

Overhaul surveillance, privacy laws: experts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh's constitutional and legal framework enables state surveillance and fails to protect citizens' privacy and data rights, experts said at a roundtable discussion yesterday.

The event titled "A New Digital Vision for a New Bangladesh" was organised jointly by Tech Global Institute and The Daily Star at the capital's The Daily Star Centre.

Shahzeb Mahmood, head of Research, Legal, and Policy at TechGlobal, said a combination of at least four laws and over a dozen regulatory guidelines allow law enforcement agencies to monitor citizens. He also pointed out that Bangladesh lacks robust laws to safeguard individual privacy and data protection.

Mahmood cited laws such as the Competition Act, 2012, Consumer Rights Protection Act, 2009, Digital Commerce Operations Guidelines 2021, and Bangladesh Mobile Financial Services Regulations, 2022, saying these regulations are not suitable for the digital ecosystem and often encourage anti-competitive practices.

Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, highlighted how the previous authoritarian government criminalised freedom of expression, dissent, and privacy

rights to maintain power.

"The past regime's strategy involved first eliminating or neutralising political opposition. Then they targeted dissenting voices and the media, creating a system to suppress them using various laws," he said.

Iftekharuzzaman stressed the need to overhaul the entire legal infrastructure related to freedom of expression. "No authority should come into power that criminalises public voices," he added.

He said the former regime's actions created opportunities for power abuse, illicit wealth accumulation, and money laundering. He described a system in which a political, bureaucratic, and business syndicate colluded to protect the regime and its illicit gains.

For immediate actions, Iftekharuzzaman suggested that the interim government should evaluate the need for multiple security agencies, including the National Telecommunication Monitoring Center.

"In the name of these security agencies, the government has mainly undermined the people's security," he said, calling for the immediate destruction of spyware like Pegasus, allegedly used by the NTMC for citizen surveillance.

Barrister Sara Hossain urged the government to identify websites spreading fake videos, leaked calls, and rumours, many of which are allegedly sponsored by

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Speakers at a roundtable on "A New Digital Vision for a New Bangladesh" yesterday. The event was organised jointly by Tech Global Institute and The Daily Star at the capital's The Daily Star Centre.

PHOTO: STAR

'New Bangladesh' must embrace anti-discrimination spirit

Speakers tell Democracy Day event

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

To build the desired "New Bangladesh", it is imperative to flourish a political force imbued with the spirit of the anti-discrimination movement, said TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman yesterday.

Iftekharuzzaman made the remarks at a discussion, titled "Democracy and Good Governance in New Bangladesh: Youth Expectations," organised by Transparency International Bangladesh in observance of International Democracy Day 2024 at its Dhanmondi office.

He said the activities of anti-democratic forces that are communal, intolerant, and against pluralism contradict the core lessons of the anti-discrimination movement.

At the discussion, media professional Shimu Naser said in "New Bangladesh", no one should fear oppression from government forces for criticising someone's work.

"Over the past 10-15 years, political cartoons have been eradicated, curbing the freedom of expression of artists. We should be able to criticise those in power fearlessly," he said.

Due to previous bad experiences, people do not want to trust those who come to power.

HASNAT ABDULLAH
Key coordinator

Mentioning that the marginalised communities played an active role in this movement, Naser said, "We are not hearing about what kind of Bangladesh they want. I believe the laws and governance structure of the 'New Bangladesh' should be formulated or amended keeping everyone in mind."

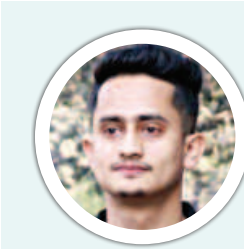
Hasnat Abdullah, a key coordinator of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, said due to previous bad experiences, people do not want to trust those who come to power.

"They [people] also look at us with suspicion. We cannot blame them for this. There are concerns that those who come to power through movements might act the same way," he said, adding that in the past, asking questions during a government's tenure often came at a price.

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Cops involved in killings must be brought to justice

Sarjis tells Manikganj meeting



Some people are also making money by naming and removing names in the cases. The names of our brothers who gave their lives for the country should not be misused like this.

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Sarjis Alam, a coordinator of the central committee of Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, yesterday said all the members of the law enforcement agencies who were directly involved in killings during the mass protests must be brought to justice.

They must be tried through legal investigation, case, or any means, he said.

He said this while exchanging views at the Manikganj District Shilpakala Academy yesterday afternoon with the families of Anti-Discrimination Student Movement martyrs and injured people in Manikganj.

"Many of the policemen, being overzealous, committed murders unjustly to prove themselves to the fascist government. So legal action should be taken against them. If the police are not prosecuted, then the justice will be questioned," said Sarjis.

Regarding the filing of cases on behalf of the victim's families, Sarjis

said in several cases innocent people are being harassed as their names have been mentioned as accused.

He added, "Some people are also making money by naming and removing names in the cases. The names of our brothers who gave their lives for the country should not be misused like this."

The families of Saad, who was killed in the student movement in Dhaka's Dhamrai, and Rafiq, who was killed in the Paturia Ghat area of Manikganj, were present there.

Apart from them, several injured students took part in the meeting. They shared their experiences of the movement and the role of police during the time.

A team of 10 coordinators, including Sarjis, reached the venue around 10:00am.

Before exchanging views with the families of the martyrs and injured, they participated in a two-hour discussion with students from the district.

Wholesale filing of cases against journos must stop

Says Law Reporters Forum

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Reporters Forum (LRF), a platform of journalists covering law, justice, and human rights issues, yesterday said wholesale filing of cases against journalists is an obstacle to freedom of expression and establishing the rule of law.

In a statement, the organisation strongly condemned and protested the filing of cases against journalists, including its members Sheikh Muhammad Jamal Hossain and Abu Saleh Rony, without specific charges.

LRF's acting President Hasan Jabed and its General Secretary Moneruzzaman Mission said in the statement that murder cases are not desirable without specific allegations against journalists.

LRF considers that filing such cases is against independent journalism, they said.

LRF leaders urged authorities concerned to verify the allegations before filing a case against journalists and to exempt them from the cases if their involvement is not found.

MATARBARI POWER PLANT

A move against public interest

Says ex-river commission chief Muzibur Rahman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former Chairman of the National River Conservation Commission, Muzibur Rahman, has questioned the decision to commission the Matarbari coal-fired power project in Cox's Bazar, calling it a move against public interest.

Speaking as the chief guest at a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday, during the presentation of the final declaration of the Climate Justice Conference 2023, Rahman said, "We are responsible for the Matarbari coal-fired power project. Why did we make this decision against the public interest? Establishments and factories

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Tk 90 lakh lost from JS building on Aug 5

Says Parliament Secretariat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Approximately Tk 90 lakh -- both from official and personal funds -- went missing from Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban during the vandalism and looting on August 5.

The amount was disclosed at a meeting on the overall situation of the JS building recently.

Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban's acting secretary (additional secretary, committee support wing) Zebunnesa Karim presided over the meeting held at the parliament building.

A decision was made to take appropriate action to refund the cash, according to a press release of the Parliament Secretariat yesterday.

Another decision was taken to prepare a list of

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