



The role of social media in youth political activism

"Our local papers, however, actively covered our protests. Social media-based news outlets on Facebook also contributed a lot. These local online pages were covering the protests, keeping protesters like us informed on where the police were or about the hotspots where most arrests were happening."

FROM PAGE 8

said, "Social media sites were showing what the students had to say at a time when, I feel like, traditional media outlets couldn't give us this platform."

The coverage of protests, especially if it takes place in a regional city, doesn't always make it into the national conversation. Discussing the role of social media in covering regional protests Nehal said, "The coverage of protests by the national media was minimal during the July Revolution in divisional cities like Khulna. We didn't see journalists from major media outlets on the ground while protesting here in Khulna. Our local papers, however, actively covered our protests. Social media-based news outlets on Facebook also contributed a lot. These local online pages were covering the protests, keeping protesters like us informed on where the police were or about the hotspots where most arrests were happening. They were going live during the massive clashes between the police and protesters on August 2 here. Even my parents came out looking for me after seeing the clashes on Facebook."

Yet there is a need to reach conventional media houses. Social media is a great tool for online activism and arranging flash protests, but conventional media has to



PHOTO: ZARIF FAIAZ

step in to put real pressure on any power structure. Nonetheless, individuals on social media have been doing much of the heavy lifting in drawing the attention of national and international media to persisting issues, even in the face of suppression.

"The collective attempt to reach the international media was a big step. Most Facebook-based activists urged people to turn to X to gain attention from international media outlets. They were successful as Al Jazeera had three interviews with the former ministers regarding the situation in the country. Throughout that period, the narrative that the ruling party was pushing was weak in social media. They also had to shut down the whole internet at one point. This move simply shows the impact social media had on the government,"

▲
PHOTO: ZARIF FAIAZ

Young people developing an interest in politics, activism, and state-building is a positive outcome.

said Zakaria.

If you try to catch lightning in a bottle, chances are you're going to get zapped a few times in the process. Using social media for political activism and similar to catching lightning in a bottle because when it works, it can be the best medium. Offering a diversity of political views on an open platform where everyone can have a voice and a collective narrative emerges without any censorship. But it equally has the opportunity to spread violence, hate speech, and mobilise groups preaching distorted narratives of the truth. Even in terms of political literacy, it runs a real risk of trapping you in an echo chamber of similar views, reinforcing a singular narrative and reducing one's ability of critical thinking and tolerance to opposing views.

"Obviously, the downside is the lack of

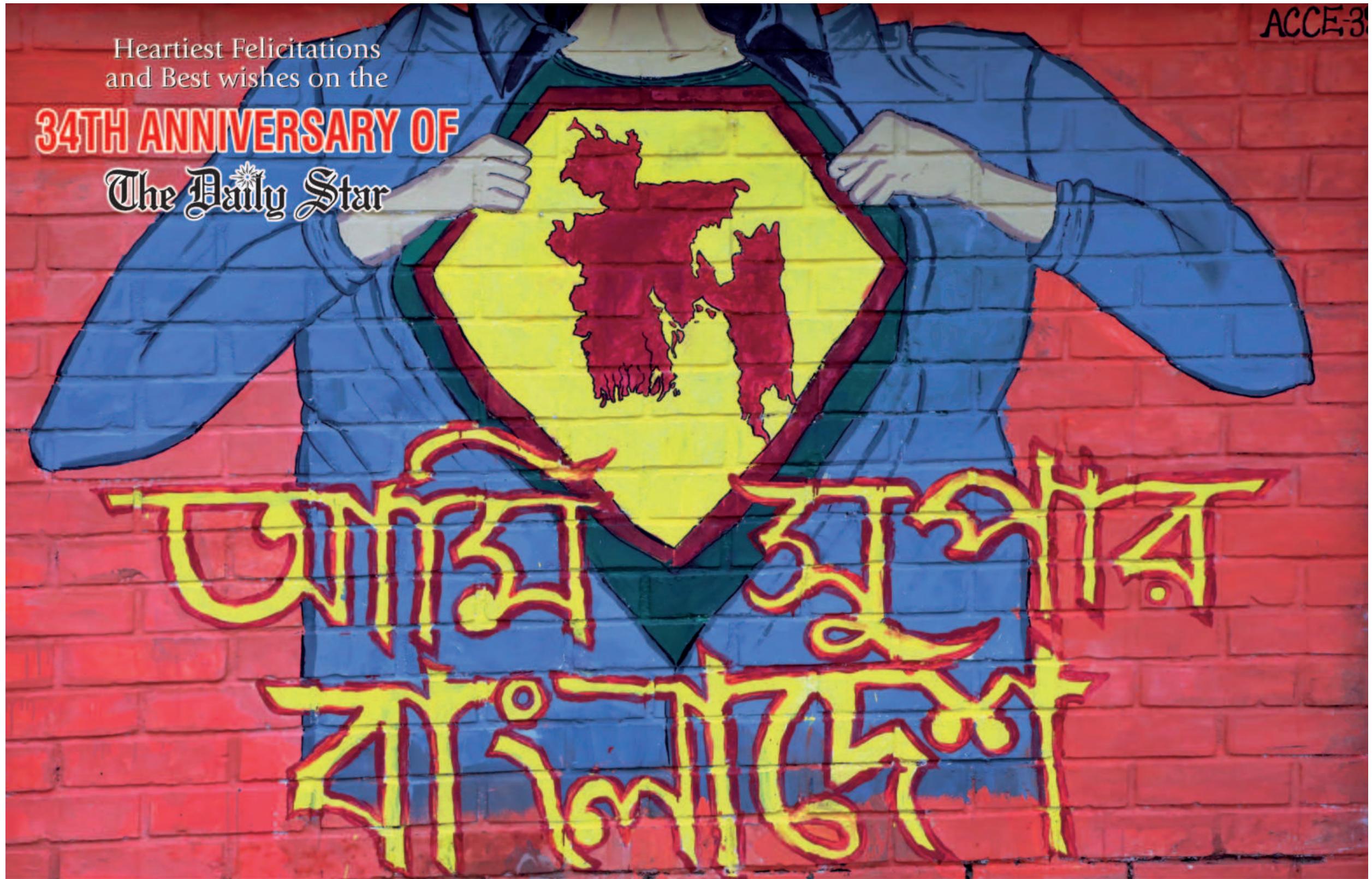
fact-checking on social media platforms. The algorithms often promote content with hate speech. Organised propaganda is also more effective on social media. People living inside these propaganda bubbles rarely get the chance to verify the news that they're getting. It divides entire communities and is often used to create an 'us versus them' narrative," said Mujahid.

This doesn't mean, however, that social media cannot be used for political literacy. But a sceptical view must be maintained to fact-check sources and to ensure that your feed is not becoming an echo chamber.

On the role of social media in the political literacy of our youth, Ahmed Abdul Mukit, a final-year student of Political Science at Dhaka University said, "Social media news outlets are winning out on the young demographic as these outlets tailor the news to our preferences. They chop the news into palatable pieces and visually appealing thumbnails which are easier to share from personal accounts. The spread of information is supercharged in this way. When it comes to political literacy, even conscious young people are choosing platforms like YouTube or podcasts, and maybe they're fact-checking the sources themselves. It's more convenient and a lot faster this way. The flipside is obviously accountability. Often self-serving, sponsored, or malicious content is presented in front of hundreds of thousands of people packaged as authentic news. Traditional media outlets crosscheck themselves and each other on a regular basis because they might lose credibility over this."

Young people developing an interest in politics, activism, and state-building is a positive outcome. The contribution of social media in energising the youth of this nation cannot be understated. It has united the country on a wide variety of issues. It is our hope that Gen Z can harness the benefits of social media and not give in to its potential for communal violence, misinformation, and propaganda.

Mehrab Jamee is an activist at Sandhani and a 5th-year medical student at Mugda Medical College.



• ARLINKS LIMITED

• IMAAN COLD STORAGE LTD.

• ARIS HOLDINGS LTD.

• R. R. COLD STORAGE LTD.

Rlinks
GROUP
e-mail : arlinks@arlinksgroup.com