## Has the media gotten out of the grip of (self-)censorship?



freedom, actions like the cancellation of

press credentials and the incarceration of journalists send troubling signals, leaving

media freedom in Bangladesh at a perilous

crossroads.

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troubling conflation of legitimate criticism or hurting religious sentiments. Hundreds with threats to national security. These dynamics have allowed the Act to become a powerful tool for suppressing opposing views, undermining the free exchange of ideas that a vibrant democracy requires.

Subsequent laws, including the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act, the Digital Security Act (DSA), and

of what qualifies as "prejudicial" and the like defamation, "negative propaganda," of arrests were made under this neverending cycle of repressive laws, leading to accusations that the DSA (and then CSA) was used to silence dissent and discourage investigative journalism.

Since the fall of the past regime, the sacking of journalists for reportedly being linked with the previous government, without concrete criminal charges having been brought against them, is unsettling to say the least. Most recently, the government rescinded the press accreditation of numerous journalists, effectively restricting their access to government secretariats. Previously, the ICT Adviser Nahid Islam had, on several occasions, suggested that journalists could be prosecuted and punished due to their possible nexus with the erstwhile regime. The press secretary, Shafiqul Alam, gave a similar vague message. The cancellation of press passes and the administration's statement against journalists sends an ambiguous message: while the government maintains that it supports press freedom and expresses its willingness to repeal the draconian laws, its words and actions may pressure the media to cautiously choose its contents and stories.

It is important to mention that journalists are held to high professional and ethical standards and must uphold truth and accuracy in news reporting. The current legal framework, such as the 1993 Journalists' Code of Conduct, provides a grievance procedure if journalists breach their duties. The Code prohibits maliciously distorting or slanting news in commentary and headlines, requiring clear and fair presentation without bias. Newspapers are also expected to resist and expose crime and corruption. If any newspaper, news agency, editor, or journalist breaches journalistic ethics and codes of conduct, the Press Council, under Section 12(1) of the Press Council Act of 1974, may investigate complaints and warn, admonish, and rebuke the concerned parties after giving them an opportunity to be heard. There are legal recourse available in the existing Press Council Act and the Journalists' Code of

The persecution of journalists without any

specific allegations have attracted criticism from local and international quarters, raising alarms over the actual extent of media freedom in the country. Antoine Bernard of Reporters Without Borders called on the government to "stop the current legal harassment of more than 130 journalists" who have been charged with trumpedup crimes, as well as the arrest of some journalists without prior investigations. The Committee to Protect Journalists called for guaranteeing the procedural rights of incarcerated journalists.

The interim government's stated objective to right past wrongs and implement reform seems to be out of step with the continued plight of the media landscape in Bangladesh. The gap between the government's declared goals and the actual circumstances raises serious concerns about the current state and future trends of media independence. It may also thwart the goals of the Public Media Reform Commission, which is currently undertaking the job of furthering press freedom in Bangladesh.

Protests in July and August have flagged one of the most severe failures of the media in maintaining neutrality in times of crisis, yet similar patterns of media restrictions persist. If Bangladesh is to break out of this cycle where news outlets act primarily as a mouthpiece for the government, changes must extend beyond cosmetic promises. The interim government now has an opportunity and a corresponding responsibility to show real commitment to freedom of the press, which it can do by letting the Media Reform Commission work independently and by taking tangible steps that create an atmosphere where journalists can work without fear of retribution.

Failing to pursue these fundamental reforms at this critical moment would perpetuate the past practice of media suppression and drastically reduce public expectations of meaningful democratic change. The stakes are particularly high, given Bangladesh's history of political volatility and the critical role a free press must play in guaranteeing governmental accountability and fostering robust public



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The constitution of Bangladesh promises freedom of thought, conscience, and Bangladesh have wielded repressive laws expression, alongside press rights under to penalise speech deemed, in their broad Articles 39(1) and 39(2), with caveats of "reasonable restrictions" for national understanding, to be false, offensive, defamatory, or disruptive to law and order. security, public order, and morality-vague Among the earliest and most contentious terms often misused by authorities to limit of these laws is the Special Powers Act of 1974, which established far-reaching state dissent and critical journalism. In addition to the constitution, the Press Council Act of censorship by criminalising vaguely defined 1974 supports press freedom and upholds "prejudicial" content. This Act, and others journalistic integrity. Yet, the effectiveness of this Act is limited, and it lacks the silence dissenting voices and restrict the enforcement muscle to shield journalists media's ability to report freely. Its impact is particularly alarming for two reasons: For years, successive governments in the government's expansive interpretation

the Cyber Security Act (CSA), have continued this trend. Notorious provisions like Section 57 of the ICT Act penalised digital content deemed defamatory or religiously offensive with harsh sentences, fostering a culture of fear. Subsequently, the DSA of 2018 was enacted in response to public outcry over the ICT Act, while the CSA of 2023 followed as a reaction to international criticism like it, have been routinely exploited to of the DSA. Each of these laws has drawn criticism for pulling similar language from Section 57 of the ICT Act and repackaging it to retain authoritarian control over freedom of expression under broad pretexts

## Building a lasting defence against fascism



from legal and extra-legal threats.

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and its virtues, but when it comes to might have challenged governments and confronted authoritarianism, but does this mean the problem has been solved? Or are these efforts just temporary fixes, like putting a band-aid on a wound that needs surgery? We may have seen the fall of one fascist regime, but have we truly eradicated fascism itself?

Think of fascism like cancer. Imagine you have a cancerous tumour—it's painful, causing the most immediate problems, and you might decide to have a bloody surgery to remove it. Removing the tumour is essential, but does it cure the cancer? Not necessarily. If the cancerous cells remain, there's always a risk that it could come back. It might not be the same tumour or in the same place—it could reappear in your brain, your lungs, or somewhere else in your

body. Fascism is similar to a sickness in society. Fascist "germs" can still be found today, deeply ingrained in societal norms and myths. These stories continue to be told in many social circles, frequently with the backing of those who gain from them. Similar to cancer, fascism can be subtle. It silently spreads across society's shadowy nooks and crannies, feasting on greed and misinformation, fear, and power struggles.

What steps can we take to truly eradicate fascism? We need to focus on three key points. While these are not exhaustive, they can still serve as a foundation upon which to build.

The first step is achieving independence from any external interference in our political structure. Foreign policy and international relations will always have economic and diplomatic influences, that's a given. But the core of our political system—the building blocks of our democracy—

People often understand democracy must be free from external control. Influence is acceptable in measured the practical side of fighting fascism, stances, but control is not. When there's still much confusion. We external forces interfere, they often validate or create narratives that serve their interests, not ours.

This outside influence may pose a threat. Because it depends more on outside assistance than on the mandate of its own constituents, it might strengthen political party or government that is exempt from public scrutiny. Because these regimes are more accountable to foreign forces than to their constituents, such situations frequently result in authoritarianism eventually turning to fascism. An example

> **Instead of focusing** on any one political party, we need to invest time and resources to find out the remaining germs of fascism. As the mechanism for fascism still persists, it won't take long for a different party or entity to replace the old one.

of this is our previous regime's democratic beginning in 2009, which became more authoritarian as the government's external support increased.

We might think of the nations that supported the Soviet Union vigorously during the Cold War. An authoritarian regime ultimately emerged in many of these countries as a result of foreign influence creating a dependency, whereby the local government lost interest in answering to the people.

Our cultural mindset is the subject of the second point. Many conquered nations throughout history have fostered a culture cultural, social, and political of deference to authority. Long context.

after we gained our independence, submissiveness persisted democratic progress.

In many post-colonial societies, there is a tendency to respect and obey authority figures unquestioningly. This mindset is a hangover from the colonial era when people were taught to see themselves as subjects rather than citizens. Even today, in Bangladesh, when a senior official or politician enters a room, people stand up out of respect—a practice rooted in colonial traditions. In Bangladesh, every leader is looked at through a lens of kingship. Whether they come to power through an election or in some other manner, it seems like an ascension. We all seem to forget that they are there to serve the people and the nation, not the other way around.

This is why we have corrupt institutions filled with corrupt individuals. It's due to the lack of accountability and the superior feeling that people in power gain, which allows them to normalise selfish and corrupt behaviour. When these sorts of individuals fill an institution or organisation, the whole entity becomes like a kingdom. You cannot question it. We are merely subjects of it. It doesn't belong to us but rather to the individuals who run it.

In contrast, in many democratic societies, there isn't the same level of deference to authority. People see themselves as equal participants in governance, not subjects. They speak to their leaders by name and aren't afraid to express their concerns, and an attitude of accountability prevails. Authoritarianism and fascism can flourish when people fail to see that they are the real owners of their nation and that the government should work for them, not the other way around.

The third argument, related to the first two, concerns Bangladesh's idea of nationalism. Our political discourse has been influenced by outmoded colonial-era ideas or outside forces for far too long. We need a narrative developed by our own people, for our own people one that is rooted in our unique

Our current idea of nationalism martial arts, doesn't hold them back implies that winning elections and consciousness. Because individuals our people. For the moment, the arena. are more likely to accept authority nationalistic ideas or practices that national holidays that the ruling government of the time aligns with, declaring them unimportant when the government changes. This tradition has gone on too long. We are only appreciating our sports teams when they manage a win. We don't pay heed when the women's football team hasn't received their salary in months. We only try to get Geographical Indicators for products that draw interest from nations other than ours. We impose our own conservative or liberal views with nationalism to get an edge on our arguments.

We can look at alternative examples like Japan. It simultaneously embraces its cultural heritage and history while regularly setting the stage for one of the most technologically advanced countries in the world. The preservation of their traditional practices, such as tea ceremonies and

needs a lot more work to reach from also having the reputation of overthrowing dictators are not the permeated our national the state where it can truly serve precision manufacturing in the global only goals of the struggle. It involves

> be successful through hard work. This narrative of independent identity, freedom, and economic prospects shapes the national idea of the US.

> Bangladesh today, more than ever, needs a unified idea of Bangladeshi nationalism. For us, our national identity could potentially accommodate the love for language, as even today we remain the only nation to have shed blood fighting for it. Next could be our fight for democracy. In the 1971 Liberation War, the 90's anti-Ershad movement, and the 2024 July uprising, every time the countrymen came to the streets to fight the suppression of democracy in one way or another. Lastly, our moderate Muslim majority identity, similar to Indonesia and Malaysia, can

> What does all of this signify for our efforts to combat fascism? It

constructing robust institutions, On the other hand, the US has "The altering people's perspectives, and than to question it, it impedes we have all seem self-serving to a American Dream." The idea is that promoting an accountable and large extent. We are only observing regardless of background, anyone can democratic culture. It's important to understand that, if we're not careful, fascism can emerge from the inside as well as from the outside.

> Instead of focusing on any one political party, we need to invest time and resources to find out the remaining germs of fascism. As the mechanism for fascism still persists, it won't take long for a different party or entity to replace the old one.

> So, while we have made some progress, we need to remain vigilant, buildstronger democratic institutions. foster a culture of accountability, and, most importantly, empower ourselves as citizens to take ownership of our country. Before that, we also have to figure out what we, as individuals, want to do for our country to create our own inception of Bangladeshi nationalism. Only then can we ensure that our victories against fascism are not just temporary, but permanent.



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১। আবেদনপত্র গ্রহণের শেষ তারিখঃ ২৬/১২/২০২৪ খ্রি.

১৪। কর্তৃপক্ষের সিদ্ধান্তই চুড়ান্ত বলে গণ্য হবে।

নম্বর: ৩৯.০৩.০০০০.০০৫.১১.০০১.২২.১১৬

২। আবেদনপত্র ভাকঘোণে মহাপরিচালক, জাতীয় বিজ্ঞান ও প্রযুক্তি জাদুঘর, আগারগাঁও, শেরেবাংলা নগর, ঢাকা-১২০৭ বরাবর আগামী ২৬/১২/২০২৪ ছি, তারিখ অফিস সময়ের ছবে। সরাসরি দাখিলকুত কোন আবেদনপত্র এবং নিধারিত তারিখ উত্তীর্পের পর ডাক্যোগে বা অন্য কোনভাবে প্রাপ্ত আবেদনপত্র গ্রহণযোগ্য ছবে না

ত। সরকার নির্ধারিত চকুরির আবেদন ফরমে আবেদন দাখিল করতে হবে। আবেদন ফরমের নমুনা এ অফিসের Website: www.nmst.gov.bd থেকে বা জনপ্রশা Website: www.mopa.gov.bd থেকে ডাউনলোড করা যাবে বা অফিসের নোটিশ বোর্ডে পাওয়া যাবে।

৪। আবেদন পত্রের খামের উপরের ভানপাশে পদের নামউল্লেখ করতে হবে এবং আবেদনপত্রের সাথে প্রাধীর যোগাখোগের ঠিকানা উল্লেখপূর্বক ১০,০০ টাকা মূলোর অব্যবহৃত ভাকটিকেট

৯.৫ ইঞ্চি x8 ইঞ্চি পরিমাপের একটি ফেরত খাম দিতে হবে। ৫। প্রাধীর বয়সদীমা ২৬/১২/২০২৪ স্থি, তারিখে ১৮-৩২ বংসরের মধ্যে হতে হবে। বয়সের ক্ষেত্রে এফিডেভিট গ্রহণযোগ্য নয়

৬। নিয়োগ বিষয়ে সরকারি নিয়মাবলী এবং সরকারের সর্বশেষ জারীকৃত পরিপত্র/নীতিমালা অনুসরণ করা হবে

৭। এক জেলার বাসিন্দা অন্য জেলার বাসিন্দা হিসেবে আবেদন করতে পারবেন না। ৮। সরকারি/আধা সরকারি সংস্থায় চাকুরিরত প্রাধীদের অবশাই যথাযথ কর্তৃপক্ষের মাধ্যমে আবেদন করতে হবে। অগ্রিম কপি গ্রহণযোগ্য নয়।

৯। আবেদনপত্রের সাথে বাংলাদেশের যেকোন অফসিলি ব্যাংক থেকে মহাপরিচালক জাতীয় বিজ্ঞান ও প্রযুক্তি জাদুঘর, ঢাকা-এর অনুকূলে প্রাধীদের ২০০/-(দুইশত) টাকার অক্রেকযোগ্য ব্যাংক ড়াফট/পে-অর্ডার জমা দিতে হবে। এছাড়া পাসপোর্ট আকারের ৩ (তিন) কপি ছবি ব্যতীত আর কোন কাগজপুর জমা দিতে হবে না।

১১। অসম্পূৰ্ণ ও দ্ৰাটিপূৰ্ণ আবেদনপত্ৰ ৰাজিল বলে গণ্য হবে।

১২। নিয়োগ পরীক্ষায় অংশগ্রহশের জন্য কোন প্রকার টিএ/ডিএ প্রদান করা হবে না। ১৩। মৌখিক পরীক্ষার সময় সংশ্রিষ্ট সকল সনদপত্রের মূলকপি প্রদর্শন করতে হবে এবং সকল সনদপত্রের সভায়িত ফটোকলি দাখিল করতে হবে। এছাড়া জেলার স্থায়ী বাসিন্দার প্রমাণপত্র হিসেবে ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ/পৌরসভা/সিটি কপোরেশন কর্তৃক প্রদত্ত নাগরিকত সনদ ও জাতীয় পরিচয়পরের সত্যায়িত কপি প্রদান করতে হবে। চাকুরিরত প্রাধীদের অবশ্যই যথাযথ কর্তৃপক্ষের অনুমতিপত্র দাখিল করতে হবে।

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