



'The fire in Karwan Bazar was not just an attack on two newspaper buildings; it was also an attack on press freedom.'

FILE PHOTO: MD ABBAS

Attacks on media houses, unruly politics, and the new democratic risk



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The smoke that rose from Karwan Bazar during the early hours of December 19 did not begin with fire. It started with grief, or so it seemed, apparently over the tragic killing of young leader Sharif Osman Hadi that shook the entire nation. In reality, that grief was exploited by vested quarters to do what many believe they wanted to do for long. Thus, the attacks on the offices of *Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star*, along with the unruly behaviour directed at New Age editor Nurul Kabir, were not spontaneous outbursts borne out of mourning. They were the result of a political atmosphere in which anger is weaponised and violence is quietly rationalised as moral action. Hadi's killing became the emotional trigger, but the target was the press. That shift tells us something deeply unsettling about how dissent, grief, and power are being managed today.

When the state cannot clearly and forcefully defend journalists, it sends a message that some forms of violence are tolerable, even if they are officially condemned. Democracy does not collapse all at once. It erodes slowly, through moments when the state hesitates and non-state actors step forward to fill the space.

The most troubling feature of these attacks is that they were carried out by groups that do not formally control the state, yet claim moral authority over it. These actors claim to defend national interest, religious values, or popular sentiment. In reality, they operate outside the law while masquerading as patriots or

it towards media houses. They were accused of distortion, bias, or silence. Whether these accusations are fair or not became irrelevant. What mattered was that the press had become a symbol, and symbols are easily burned.

This redirection did not happen organically. A significant role was played by online figures operating from outside the country. These digital actors speak loudly but risk nothing. From safe distances in Europe or North America, they frame events in moral absolutes and encourage confrontation.

Major media houses in Bangladesh have often failed to communicate effectively with the public, particularly with younger generations. They often speak in formal language, remain distant during crises, and assume that credibility speaks for itself. In a polarised environment, that assumption can be fatal.

They do not face tear gas, arrest, or retaliation. Those consequences fall on young men on the streets, many of whom believe they are acting heroically. In this sense, the violence against media houses was due as much to local anger as to outsourced radicalisation.

At the heart of this lies a dangerous misunderstanding of how media power actually works. Many attackers seem to believe that newspapers possess an almost magical ability to shape public opinion and fate, as if a single headline can sway the thoughts of millions overnight. This belief comes from an outdated view of communication, one that treats audiences as passive and the media as all-powerful. Modern research shows the opposite. Media influence is limited, filtered through personal beliefs, social networks, and digital algorithms. People choose what they consume. They argue, reject, remix, and ignore.

In today's Bangladesh, newspapers are no longer the dominant source of information. Social media platforms shape opinion far more aggressively and far less responsibly. Rumours spread faster than facts, and outrage travels further than evidence. If the genuine concern were manipulation, attention would be directed towards unregulated digital ecosystems. Burning newspaper offices does nothing to solve that problem. It only creates fear and silence.

Yet, defending the press does not mean denying its

weaknesses. Major media houses in Bangladesh have often failed to communicate effectively with the public, particularly with younger generations. They often speak in formal language, remain distant during crises, and assume that credibility speaks for itself. In a polarised environment, that assumption can be fatal. When accusations of being "anti-state" circulated, media institutions responded slowly and defensively. They did not explain their editorial processes. They did not humanise their tone. They did not actively engage in online narratives that were turning hostile.

This gap made it easier for non-state actors to define the media before the media could define itself. Silence was interpreted as arrogance or guilt. In an age where perception moves faster than truth, that silence became dangerous.

To understand why this moment matters, it is helpful to consider a simple model of media attacks by non-state actors. The process usually unfolds in five stages. First, a triggering event occurs, often involving death, injustice, or humiliation. Hadi's killing fits this stage. Second, emotional narratives spread rapidly, amplified by social media and external influencers. Third, the media is framed as an enemy, accused of betrayal or distortion. Fourth, symbolic violence is carried out against media institutions to demonstrate power and unity. Ultimately, fear sets in, leading to self-censorship and a weakening of accountability.

This model shows why such attacks are not isolated incidents. They are structural threats to democracy. Bangladesh is now witnessing the emergence of non-state actors hell-bent on threatening media freedom.

The state's response at this stage is crucial. Condemnation without enforcement is not enough. The interim government must make it unmistakably clear that violence against the press is a red line. That means arrests, prosecutions, and public accountability, regardless of who the perpetrators claim to represent.

At the same time, media institutions must change. They cannot afford to remain insulated silos. They must engage directly with citizens, especially young people. They must explain why journalism matters, how stories are verified, and where mistakes are acknowledged and corrected. Trust cannot be assumed. It must be rebuilt, patiently and publicly.

Hadi's death should have led to national reflection and institutional reform. Instead, it was weaponised to justify attacks on the very institutions that could have helped uncover the truth and demand justice. That inversion is the real tragedy. When grief is turned into violence and journalism becomes the enemy, democracy stands on fragile ground.

The fire in Karwan Bazar was not just an attack on two newspaper buildings; it was also an attack on press freedom. It was a signal that showed how quickly anger can be redirected, how easily non-state actors can shape political action, and how vulnerable democratic institutions become when both the state and the media fail to act decisively. If this moment is not taken seriously, the next crisis will be worse. And the subsequent fire may not stop at media houses.

A smarter solar strategy essential for Bangladesh's clean energy transition

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In recent years, Bangladesh has made notable progress in renewable energy production. The Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority (SREDA) estimates that five percent of the country's total generation capacity now comes from renewables. Solar energy is the primary contributor, accounting for 82 percent of renewable generation. Rooftop solar is steadily expanding, with 4,267 net-metered systems installed nationwide to date. Large-scale solar parks are also playing an increasingly important role.

Despite these advances, Bangladesh's solar potential remains largely untapped. Experts estimate this potential at 50,174 MW—sufficient to meet around 80 percent of the country's projected energy demand of 60,000 MW by 2041. The urgency to harness this potential has been heightened by the recent energy crisis. Responding to these challenges, the interim government announced ambitious targets in its Renewable Energy Policy of June 2025, aiming to generate 20 percent of energy from renewables by 2030 and 30 percent by 2040.

While rooftop solar continues to grow, Bangladesh must explore more effective alternatives to increase the share of renewables in its overall energy mix. Advances in solar, storage, and smart-grid technologies offer opportunities to leapfrog traditional power systems. One promising innovation is perovskite solar cells, a new class of photovoltaic (PV) material capable of converting up to 50 percent more sunlight into electricity than conventional silicon panels. This makes them particularly suitable for low-light conditions, including Bangladesh's monsoon seasons. Lightweight and adaptable, these cells can be printed or spray-coated, enabling applications such as "solar paint" on roofs or walls. Unlike traditional silicon PV, perovskites can be processed at near room temperature, significantly reducing manufacturing energy use and costs. Such high-efficiency, low-cost PV technologies could allow Bangladesh to expand capacity within

limited rooftop and urban spaces while lowering adoption costs for households, industries, and SMEs.

Alongside perovskites, emerging technologies such as thin-film and organic photovoltaics (OPV) offer distinct advantages. They are lightweight, flexible, and inexpensive to manufacture. Thin-film cells can be produced on rolls or plastic substrates, making them suitable for curved roofs, portable devices, and building integrated solar windows. In Bangladesh, thin-film modules could be installed on lightweight rooftops and building exteriors where heavier panels are impractical, while OPV films could supply power to village shops and small electronic devices.

Solar power generation typically requires more land than conventional power plants. As Bangladesh faces acute land constraints, floating photovoltaic (FPV) systems provide a way forward by enabling solar deployment on reservoirs, lakes, and ponds. Water acts as a natural coolant, improving panel efficiency and durability, while also reducing evaporation and algae growth. Bangladesh has already installed an FPV plant in Bagerhat, and this modular, scalable technology could rapidly add capacity without displacing farmers or occupying scarce land.

Agrivoltaics offers another solution by integrating solar panels and agriculture on the same land. Elevated PV arrays create dual-use fields where crops grow under partial shade while panels generate electricity. Studies show that this approach can increase overall land productivity, reduce water requirements, and raise combined crop and energy yields by 35 to 73 percent. In Bangladesh, trials with BRRI-33 rice indicate that intermittent shading does not reduce yields and may even improve plant growth, soil conditions, and water retention. A 100 MW semi-agrvoltaics project is already planned in Jamalpur, where green chillies, turmeric, and ginger will be cultivated beneath solar panels.

Beyond photovoltaic systems, solar thermal technologies also offer potential for renewable power generation. Thermoelectric generators, for example, can convert solar heat directly into electricity. Other solar thermal options, such as concentrating solar power (CSP), use mirrors or lenses to heat fluids that drive turbines. Unlike PV systems, CSP can store energy as heat—often using molten salt—and deliver electricity on demand. This feature is particularly valuable as it

allows energy supply during periods of low sunlight. Feasibility studies, especially in the Dinajpur region, have identified significant potential for CSP deployment.

In addition to CSP, several storage technologies are being developed to support photovoltaic power. Flow batteries store energy in liquid electrolytes held in external tanks, separating power capacity from storage volume. They offer long lifespans, often exceeding tens of thousands of cycles, and allow full depth of discharge. Although their energy density is lower than that of lithium-ion batteries, flow batteries are well-suited to large-scale, multi-hour grid storage and can smooth daily or weekly fluctuations in renewable generation with minimal degradation. Bangladesh currently has no grid-scale flow battery installations, but declining costs could make them viable for island grids or long-duration solar storage.

Among long duration storage solutions, pumped storage hydroelectric (PSH) is the most established. It uses surplus electricity to pump water to an elevated reservoir, releasing it later to generate power during peak demand. PSH offers large capacity at a relatively low cost per kilowatt-hour and can operate reliably for decades. Although Bangladesh has no PSH plants at present, the 2016 Power System Master Plan has set a target for the first project by 2030. Locations such as Kaptai, where an existing hydroelectric dam operates, or reservoirs in the hilly northeast could provide gigawatt-hour scale storage.

Modernising the power grid is essential to integrating renewable energy effectively. Smart grids use digital sensors, automated controls, and real-time data to optimise electricity flows and manage intermittent supply. In Bangladesh, US-funded studies have launched pilot projects in Dhaka and at the national transmission level to improve grid efficiency and flexibility. The 2025 net-metering reforms mark another important step. Under the revised policy, households and businesses can use rooftop solar for self-consumption and export excess electricity to the grid. Net exporters receive energy credits, which can be used to purchase electricity later. These measures encourage decentralised generation. When combined with smart grid investments, these measures will help Bangladesh manage its expanding renewable capacity more efficiently.

| Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh | | | | | |
|---|-----------|------------------------------------|---|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Local Government Engineering Department | | | | | |
| Office of the Upazila Engineer | | | | | |
| Upazila Sadar, District: Munshiganj | | | | | |
| www.lged.gov.bd | | | | | |
| Memo No. 46.02.5956.000.14.061.25.732 | | | | | |
| Date: 24.12.2025 | | | | | |
| e-Tender Notice No. 06/2025-26 (LTM) | | | | | |
| e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for following Package of Sadar, Munshiganj | | | | | |
| Sl No. | Tender ID | Package | Name of work | Last selling date & time | Closing date & time |
| 01 | 1168000 | e-Tender/MUN/SAD/ADP/2025-26/W-01 | Improvement of Doshkani-Bhuyain Ban-Champatola Road at Ch.0-200m under Panchasar Union, Munshiganj Sadar, Munshiganj | 12 Jan. 2026 17.00 | 13 Jan. 2026 12.00 |
| 02 | 1163821 | e-Tender/MUN/SAD/ADP/2025-26/W-02 | Construction of Khonokar Bari main road to Rampal graveyard via Nurul Sheikh residence under Ramal Union, Munshiganj Sadar, Munshiganj | 12 Jan. 2026 17.00 | 13 Jan. 2026 12.00 |
| 03 | 1163845 | e-Tender/MUN/SAD/ADP/2025-26/W-03 | Improvement of Syedpur Tempustand to Chitulia Bazar River east side Ghat at Ch.00-420m under Adhara union, Munshiganj Sadar, Munshiganj | 12 Jan. 2026 17.00 | 13 Jan. 2026 12.00 |
| 04 | 1202929 | e-Tender/MUN/SADA/UDF/2025-26/W-03 | a) Rehabilitation of Matborbari Mor to Ajit Doctor House Road by Uni Block at Ch.00m-145m under Panchsar UP, Upazila: Munshiganj Sadar, District: Munshiganj b) Rehabilitation from Notungao Kahir Sir House to Mehedi Hasan Sharif House Road by Uni Block at Ch.00m-135m under Panchsar UP, Upazila: Munshiganj Sadar, District: Munshiganj. c) Rehabilitation of Bonikopara Bytunnoor Jame Mosque Road at Ch.00m-285m under Panchsar Upazila: Munshiganj Sadar, District: Munshiganj | 12 Jan. 2026 17.00 | 13 Jan. 2026 12.00 |

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Upazila Engineer
LGED, Munshiganj-S
Munshiganj

| Office of the Project Director | | | | | |
|--|--|-----------|--------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| Economically Lost Lifecycle Rubber Tree Felling, Restoration and Rubber Processing Modernization Project | | | | | |
| Bangladesh Forest Industries Development Corporation | | | | | |
| 73, Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000 | | | | | |
| www.bfidc.gov.bd | | | | | |
| Ref-22.03.0000.022.122.01.003.25-96 | | | | | |
| Date: 24-12-2025 | | | | | |
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| e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (https://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of below: | | | | | |
| SL | Description | Tender ID | Last selling date & time | Last date & time of tender security submission | Closing & opening date & time |
| 01 | Procurement for hiring service personnel through outsourcing policy. | 1202860 | 06-01-2026 16:00 | 07-01-2026 12:00 | 07-01-2026 14:00 |

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24-12-25
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Project Director (Joint Secretary)
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