

# Challenges to media freedom in post-Hasina Bangladesh



Rahat Minhaz  
is assistant professor of mass communication and journalism at Jagannath University. He can be reached at minhaz.uddin.du@yahoo.com.

RAHAT MINHAZ

After the student-led mass uprising in July-August 2024, a lot of expectations emerged within society, which was normal. The media sector is no exception. During Sheikh Hasina's 15-plus years of hybrid regime, standard journalism practices declined drastically due to certain actions of a group of pro-Awami League journalists. It would be more appropriate to call them activists of the regime. The press wing of the ousted prime minister and a particular intelligence branch exerted a kind of pressure on our media outlets. That's why, after the Awami League's fall in August, people expected major changes in this sector. However, these expectations, under the interim government led by Prof Muhammad Yunus, have already experienced setbacks for many reasons. It is unfortunate that professional journalists who played a pivotal role in ousting Hasina are now facing unfortunate situations.

After the massive fire at the secretariat on December 26, another controversial decision related to journalism was made. Due to security concerns, the interim government suspended accreditation cards for journalists, including visitor and other passes. Barring others from

the secretariat may be necessary, but restricting journalists from performing their daily duties is not acceptable. Although the press wing of the chief adviser clarified the issue and a temporary pass issuance process was put in place, this decision ultimately did not bode well for media freedom. The Editors' Council and other journalists' rights-based organisations issued statements saying that such decisions are a threat and an obstacle to independent journalism. By observing the situation closely, I can assume that this particular decision did not help journalism at all. However, I strongly agree with the authorities that many unprofessional journalists are holding accreditation cards for purposes other than journalism. These should be cancelled as early as possible.

Another burning and unfortunate issue is the firing of five senior journalists from Somoy TV. No doubt, this media outlet was one of the notorious propaganda machines of Sheikh Hasina. It systematically spread the regime's disinformation. On the other hand, this channel also targeted individuals who were critical of the ousted fascist regime.

That said, firing journalists through "mob justice" is not acceptable. The information ministry and the press wing of the chief adviser failed to address this issue. This was undoubtedly done through the misconduct of student leaders. The press wing and the government should have taken proper action

different media outlets under Sheikh Hasina became almost party propaganda cells. However, after her fall, intervening in TV channels and newspapers is not acceptable either. Alongside the spin doctors of these outlets, many professional journalists have also lost their jobs in recent months. These decisions were

Bangla authorities fired him. The government did nothing in these journalists' aid. At the very least, it could have issued a strong statement against this malpractice.

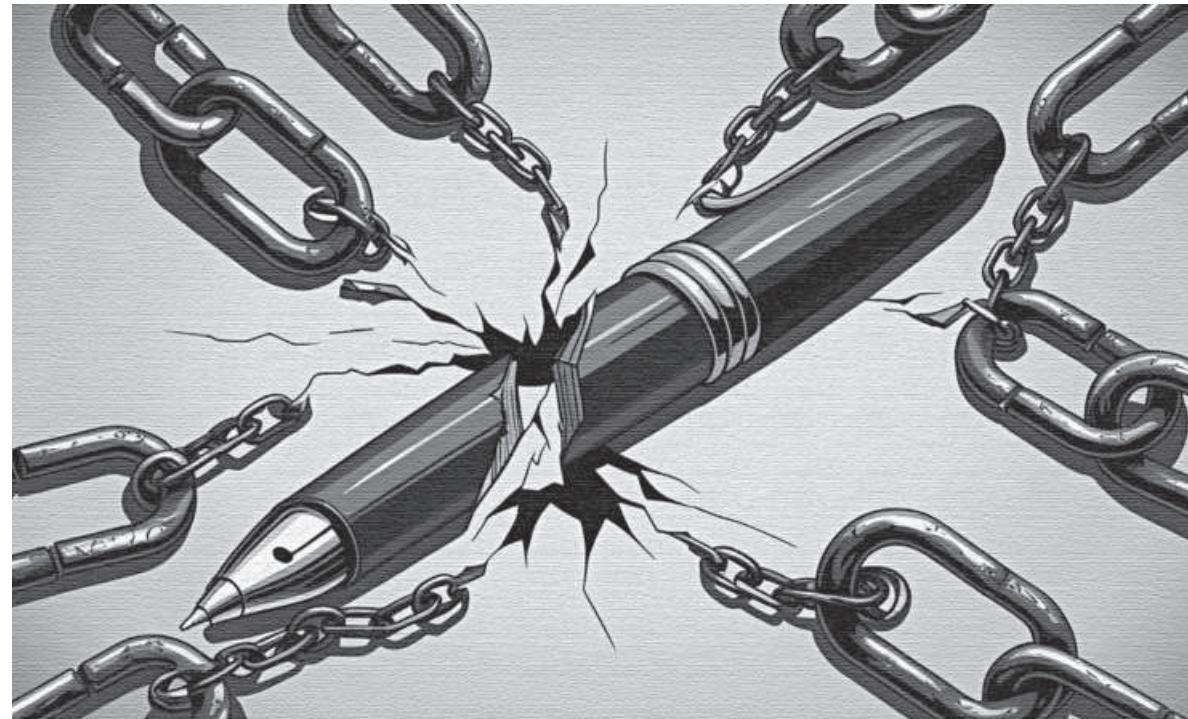
Though Sheikh Hasina has fled, and her press and intelligence wings have been dissolved, has the sense of fairness in free journalism

think pressure groups—including some anti-discrimination student activists, government members, powerful political parties, and others—are already acting against media freedom.

I want to conclude with the example of journalist Khaled Muhiuddin, a renowned journalist who faced severe backlash on social media mainly for criticising student leaders. He also became a target after inviting a leader of Bangladesh Chhatra League, student wing of the Awami League, as a guest on his show. Hasnat Abdullah, convener of the anti-discrimination student movement, and Sarjis Alam, secretary of the July Shaheed Smriti Foundation, said Khaled Muhiuddin was "betraying the blood of the martyrs" by promoting Chhatra League. Though the proposed show was not conducted supposedly due to legal reasons, this issue has certainly cast a shadow over media freedom.

According to a report published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) in May last year, Bangladesh ranks 165th out of 180 countries in the Press Freedom Index. Moreover, RSF identified Bangladesh as one of the most dangerous countries for journalists in their 2024 round-up report.

We don't want Bangladesh to be labelled as a dangerous country for journalism. We don't want further degradation of press freedom, and we don't want to lose the sense of fairness in professional journalism again. Hopefully, the interim government will take prompt and necessary steps in this regard. A new Bangladesh certainly deserves it.



FILE VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

against it, but they did nothing. It has already become an international issue, which does not align with the reputation of Prof Yunus at all.

Yes, we are well aware that

made under pressure and without following due process. A journalist of ATN Bangla is one of them; as far as I know, he had supported the students' movement. Yet, the ATN

disappeared? Not at all. Senior journalist and editor of the daily *Manab Zamin*, Matiur Rahman Chowdhury, pointed out this issue during a public discussion. I

## A crossover episode with my depression



Mahiya Tabassum  
is a member of the editorial team at The Daily Star.

MAHIYA TABASSUM

Picture this: it's an ungodly hour of the morning, and I'm stumbling out of my building after pulling an all-nighter for an exam. The gloomy morning sky and cold snaps are having this fascinating interaction with the circadian rhythm of my body, and the coffee in my empty stomach is doing the cha-cha. Just as I'm having one of those "What even is this life, man?" moments...

"Hey, that's life," drawls a familiar voice—one belonging to everyone's favourite depressed, self-loathing, alcoholic horse. Classic BoJack Horseman, appearing like an existential crisis personified, ready to drag you into the depths of contemplation on just another weekday morning.

Ten years after its debut, *BoJack Horseman* remains less of a TV show and more of a gut punch wrapped in animal puns. In an era where talking animals could've been just another gimmick, this series chose violence—emotional violence, that is. It's the kind of show that makes you laugh, then makes you question why you're laughing, and then makes you question everything else about your life choices.

But more than that, it has become a lighthouse for those of us navigating the stormy seas of depression. Addressing the mental health struggles, the series chose authenticity—raw, uncomfortable, yet deeply validating.

The show's brilliant stroke was mixing humans and animals in a world where a horse can be a washed-up sitcom star and, somehow, that's the least bizarre thing about it. But here's the kicker: behind the cartoon facades and animal jokes lies a mirror so clear, it's uncomfortable. Every character is carrying enough emotional baggage to fill a cargo hold, yet they're still somehow functioning—just like us!

Through the characters, the show portrayed the symptoms we often try to hide—the random crying spells, the inability to get out of bed, the constant fatigue that no amount of sleep seems to fix—and none of these

are character flaws. They're shared experiences, even if they're wrapped in fur and feathers.

Take Princess Carolyn, the feline agent whose life is a masterclass in "fake it till you make it," while simultaneously having an internal meltdown. Her perpetual hustle culture mentality isn't just a character trait, it's a perfect illustration of high-functioning depression, where we keep spinning plates while feeling completely hollow inside. When she tells herself, "You gotta get your shit together," it's the same mantra many of us repeat, thinking we're somehow failing at life while everyone else has it figured out.

What sets *BoJack Horseman* apart is how it normalises the full spectrum of depression's manifestations. The show tells us it's okay if your depression doesn't look like the commercials, where people just stare sadly out of windows in grayscale. Sometimes it's angry outbursts, sometimes it's numbness, and sometimes it's throwing yourself

while somehow maintaining its sense of humour. Depression, addiction, trauma, toxic relationships—it's all there, wrapped in animal puns and visual gags. It's like getting therapy, but your therapist is a cartoon horse who's probably more messed up than you are.

Made in the early 2010s, when streaming platforms were willing to take risks on quirky ideas, *BoJack Horseman* became more than just another adult animation. It pioneered a new kind of storytelling that proved animation could tackle serious issues without losing its comedic edge. In today's landscape, a show about a depressed talking horse dealing with existential dread might sound like a hard sell, but *BoJack* made it work. It showed us that depression isn't always dramatic breakdowns; sometimes it's just getting through another day, trying your best even when your best feels inadequate. The show's greatest gift might be its message that healing isn't linear. Some days you're Princess Carolyn, getting yourself together. Other days you're BoJack, floating in your pool, questioning everything. Both are valid, both are normal, and most importantly, both are temporary states, not permanent identities.

A decade later, the show's message still rings true: mental health struggles are part of the journey, and they're definitely not character flaws or personal failures. Life can be messy, people (and animals) are complicated, and sometimes the best we can do is keep swimming. Or galloping. Or whatever species-appropriate movement applies to you.

**Mental health struggles are part of the journey, and they're definitely not character flaws or personal failures. Life can be messy, people are complicated, and sometimes the best we can do is keep swimming, or galloping, or whatever movement applies to you.**

Well, that would be me too!

Then there's Diane Nguyen, the writer who can't seem to fit into the "rainbow muffin" version of happiness that society, especially her romantic partner Mr Peanut Butter, prescribes. Her journey with depression hits particularly close to home. When she sits in her flat, unable to write her "fun" book because the weight of existence feels too heavy, and ends up with a heavy memoir instead, it also serves as a validation. It's the show saying, "Hey, sometimes depression makes basic tasks feel impossible, and that's not your fault." Her struggle with medication, her resistance to accepting help, and her fear that treating her depression might change who she is—these aren't just plot points. They're real fears that many of us grapple with while suffering from depression.

But let's talk about our protagonist, the horse himself. BoJack Horseman isn't just another lead character of

into work or relationships to avoid dealing with the void inside.

The series doesn't just acknowledge these experiences—it validates them. When BoJack spends days in his pool, when Diane can't write her book, when Princess Carolyn pushes herself to exhaustion—these are permission slips for viewers to recognise their own struggles and understand that they're not "broken" or "abnormal." These are human experiences (even when portrayed by animals).

The series' unflinching commitment to reality—despite being, you know, a cartoon about talking animals—also makes it raw and relatable. When that ottoman in BoJack's living room catches fire, it stays burnt in every subsequent episode—a brilliant metaphor for how our actions leave permanent marks on our lives and those around us. The show doesn't just touch on heavy topics; it belly-flops right into them

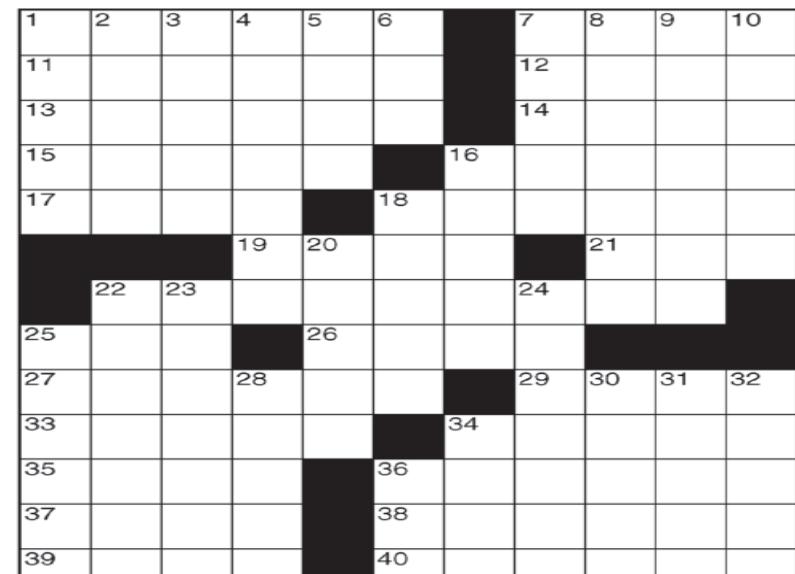
The genius of *BoJack Horseman* lies in its ability to make us laugh at our darkest moments while acknowledging their weight. As BoJack himself put it, "Life is just one hard kick in the urethra." But sometimes, watching a show about messy characters trying their best is exactly the comfort we need. In a world that often demands we put on a happy face and pretend everything's fine, *BoJack Horseman* stands as a mirror to the beauty of acknowledging our struggles, our failures, and our continuous attempts to do better, even when we keep messing up. And isn't that, after all, the way life is?

Back to that morning after my all-nighter, maybe hallucinating a conversation with BoJack Horseman isn't the worst way to start the day. At least he gets it. That's just, like, life, man—and I'm not alone in it.

## CROSSWORD

BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS	29 Physics amount	7 Start
1 Convincing	33 Lucy's brother	8 Kilaea, e.g.
7 Track shape	34 Fire starter	9 Ace, e.g.
11 Dense	35 Rara	10 Passed on the track
12 Flaring star	36 "The Naked and the Dead" author	16 Caesar subject
13 Good name	37 Minimal change	18 Japanese noodles
14 Marina spot	38 Mysterious	20 Cartesian line
15 Provinces	39 Hence	22 Away from the mouth
16 News summary	40 Poked fun at	23 Drizzly
17 Endure	18 Take turns	24 Reggae's birthplace
19 Final, for one	19 Final, for one	25 Comfort
21 Silent assent	21 Silent assent	28 Relish
22 Alcor's	22 Alcor's	30 Travel aid
23 constellation	23 constellation	31 Public outburst
25 Sauna site	25 Sauna site	32 Tatter
26 TV warrior	26 TV warrior	34 Foal's mother
27 Genesis	27 Genesis	36 Yoga need
DOWN		
1 PInk shade		
2 Met performance		
3 Stares stupidly		
4 Considers		
5 Comparable		
6 SQuirrel's cache		
7 Kicker's aid		



4-22

### SATURDAY'S ANSWERS

S	H	A	R	D		F	L	O	S	S
L	O	T	T	O		R	A	N	C	H
E	A	T	E	N		E	X			
U	G	H		A	W	E	H	I	M	
T	I	E		T	A	D	E	M	U	
H	E	S	T	E	R		A	S	P	S
	A	U	S	T	R	I	A			
D	U	M	B		H	A	M	M	E	R
E	V	E		D	O	C	E	R	A	
C	U	T		A	G	E	P	A	R	
A	L	I	B	I		C	E	A	S	E
L	A	M	E	R		A	N	G	E	L
S	E	D	Y	R	E	E	D	Y		

Write for us. Send us your opinion pieces to [dsopinion@gmail.com](mailto:dsopinion@gmail.com).