

Swift release of aid for July victims vital

Why would the injured need to demand what should be readily given?

We are quite troubled to see that a street protest—that too for 14 hours—had to occur for those injured in the July–August uprising to put the spotlight on their grievances surrounding treatment, promised compensation, and rehabilitation. This is an issue that should not have arisen in the first place. Those who suffered injuries or lost their loved ones during the movement to bring down a fascist regime deserve our gratitude and sincere cooperation, not the frustration of having to fight once more to receive basic support.

Reportedly, injured protesters staged a sit-in in front of the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR) after Health Adviser Nurjahan Begum visited the hospital but apparently only met a few of the injured, triggering angry reactions among others. This led to a prolonged road blockade that stretched into early Thursday. The protesters, later joined by patients from the nearby National Institute of Ophthalmology & Hospital (NIOH), were still bearing the scars of the uprising, many with bandages or using crutches or wheelchairs. As well as expressing their grievances, they also called for the resignation of the health adviser. It was only after the intervention of four government advisers late at night that they agreed to return to their hospitals.

It may be recalled that at least 873 individuals lost their lives, and 19,931 were injured, during the uprising. So far, the health authorities have taken various measures to assist the affected and their families. Government hospitals have been providing free treatment, and doctors from abroad have been brought in to address complex injuries. Meanwhile, according to an estimate given by the July Shaheed Smriti Foundation, the families of 200 deceased, and over 500 injured individuals, have received compensation so far.

That means a large number of the victims are still waiting for compensation, even after over three months, while many require advanced treatment which is not possible in local hospitals. These issues coupled with concerns over their rehabilitation have caused frustrations. The delayed release of funds is apparently due to verification issues as many claimants still needed further documentation. However, Sarjis Alam, general secretary of the foundation, stressed that once the verification process is completed, funds can be released to 500 people every day, and that everyone would get their compensation by December. The government, after Wednesday’s protests, also promised to devise a framework for the treatment and rehabilitation of the injured, in consultation with the latter, and implement it by December.

We are encouraged to hear that, but we must urge the authorities to ensure nothing comes in the way of fulfilling these promises. The July victims and their families have already endured unimaginable hardships; it is our duty to ensure they are given the dignity, care, and support they deserve. To meet the deadlines set by the government, it is also vital to streamline these processes to reduce the chances of bureaucratic delays or obstacles.

Carbon neutrality is non-negotiable

Major polluters must help nations most vulnerable to climate change

As Bangladesh and other vulnerable countries grapple with the devastating effects of climate change, the urgency for global action has never been clearer. With the world passing through what is expected to be the warmest year on record, the stakes are higher than ever. At COP29, nations are presently discussing their next course of action, but ongoing tensions, especially after climate change denier Donald Trump’s victory in US elections, reveal a worrying lack of political resolve. Equally concerning is the fact that, nearly a decade after the Paris Agreement was signed, efforts to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius remain woefully inadequate, while climate finance promises also remain unmet.

Against this backdrop, recent research highlights a sobering reality: that to address the current environmental degradation, the world needs to achieve net-zero CO2 emissions by the late 2030s, not 2050. This is a stark reminder that we are running out of time. Thus, it is painful to see ongoing political inertia, funding crisis and refusals, as well as continued resistance from major polluters. This is not only threatening our planet but disproportionately impacting countries like Bangladesh.

One of the most striking moments at COP29 came from Bahamian Prime Minister Philip Davis, who pointed to how vast financial resources are mobilised for military conflicts while affluent nations remain reluctant to address the existential threat of climate change. His criticism is particularly poignant when we consider the environmental toll of war. For instance, the first 60 days of Israel’s war following the October 7 Hamas attack on Gaza produced approximately 281,000 metric tonnes of CO2. These realities underscore the irony of a world that can finance war but struggles to do the bare minimum to prevent its downfall.

Chief Adviser Dr Muhammad Yunus’s message at COP29—calling for a “zero waste” world and an economic model that reduces consumption—also resonates powerfully. He expressed frustration with the climate finance negotiations, calling it “humiliating” for vulnerable nations to beg for financial assistance. Yunus argued that these nations, which have contributed the least to global warming, should not be put in a position where they must plead for help, while wealthier nations that have contributed the most continue to evade their obligations.

The fact is, achieving carbon neutrality is not a negotiable goal. It is essential for the survival of nations like Bangladesh. As the world approaches critical climate thresholds, we must push for stronger global response, and ensure that the wealthiest nations deliver on their commitments on emissions and climate financing.

Ending impunity for crimes against journalists

Newer impediments for the free press

THE THIRD VIEW



Mahfuz Anam
is the editor and publisher of The Daily Star.

MAHFUZ ANAM

It was somewhat ironic. I was attending the UNESCO conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to commemorate the 2024 International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (IDEA) at a time when, in Bangladesh, the highest number of journalists in our history had been accused of “murder,” with four of them being in jail. These charges are so farcical and unfounded that the credibility of the interim government may now come under question. Thankfully, this topic did not come up at the conference.

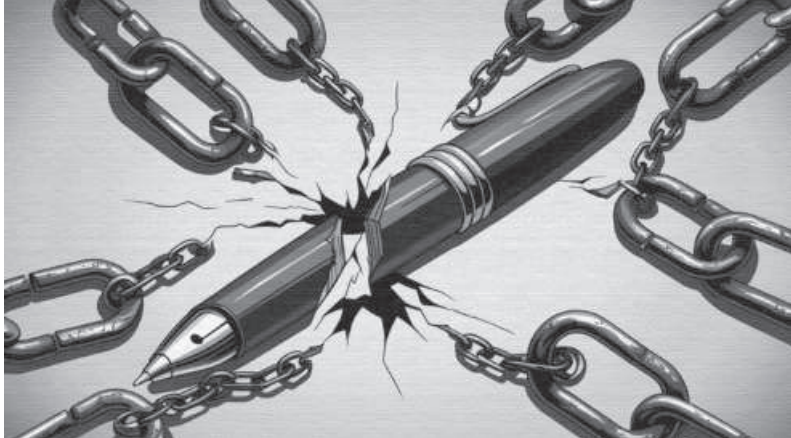
What came out in the UNESCO conference is that violent crimes against journalists were on the rise, especially in conflict zones where journalists not only faced violent attacks but were targeted in many places by the contending fighting forces who enjoyed complete impunity from their respective governments. The killing of journalists in Gaza by the Israeli army is by far the worst example in recent history. According to various sources such as *The Guardian* and NBC News, as of November 5, around 134-147 journalists and media workers, including 120 academics and over 224 humanitarian and aid workers have been killed. The silence or very muted reaction to these crimes against journalists by the Western media and media protection bodies has indeed been shameful, to say the least.

A joint paper presented by UNESCO and the African Union at the conference stated that, “Too many (journalists) pay unacceptably high prices, including death, enforced disappearances, torture, unlawful detention and kidnapping for producing independent, reliable and verifiable information.” In conflict areas, journalists being killed have doubled in the 2022-2023 period, reversing a five-year trend of improvement. This has happened mostly in Africa (Gaza incidents are not included here) where, in the 2023-2024 period, 14 journalists have been killed, predominantly in countries experiencing conflict. According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), in 2024, 14 journalists have been disappeared in the same region and 32 journalists have been detained. In 12 sub-Saharan African countries, at least 47 journalists have been detained

on charges of defamation, censorship violation, anti-state news reporting, religious insults, etc.

A new reality is emerging for journalists covering environmental issues. Just as climate-related disasters are becoming more frequent, journalists reporting on them are facing serious threats and challenges to their work. In May 2024, for World Press Freedom Day, UNESCO released a report revealing that 70 percent of journalists covering environmental issues have been attacked in connection with their work.

The situation for journalists in Bangladesh is similarly disheartening. Between 1992 and 2024, 26 journalists were killed according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). None of these cases have seen



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

justice completed. As Zyma Islam from this daily reported, “...in the last two and half decades, cases filed over murders of at least 13 journalists have apparently got lost in the annals of time. The stories are the same for all of them—investigations navigating through a labyrinthine judicial mess, never ending probes and traceless culprits—all in all, complete impunity.”

Since the change in government in August, a new cause for worry has descended upon journalists—sweeping murder charges. In my column published a month ago, I wrote, “...cases have been filed against 129 journalists in Dhaka, Chattogram, Bogura and Rajshahi” on various charges of murder, attempted murder, etc. Although mass filing of cases

against journalists has now stopped, those who have already had cases filed against them remain victimised. Though they are not imprisoned, their livelihoods have been severely impacted, with some experiencing complete professional destruction. Life is particularly difficult for journalists in district and upazila towns. They live under constant fear of being picked up by the police or being physically assaulted by their political opponents and professional rivals. Daily life for their families has also been affected, including those of their children who fear going to schools or sitting for examinations.

In the midst of it all, Asif Nazrul, our law adviser, commented a few days ago that, “the wholesale filing of cases is embarrassing the government.” He said that common people, particularly the political victims and rivals of the previous regime are the ones filing these cases, not the government—as was common under the previous regime. However, any indication that such wholesale case filing, even if they are not being done by the government, will be stopped or at least examined in some way before being filed, was missing in his statement. As someone

Act of 1923—pending their repeal or amendment in line with international human rights standards.”

This would be an important step to take at the start of Bangladesh’s new journey, reflecting a strong commitment to freedom of expression and the media. Our history has shown that whenever we have the chance to begin anew, we often dwell too much

What came out in the UNESCO conference is that violent crimes against journalists were on the rise, especially in conflict zones where journalists not only faced violent attacks but were targeted in many places by the contending fighting forces who enjoyed complete impunity from their respective governments. The killing of journalists in Gaza by the Israeli army is by far the worst example in recent history.

on the past and too little on the future. This time it appears different as Prof Yunus’s government has established six new reform commissions, including one on media, to suggest forward-looking changes. We expect the media reform commission will create a legal framework to clarify the freedoms and autonomy of media institutions, making media freedom a lasting element of Bangladesh’s future.

We also endorse CPJ’s suggestions for the “withdrawal or dismissal of hundreds of criminal cases lodged against journalists in retaliation for their work.” Many cases filed by the previous government were purely political, aimed at punishing specific media outlets or journalists. These should be dismissed immediately. With the repeal of the Cyber Security Act, the withdrawal of such cases should be straightforward.

As for the murder cases filed under the current government, efforts should be made to review and dismiss those without evidentiary basis. Such actions would significantly enhance the present government’s commitment to a free press.

Though the signals are mixed—the recent withdrawal of accreditation for 167 journalists without explanation being the latest example—we still hope that the media in Bangladesh will see a new dawn and that the whole world of freedom of expression will finally flourish here.

Bangladesh should endorse the fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty



Farzana Faruk Jhumu
is a climate activist and a co-founder of Kaathpencil.

FARZANA FARUK JHUMU

Bangladesh is currently in a crucial transition period with reform initiatives taken in a number of areas. Urgent reform in the energy sector is also needed. As a climate justice activist, I have been advocating for a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty since 2021, around the same time that Professor Muhammad Yunus—now the head of the interim government in Bangladesh—first endorsed the proposal for a global treaty to manage a fast and fair transition away from coal, oil and gas extraction.

Bangladesh is a country particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Being a low-lying delta, we are highly susceptible to sea-level rise, which is causing coastal erosion, displacement of communities, and saltwater intrusion into agricultural lands. Our nation is prone to cyclones, floods, and droughts, which have devastating consequences for its population and economy. The primary contributor to climate change causing such catastrophes in Bangladesh is the fossil fuel industry.

The fossil fuel industry is not only

at the heart of climate change but it is also intertwined with decades of corruption in Bangladesh. The wave of corruption cases increasingly shows the role of the fossil fuel industry in an era of deception and misconduct. Fossil fuel industries have monopolised the energy sector through unnecessary power plant constructions, contract extensions, inflated service charges on fuel imports, and excessive capacity payments. Because of the former government’s policy, the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDDB) had to buy electricity from privately owned fossil fuel-based companies at inflated prices. Although a large part of the power generation capacity remains unused throughout the year. Even when there is no electricity production by these companies, BPDDB still has to pay capacity charges to the power plants. Additionally, the country has been left in a bad state due to electricity imports from an Indian company. As a result, our dependence on fossil fuels makes us more vulnerable to price fluctuations and supply disruptions.

All these indicate that we need to

reform our energy sector—one that is free of fossil fuels. If we are bringing change, we need to depend on a new system, to stop the dependency on fossil fuel imports, and avoid market monopolisation by fossil fuel lobbyists. For that, we are calling on the current government to join the bloc of countries seeking to negotiate a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty.

The climate movement in Bangladesh has been calling for justice and rights. Our work is not over even after a successful mass resistance and protest against injustice and the silencing of rights of Bangladeshi people. Now begins the more difficult work of creating actual, lasting reform.

The climate movement in Bangladesh has been calling for justice and rights. Our work is not over even after a successful mass resistance and protest against injustice and the silencing of rights of Bangladeshi people. Now begins the more difficult work of creating actual, lasting reform.

Global treaties have historically proven effective in addressing

worldwide threats such as the ozone layer depletion and phasing out landmines. The fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty would provide a similar international framework to phase out fossil fuels based on three pillars: i) non-proliferation—ending the expansion of new coal, oil and gas fields; ii) a fair phase out—transitioning away from existing production in line with 1.5C global temperature threshold, with wealthy countries shifting first and fastest; iii) a global just transition—support and financing a global shift to renewables in which no worker, community, or country like ours is left behind.

Favourably, the proposals in the fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty align with Bangladesh’s national climate change strategy, which aims to reduce vulnerability to climate change and promote sustainable development. Supporting the treaty and a fast and fair transition away from fossil fuels can attract investment in renewable energy projects, creating jobs and boosting the economy.

As a youth champion of the treaty, I urge the interim government to take the initiative to endorse it during the ongoing COP29 UN climate summit in Baku. By endorsing the fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty, Bangladesh, under Dr Yunus’s leadership, can demonstrate its commitment to addressing climate change and protecting its population from the devastating impacts of global warming. We could take the lead as the first nation in South Asia to back this bold, powerful, and historic proposal.