebook saying:

“Things my husband needs to get from the grocery shop but will probably forget. A thread.”

In one comment, she wrote “bitter gourds” and in another she said “okra”.

Her friend commented, “Can't believe even Jean Paul Satire turned out to be like this. I thought he was one of the good ones.”

Experts seem to think this is simply growing pains for a nation who just haven't been able to say what they wanted to for a long time, and things will only get better from here.

Dr Communicado Oficial, a professor of media studies at the University of Conservative Arts Bangladesh (UCAB), said, “We must also consider the fact that free speech, when combined with general stupidity, results in the sort of absurdity we are seeing right now.”

“As more time passes, and we read more and more Facebook comment threads, we will only get smarter, and be able to use our freedom of speech for the good of society. We can even use it to finally find those ministers and MPs hiding at the bottom of the Buriganga as mermen and mermaids. I heard they are eating all the fish down there to raise prices and increase market instability. The counter-revolution must be stopped.”

## Obsessed with rainbows, ex-faculty member slapped with restraining order

When the former part-time lecturer of Crack University was let go last year for his discriminatory language and actions, he was at a loss. Why had the university dismissed him for tearing up a book as an educator?

The former lecturer, Jenó Ipad, believed that after enduring countless student assignments checked with ChatGPT and the apparent laziness of his students, his position gave him the unique opportunity to lead a movement against his profound hatred for rainbows.

Alas, since his aversion to rainbows was fascist and discriminatory towards those who accepted and loved them, he had been terminated.

Since then, Jenó has made it his life's mission to rally people against rainbows and, indirectly, Crack University for making him unemployed. He began scouring for incriminating evidence against the university, wherever he could find traces of the rainbow.

He started defacing university promotional flyers featuring multi-coloured kites and targeting students who adored wearing chrome eyeshadows simply because they loved bright colors. His particular disdain for tie-dyes was initially eyebrow-raising and confusing, but this correspondent soon realised that it was the vivid colour combinations that provoked his hatred.

One of his followers reported that they had taken to boycotting rainbows in the sky by refusing to go outside after it rains. This was especially difficult for the protesters, given that Dhaka receives 1,854 millimeters of rain on average.

Yet, his ultimate goal was to gather support against Crack University, against all odds.

One of his followers reported that they had taken to boycotting rainbows in the sky by refusing to go outside after it rains. This was especially difficult for the protesters, given that Dhaka receives 1,854 millimeters of rain on average, but their resolve was admirable.

“We don't understand why Jenó Ipad just can't get therapy. We're getting concerned about his obsession with us. It's like he's going through a really bad breakup. We're planning to issue a restraining order because of his fixation on the university,” said a teaching staff member at Crack University.

Meanwhile, after extensive investigation, this correspondent spoke with Jenó's doctor, who revealed that he suffers from microcephaly, a brain development disorder, which prevents him from accepting all colors in the same frame.



PHOTO: JORDAN MCDONALD

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# The Cancellling

AAQIB HASIB

The TV hummed slowly, filling the room with a soothing sound. Almost acting like a form of white noise.

The ceiling fan rolled slowly, emitting this tiny squeak that acted almost as another note to fit this mini orchestra.

Suddenly, the generic ad with its peaceful jingle playing disappeared from the screen, replaced by just two words.

BREAKING NEWS.

A newsreader came on screen, stacks of paper in hand, tacky montage background behind them.

“On today's evening news, we uncover the latest series of notable ‘cancellings’ that have happened in just the last 24 hours. Just earlier this morning, the most prominent figure to be cancelled was Dr Mohiuddin Mahmud. A notable neurosurgeon, who once even served as the country's chief medical adviser, was cancelled for his controversial comments regarding Sheikh

Mujibur Rahman.

Famously, Dr Mahmud praised the former president for his mic skills. Unfortunately, the Cancelling Council yesterday deemed the words as inflammatory and *dalali*. Now, Dr Mahmud has been cancelled posthumously. We shall never speak his name again.”

And with that, there was a small click and the lights from each corner of the TV met in the middle and it turned off.

The remote fell off the couch as Sameer rolled onto the floor, yawning. He rubbed his eyes, trying to clear his vision. Groaning, he finally got to his feet.

He stretched, too tired from awkwardly sleeping on the couch. Sameer pulled his phone out of his pocket, and glanced at the notifications. Just an endless list of his friends he would never be able to talk to again.

That was the problem with the

cancellling, Sameer thought, you never got to contact these people again. No phone calls, texts, chats, or even emails. They would also never be allowed outside of their houses.

It all made sense when this started. At first, it was great. You were getting rid of the worst people – perverts and musicians, sometimes both were the same. Predators and diabolical people were being removed. It was perfect.

But then, someone had to take it too far, and things just got out of contro—

*Ring Ring...Ring Ring*

Sameer's phone buzzed, he picked it up to see that it was his mother calling.

“Sameer, baba, they are taking us away,” his mom whispered, voice filled with panic from the other side.

“WHAT? What is happening mom?” he asked.

“They say it is because your father thanked Hasina for the metro rail and I apparently watched too many hours of Zee Bangla. Son, please, be safe. This might be the final time we hear your voice. I love you...,” she said, before the line went dead with a final click.

Sameer stood there, mouth open from the shock. He had never thought his parents would get cancelled. This was a whole other can of worms.

A siren blared through the street, the sound piercing the air all the way up to Sameer's apartment on the 26th floor.

Utter chaos, Sameer thought. He at

