

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

## Meta's unforgivable inaction

### A shameful failure to protect independent journalism

The stark revelation that the grievous attacks on *The Daily Star* and *Prothom Alo* as well as two cultural institutions, Chhayanaut and Udichi, were fuelled by false narratives circulating on social media for days in plain sight of both the interim government and Meta, the owner of Facebook, is shocking and unacceptable. A joint study by *The Daily Star* and Dismislab, which analysed 3,064 Facebook posts published between December 13 and 19, found a clear link between online incitement and the violence directed at the media and cultural institutions.

The evidence indicates that neither law enforcement agencies nor Meta acted in time to halt the spread of some of the most virulent hate speech and inciting content—material that remained visible for hours and days and even included live-streamed acts of violence accompanied by calls for others to join. The night-long attacks, along with calls for further violence that persisted even afterwards, exposed glaring weaknesses in Meta's monitoring and response systems in detecting and removing content posing imminent threats to life and property.

Even more troubling is the claim by the Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC) that its repeated requests to deactivate accounts inciting and mobilising violence did not receive timely responses. According to the BTRC, it reported 165 pieces of content to Facebook between midnight on December 18 and the evening of December 19, requesting their removal in the interest of public safety.

This episode represents a glaring failure by Meta to enforce its own policies on violence and incitement as outlined in its Community Standards. As a result, some self-styled influencers, including those operating from thousands of miles away, have been able to exploit social media platforms, particularly Facebook, to disseminate misinformation, propagate hate-filled narratives, organise mobs and direct violence against independent media and liberal voices and institutions. Their incitement led to arson attacks on the media houses, destruction of valuable documents, and attempts to burn alive 29 journalists and employees at *The Daily Star*. Meta and other social media companies must take responsibility for the misuse of their platforms and be held accountable for failing to enforce their own standards.

Recent legal proceedings against Meta and its CEO in the United States and several Western countries for failing to curb online harm are developments that our government should closely follow. These cases may offer pathways to holding big technology companies accountable and ensuring public safety. We also express deep indignation at the failure of the interim government led by Muhammad Yunus to prevent these attacks.

Following the attacks, a Facebook post by the then press secretary to the chief adviser even acknowledged the state's failure to act but did not explain what prevented a timely and proper response. Was there negligence within the interim administration? Why did it fail even to issue a clear condemnation of the attacks? It is deeply regrettable that a government born out of an uprising against autocracy now bears a lasting stain on its record for failing to prevent one of the most serious attacks on institutions rooted in independent journalism in Bangladesh.

## Refrain from partisan acts

### Appointing BNP leaders as city administrators is problematic

The appointment of BNP leaders as administrators in six city corporations within a week of the Tarique Rahman government taking office sends an uneasy signal. The government's reported justification—that political appointees will help expedite civic services—appears somewhat forced, especially in light of LGRD Minister and BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir's recent statement.

Soon after his appointment on February 18, the LGRD minister said local government elections would be held as soon as possible. If that is the case, there is little reason as to why the interim government-appointed administrators could not have continued with their duties. While it is true that local government services have suffered tremendously during the 18 months of interim administration, the circumstances surrounding these new appointments must be considered.

After the fall of the Awami League government—long criticised for partisan appointments and other questionable practices—on August 5, 2024, the interim government removed the mayors of city corporations, district councils, upazila parishads and municipalities, replacing them with government officials. This move was reportedly necessary as most elected representatives had either fled or been arrested. Many officials were required to carry out administrative duties in addition to their existing responsibilities, and therefore often remained less accessible to local communities. These factors, combined with the fact that government officials are not directly answerable to constituents, created gaps in the delivery of civic services at the local levels. As a result, citizens are now eagerly awaiting the return of elected representatives to the local government bodies.

The Election Commission is reportedly waiting for a parliamentary decision on the ordinance issued by the interim government that abolished the use of party symbols in local body elections. Election Commissioner Abdur Rahmani Masud, on February 2, said once the decision is made, the two city corporation elections can be held. The 13th parliament is set to convene on March 12. Then there are the reserve seat election, the by-election of Bogura-6 constituency and the poll for Sherpur-3, all of which the EC hopes to complete before April 14. In other words, the EC should be able to hold the city government elections within three to four months. Then why rush to make such political appointments? The BNP government's decision to appoint party leaders to the city administrators' positions shows that it could not rise above party interest. We urge the government to refrain from such partisan acts and make more inclusive democratic decisions.

# Climate actions need less talk, more work

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At a recent climate *adda* hosted by the Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), participants including COP30 returnees, local youth climate activists, researchers, engineers, and policy thinkers gathered to reflect on the COP experience and draw lessons on how climate engagement can be meaningfully taken forward. What emerged from the discussion was neither cynicism nor grand wisdom, but a healthy dose of clarity.

Participants of the Belem COP convening spoke of a sense of impasse that masked a crisis of language and power, and of a negotiation landscape increasingly shaped by ambiguity. Wealthy nations continue to dilute commitments through carefully crafted language. "Phase out" becomes "transition away." Timelines become "pathways." Responsibilities become "shared aspirations."

The COP28 Dubai declaration's reference to transitioning away from fossil fuels was welcomed globally. But without binding mechanisms and clarity on financing, such phrases risk becoming diplomatic poetry. The questions remain: how will funds be mobilised? Who will pay? And under what accountability structure?

Bangladesh, despite being one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world, still struggles with consistent representation in these global rooms. Its delegations often lack institutional memory due to bureaucratic turnover. Critical thematic areas such as gender, just transition, and sexual and reproductive health rights frequently lack specialised negotiators. That weakens our ability to shape definitions before they are finalised. At the same time, fossil fuel lobbyists—numbering in the thousands at recent summits—continue to influence outcomes. If COP processes are to succeed, a support constituency hitherto less in focus for Global South activists must become central to engagement—namely, the citizenry of developed countries. Without domestic political pressure in the Global North, international climate agreements will continue to stall.

Looking domestically, there is progress, but it is episodic and fragmented. The whole has yet to become greater than the sum of its parts. But we must acknowledge that Bangladesh is not standing still. Youth engagement has increased markedly in recent years. Climate discussions have also entered school curricula. Media coverage has expanded. Solar expansion is visible. Local innovation is happening. Yet, something remains disconnected. Policies exist in abundance, as do strategies, frameworks, action plans, and adaptation blueprints. But

implementation continues to lag. Communities often see seminars, but not solutions. The gap between "bags of documents" and lived experience persists.

Another crucial missing element is data. Participants in the climate *adda* spoke candidly about the lack of reliable, standardised climate data repositories. In some cases, data are apparently manipulated to strengthen funding appeals. While this may bring short-term relief, it erodes scientific credibility in global negotiations. A country that cannot present transparent, validated evidence weakens its moral and technical standing. If climate justice is our demand, data integrity must be our discipline.

There is another problem, too: the tokenistic inclusion of youth. Bangladesh frequently celebrates youth participation, but effective inclusion remains uneven. Climate-vulnerable youth—particularly those from coastal belts, char areas, and agrarian communities—are often absent from

frameworks, rather than in parallel spaces.

The second priority concerns solutions and innovation. The discourse must pivot from problem-recitation to solution-scaling. Bangladesh already hosts grassroots adaptive practices: climate-resilient agriculture, floating cultivation, localised construction innovations, etc. But they remain scattered. As one participant observed, many grassroots communities have adapted ingeniously, but there is no systematic consolidation of these practices. Pilot, document, evaluate, scale—that must become the model.

The third priority relates to governance and transparency. Climate finance is flowing globally, but fund utilisation remains opaque. Greenwashing is under increasing scrutiny. The *adda* participants proposed mechanisms such as dedicating a percentage of corporate social responsibility funds to structured climate risk pools. Governance systems must ensure that resources

to strategy. Advocacy must move beyond statements and hashtags to link knowledge with policy pathways. It must connect with civil society actors in the Global North to create transnational pressure. It must also translate technical climate debates into electoral issues within Bangladesh.

The discussion challenged the conventional framing of climate vulnerability. Bangladesh's climate discourse often centres almost exclusively on coastal and char regions. Yet, vulnerable inland locations and our expanding urban centres constitute a new climate vulnerability map. Air quality, heat stress, and waterlogging—these must enter the climate conversation. Climate resilience is not only about embankments; it is also about urban governance, agricultural systems, labour transitions, and educational reform.

The PPRC *adda* resisted simplistic binaries. The private sector is often treated solely as a polluter or adversary.



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'A lesson emerging from COP participation is that for advocacy to deliver results, it must be married to strategy.'

reach communities efficiently and transparently. The fourth priority is capacity-building. Leadership development cannot remain confined to conference circuits. Technical skills—data management, climate modelling, resilient engineering—must reach vulnerable districts. Bureaucratic reshuffles often derail institutional continuity; capacity must therefore be distributed, not centralised.

Data and knowledge infrastructure are also central if climate engagement is to gain serious traction. A standardised, validated climate data network, potentially community-based, holds great promise. It is not enough just to produce data; evidence must be untampered, accessible, and policy-relevant. Without credible data, both domestic policy and international negotiating positions get weakened.

A lesson emerging from COP participation is that for advocacy to deliver results, it must be married to strategy. Urban-based advocacy networks sometimes operate in silos. Multiple youth platforms exist, yet coordination is limited. Collaboration is episodic rather than institutionalised. The *adda* highlighted an important shift in thinking: youth engagement must move from participation to co-design. Young climate leaders do not simply want seats at the table; they want roles in shaping funding models, piloting innovations, and designing accountability frameworks. While the discussion was informal in spirit, there was surprising consensus on several interlinked priorities for the country going forward. The first is partnership and collaboration. The youth present in the room brought forward an important conclusion: horizontal linkages between organisations must replace siloed activism. Universities, think tanks, grassroots groups, engineers, agricultural innovators, and policy advocates must operate within shared

But small scale farmers, entrepreneurs, and even engineering firms are potential partners in innovation and financing. Structured engagement, rather than suspicion alone, could unlock scalable solutions.

Perhaps the most important ingredient of the solution is commitment—to produce "schools of practice" rather than merely convening talk shops. A new generation of climate-literate youth, unwilling to accept symbolic inclusion, represents a potential force for shifting the country from reactive vulnerability to proactive resilience. Whether the global climate architecture remains fragmented, regional coordination weak, international finance politically entangled, or domestic implementation constrained by bureaucratic inertia, it is crucial to empower young people to co-design climate actions grounded in lived realities. We cannot allow the next COP communiqué to become just another document in the bag.

# Think twice before forcing a third language on school students



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The education ministry, under the new government, has recently introduced a 12-point reform plan to update the national curriculum. It contains a few recommendations worth noting. Raising the education budget to five percent of GDP, for instance, is a commendable and long-overdue move. However, the agenda also reveals a concerning dilemma in terms of its priorities. For instance, it makes learning a third language compulsory at the secondary level.

Now, learning a new language is undeniably a positive thing. It can help students connect to the world better and even widen their scope of employment to include non-English-speaking countries. But cramming a third language into the national curriculum is a puzzling move considering our current educational crisis. For one, it is a massive cognitive burden on students who are currently struggling to master even their mother tongue. A study by the National Academy for Primary

Education shows that a staggering 79 percent of third-graders lack basic skills in reading, writing, and understanding Bangla. Furthermore, over 42 percent of the population has reading skills below the fifth-grade level.

So making it compulsory for students to memorise the vocabulary of another foreign language beyond English may only worsen the culture of rote memorisation, which this government has explicitly promised to eliminate.

Furthermore, the idea that children must learn foreign languages in school to be globally competitive is also outdated. If the goal is workplace communication, targeted language courses for adults are sufficient enough. According to one study, even a one-week intensive course significantly boosts an adult's focus and executive function. So, once they identify a real career need for it, an adult can easily pick up a specific language in a focused six-month course.

In contrast, the complex thinking required for problem-solving and cultural empathy (skills that most students lack) cannot be crammed into a six-month corporate seminar. Artistic thinking, too, is a massive, compounding learning process that must be nurtured throughout a child's entire upbringing. Making art and music optional while making third language classes compulsory could eventually affect us as a nation.

Bangladesh is fast approaching the middle-income trap. Our industrial backbone, the readymade garments sector, makes up over 80 percent of our exports but remains stuck in basic manufacturing models. Foreign buyers hold all the creative and pricing power, leaving our factories to compete solely on cheap labour. In order to capture real value and increase profit margins, we should transition to designing our own products. But this is impossible to do without a workforce trained in aesthetic principles, spatial reasoning, and industrial design. Our nationwide "design deficit" ensures that we remain the executors of foreign ideas rather than the creators of our own.

Beyond the economy, art education on a national level is vital for raising better citizens and improving our Human Development Index. Cultural and creative industries drive sustainable growth and empower populations. Arts education can also

improve academic writing and boost compassion for others. Furthermore, music and art are vital components for ensuring good mental health.

When we systematically deprive a population of aesthetic education, we create a nationwide culture of "artlessness." This deficit shows up brutally in our physical environments. We see it in the messy sprawl of our megacities, where poor urban planning ruins the visual identity of our infrastructure and turns them into concrete jungles of chaos. Civic aesthetics—that is, the moral duty to keep shared spaces clean, follow traffic laws, and behave cordially—is not a natural trait, and is best taught through the humanities and arts. Societies that take aesthetics seriously usually produce citizens who view public pollution as a personal, even moral, failure.

Knowing a foreign language is a valuable asset for the modern worker, but it is largely a practical tool. Art, music, literature, and design, however, are the soil from which civilisation, innovation, and empathy grow. If the government truly wants education to be a nation-building project, it must resolve this flaw in its agenda. Policymakers need to recognise that an appreciation for beauty, a talent for original design, and a compassionate civic outlook are not elite privileges. They are the mass prerequisites for a prosperous and peaceful Bangladesh.