

BNP pledges free media if elected

Says Fakhrul

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said his party would prioritise the establishment of a free and independent media sector if voted to power in the next national election.

Speaking at a views-exchange programme, organised by the Broadcast Journalist Centre at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre, Fakhrul said the BNP's 31-point reform outline clearly commits to building an independent mass media and forming a commission for that purpose.

"Our commitment is very clear... we want to see and build an independent and free mass media. That is why we committed to

SEE PAGE 9 COL 6



Commonwealth Secretary-General Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey at a meeting with Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus at the state guest house Jamuna yesterday.

PHOTO: CA'S PRESS WING

300 Dhaka buildings 'vulnerable': Rajuk

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rajuk Chairman Riazul Islam yesterday announced that approximately 300 small and large buildings in Dhaka have been identified as vulnerable following the recent earthquakes.

Speaking at a seminar titled "Preparedness and Actions to Reduce Earthquake Risks", organised by Rajuk at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB), Riazul said, "Following Friday's earthquake, we have been able to mark around 300 small and large vulnerable buildings. Both Rajuk and building owners share responsibility for constructions that violate rules and approved designs. However, the main responsibility lies with the building owners."

"We approve building construction strictly following the rules. No work at Rajuk happens in exchange for money," he added.

He clarified that "Rajuk itself does not design building plans," adding, "House owners have their buildings designed by engineers or architects and submit the plans to Rajuk with the commitment of following Rajuk regulations. If they fail to follow those rules later, the penalties or punishments

should apply to the house owners. Rajuk cannot be held responsible for that."

Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan emphasised the need for urgent action.

"To minimise possible damage from major earthquakes, strong and integrated initiatives must be taken immediately. Not just Rajuk – every related agency must work together. If necessary, the government's decision-making authority needs to be strengthened to take strict action regarding vulnerable buildings," she said.

Housing and Public Works Adviser Adilur Rahman Khan said, "Without coordinated steps from government agencies alongside public preparedness, earthquake risk cannot be reduced. There can be no negligence when it comes to public safety."

Buet earthquake and disaster management experts Dr Mehedi Ahmed Ansary and Dr Tanvir Manzur presented papers highlighting Dhaka's weak soil, unregulated construction, failure to comply with building codes, and structural vulnerabilities, warning that these factors could cause massive damage if a major earthquake were to strike the capital.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Publish the list of vulnerable buildings

Immediate structural assessment

Enforce building codes strictly

Introduce mandatory retrofitting

Political parties in Bangladesh run like businesses

Speakers tell discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

There is no truly democratic political party in Bangladesh, as politics has become a business driven by nomination trade, said Badiul Alam Majumdar, secretary of Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik, yesterday.

"Selling party nominations is one of the biggest reasons political parties are being harmed. This is now the main source of money for parties, and because of this, politics has turned into a business," he said at a discussion in Dhaka.

The roundtable, titled "Political Financing Culture in Bangladesh and Business Protection: Realities and Pathways to Solutions," was organised by the Dacca Institute of Research and Analytics.

Badiul Alam said many so-called political parties were essentially business syndicates that collect money, influence elections in various ways, and then operate as they wish.

He said religious political parties did not function as political entities either. "Major changes within political parties were necessary to address the problem, he said, adding that both the electoral arena and political space needed to be cleaned up and freed from wrongdoing.

In another discussion, Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of TIB, said they had proposed that every elected representative publish a full account of income and expenses within one month of taking office, with any mismatch triggering accountability.

He said money, muscle, and religion together form the core of political capital in Bangladesh, and without addressing them collectively, political culture will not change.

Although many believe the problems can still be fixed, he said most opportunities had already been lost.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

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DR IFTEKHARUZZAMAN
Executive director, TIB

Politicians, officials used DSA to settle 'personal disputes'

Says study by Clooney Foundation, CGS

ASIFUR RAHMAN

The Digital Security Act (DSA) was widely used by politicians and government officials to settle personal disputes with journalists and to harass and intimidate them, according to a new study on the law.

The study also said journalists were treated like high-profile criminals, often arrested in the pre-trial stage at odd hours by large groups of police without being properly informed of the reasons for their arrest. Their families and lawyers were also kept in the dark.

Analysing 222 cases filed against 396 journalists, the research found that the DSA's vague and overly broad provisions criminalised acts such as defamation, alleged misinformation, and "offensive" speech and were used to punish reporting and criticism.

Most cases never reached trial, making the legal process itself the punishment. Of the cases that went to trial, most ended in acquittals, indicating that the allegations were largely baseless, it said.

"Only one journalist in the dataset was convicted," the study noted.

Conducted by the Clooney Foundation for Justice and the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS), the report said the DSA had a chilling effect on press freedom in Bangladesh.

Although the law has changed, many journalists are still dealing with its consequences, it added.

At least 73 cases were filed by politicians, with almost 70 percent of them affiliated with the then-ruling Awami League. Another

Despite the repeal of the DSA by the Cyber Security Act (CSA) in 2023 and later by the Cyber Security Ordinance (CSO), the study warned that risks remain because pending DSA cases were not withdrawn.

34 cases were filed by government employees.

In 63 cases, the complainants were not the direct victims or subjects of the speech in question. "Our data shows that proceedings under the DSA could be triggered by anyone, even if they were not directly harmed or mentioned by the speech," the study said.

The researchers conducted an in-depth analysis of 30 cases and interviewed the affected journalists. Of them, 27 were arrested in the pre-trial stage as non-bailable provisions were added to cases that involved bailable provisions.

Nearly half were arrested late at night or early in the morning, often by 30-40 officers in plainclothes. Only three were immediately informed of the reasons for their arrest or the charges against them.

Despite the repeal of the DSA by the Cyber Security Act (CSA) in 2023 and later by the Cyber Security Ordinance (CSO), the study warned that risks remain because pending DSA cases were not withdrawn.

It noted that the CSO includes a broad and vague provision that carries forward some of the flaws of Section 31 of the DSA. "It is not clear whether the new safeguards will be sufficient to prevent arbitrary arrests and prolonged proceedings even under a narrower law."

The study added that in October 2025, the CSO dismissed only certain types of pending DSA cases. "The interim government has not issued an exhaustive list of all cases dropped or withdrawn following the amendment, nor

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

Star journalist among 6 awarded Disability Equality Media Fellowship

STAR REPORT

Six journalists were awarded the Disability Equality in the Media Fellowship in recognition of their reporting on disability inclusion and rights in Bangladesh yesterday.

The fellowship, supported by the Unesco Dhaka Office, was announced at a dialogue titled "Towards Disability-Inclusive Media: Dialogue on Editorial Policies and Practices", organised by Somosti in collaboration with Unesco at the National Institute of Mass Communication (NIMC) in the capital's Darus Salam.

The recipients are Nilima Jahan, staff reporter, The Daily Star; Md Manzurul Islam, senior sub-editor, Prothom Alo; Kawser Soheli, special correspondent, Maasranga Television; Nawaz Farhin Antara, former



senior reporter, Dhaka Tribune; Asadur Rahman, deputy station manager, Radio Padma 99.2 FM; and Rita Bhowmick, senior reporter, womeneye24.com.

In addition, Shahnaz Sharmin of Ekattor TV received a special crest and certificate for her role as a mentor to the fellows.

Dr Susan Vize, head of office and Unesco Representative to Bangladesh, and Muhammad Hiruzzaman NDC, director general of NIMC, handed over the crests and certificates.

Speakers at the event stressed the crucial role of the media in shaping respectful and accurate narratives about persons with disabilities.

They urged media organisations to adopt a transformative, rights-based and diversity-focused approach, noting that long-term shifts in public attitudes and policymaking require journalists to challenge stereotypes and promote inclusion.

JULY UPRISING

A missing son, a buried body, and a call no parent should receive

TOUSIF KAIUM

For Shafiqul Islam and Mukta Begum, the wait began on the morning of August 5, 2024, for their only son – and it never ended, until yesterday.

That day, 24-year-old Sabbir Hossain left home around 10:00am from near the Kanchpur Bridge to join the Dhaka March. He told his family he would return in an hour and a half.

Running out the door, he shouted that he would be back soon.

"But he never came back. We have searched everywhere, but found nothing," said Sumaiya, Sabbir's younger sister, recalling the day her brother disappeared during the July uprising.

The family, originally from Nilphamari but living in Narayanganj, searched hospitals, police stations, and

Yesterday noon, nearly one and a half years after Sabbir disappeared, Mukta received the call from Shahbagh Police Station she had long awaited – and feared. Their DNA matched one of the six bodies that had already been buried at Jurain graveyard in August this year.

morgues. They followed every rumour, made countless phone calls, and waited through months of uncertainty.

Shafiqul, a garment worker, said they found no trace despite visiting all major

hospital morgues in Dhaka and Narayanganj.

"We went to every morgue, but no one could give us any information. We contacted the police station, but nothing came of it. In some places, the morgue authorities even misbehaved with us," he said.

Sumaiya shared the same exhaustion. "We looked everywhere for months. At some point, we became certain he was no more."

After searching for months, the family learned that a body resembling Sabbir's had been kept in the Dhaka Medical College morgue along with five others – all victims of the uprising.

Shafiqul and Mukta went there, saw the bodies, and gave DNA samples to the CID's forensic lab, hoping at least to know where their son was and

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4



A section of the footpath on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue has remained dug up for weeks for drainage improvement work by the Dhaka North City Corporation, forcing pedestrians to walk on the road to get through. The area has not been properly cordoned off, posing a risk of accidents. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON