



Ministers, opposition leaders, diplomats, businesspeople, and members of the civil society, among other guests, attend The Daily Star's 35th anniversary celebrations. PHOTO: STAR

# Let media report freely, without fear

Politicians, diplomats, academics, business leaders, civil society members, and readers attend Star's 35th anniversary programme

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The attacks on The Daily Star and Prothom Alo offices were not merely assaults on newspapers but on freedom of press, dignitaries said yesterday, calling for an environment where the media can report facts freely, courageously, and without intimidation.

They shared their thoughts about the importance of independent journalism while reacting to the attacks as The Daily Star celebrated its 35th anniversary at its office in the capital, where scars of the December 18 assault were displayed.

After seeing the photographs, and installations made from the rubble, politicians, diplomats, academics, business leaders, civil society members, and readers praised The Daily Star's resilience and wished the newspaper continued strength

last such attack on The Daily Star. "What I liked most was that, no matter how much intimidation there is, journalists still want to express independent opinions, even at the risk of their lives," she said.

Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed said The Daily Star had left a memorable mark in journalism, media freedom and social responsibility. He hoped the paper and other media would help build a strong democratic state, in line with public expectations and the 2024 student uprising.

On the attacks on The Daily Star and Prothom Alo, he said those involved would soon be brought under the law. "The government is fulfilling its responsibility to uphold the rule of law. As the matter is under investigation, it is not appropriate to say more. But justice will be ensured, and all those involved will face legal action," he

**I have been here from the first day of The Daily Star. Now I see that after 35 years, it is still alive fearlessly.**  
PROF REHMAN SOBHAN

in its pursuit of independent, objective, and courageous journalism.

They said the newspaper's decision to publish the next day, despite the arson attack on its office with journalists still inside, reflected the role the media must play in defending truth, public accountability, and democratic values.

Economist Prof Rehman Sobhan said he had been with The Daily Star from its first day. "Now I see that after 35 years, it is still alive fearlessly," he said.

About the celebration, he said the newspaper had managed to bring together all the main players, including the leader of the opposition and powerful ministers on the front bench. "This is a very good initiative," he said.

Abdullah Abu Sayeed, author and founder of Bishwo Shahitto Kendro, said he enjoys reading The Daily Star because it gives him new perspectives and new light, not always found in an average newspaper.

He also said the paper maintains neutrality and practises professional journalism. "For a nation, it is very important that such a newspaper stands strong," he said.

Political scientist Prof Rounaq Jahan said, "We cannot have our breakfast without The Daily Star."

She said readers trust The Daily Star as an objective and courageous newspaper, adding that the attack had shocked her. "It is beyond words that such a barbaric attack could take place on an independent newspaper. Nothing can be more condemnable than this," she added.

She hoped this would be the first and

said.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Zahir Uddin Swapon said the brutal attack showed how difficult The Daily Star's journey had been. "The evidence of destruction shown in the exhibition proves how difficult a path The Daily Star has had to cross."

He hoped the newspaper would continue to move forward by facing adversity, and should remain attentive to making every report objective. He also said the government had condemned the attacks on media outlets and pledged to resist them.

Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku said freedom of expression in newspapers must not be met with hostility. "If any group reacts with anger, it becomes a major obstacle on democracy's path. I hope we have overcome that. We must remain vigilant so such incidents do not recur," he said. "The Daily Star has always spoken for the people, for truth, and for democracy," he added.

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman said, "Stars were born an eternity ago. They reside in the sky and deliver justice to everyone, showing equal light and guidance to all. The Daily Star will show that same thing -- this is our expectation of it as a nation."

"... [We expect The Daily Star] to give equal importance to all," he said.

Reacting to the attacks, he said such attacks were regrettable and had happened before in Bangladesh, including the ones involving the Dainik Sangram and Daily Amar Desh. "We never support this kind

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# Rising from the ashes, EVEN STRONGER

The Daily Star celebrates its 35th anniversary, honours rescuers of Dec 18 attack

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As guests walked into The Daily Star premises to mark its 35th anniversary, they were not met with glossy interiors or a polished lobby.

Instead, they encountered the first two floors laid bare like a wound -- hollowed out and fire scarred from the night of December 18, 2025.

Spotlights lit up charred walls and peeling paint, while footfalls stirred soot from broken tiles, making the air hang heavy. Piles of burnt newspapers and shattered glass lined the walkways, and the summer heat made the scorched woodwork swelter.

On the first day of the two-day event yesterday, what was on display was not an aestheticised, carefully curated exhibit, but a raw, unflinching look at the heinous attack, which around 30 staffers of the newspaper survived.

However, after a day's gap, the newspaper was published with a single-word headline, "Unbowed".

As The Daily Star marked its three and a half decades, the ceremony served as a stark reminder that mobs could burn a building, but not its guiding principle of journalism without fear or favour.

Even when faced with the fear of death, its journalists upheld the newspaper's motto -- "Your right to know".

The programme began with the national anthem, followed by a one-minute silence observed in memory of the 13th anniversary of the Rana Plaza collapse, the martyrs of the 1971 Liberation War, the 1990 anti-autocracy movement, and the 2024 July Uprising.

"When a free press is set ablaze, democracy burns with it," said Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of the newspaper, adding that democracy falters when presses are silenced.

He reminded the audience that the newspaper, founded on January 14, 1991, was born during the fall of General HM Ershad's autocracy. "Our journey began alongside the rebirth of democracy.

**UNBOWED**  
The Daily Star  
CELEBRATING  
**35**  
YEARS of  
JOURNALISM WITHOUT  
FEAR OR FAVOUR

"As a front-row witness for 35 years, I have seen where we excelled and where we faltered. Our greatest failure has been the inability to institutionalise democracy."

He said the February 12 election and the newly elected parliament mark a renewal of the pledge to democracy, and reminded the audience that this government is not "business as usual" because it emerged through the July uprising.

"As a non-partisan paper, we speak not of a partisan victory, but of an elected government that must reflect the dreams of its people," said Anam, adding, "You [the newly-elected government] are the product of a revolution led by students -- the July uprising. This signifies something profound. Do not underestimate the dreams of that revolution; it is a perspective that must guide your path."

The newspaper's editor added, "I would like to tell my fellow journalists that your job is not to serve your owner. Your job is to serve the

people, your readers, your listeners. Sometimes you forget. I appeal to you to realise the value, the magnificent ethos of your profession."

Anam also appealed to the new leadership to pay heed to environmental destruction. "We are among the countries that have the highest number of rivers -- all fresh water -- while the world is dying for drinkable water. This is an asset. The rivers in the country are not being polluted by our enemies but ourselves. Meanwhile, groundwater, which is supposed to serve the next generations, is being extracted indiscriminately."

During the ceremony, the organisation handed over tokens of appreciation to members of the army, police, and fire service for their efforts in saving the lives of The Daily Star's staffers on the night of December 18, 2025, despite many challenges.

They included Lieutenant Colonel Sami Ud Dowla Chowdhury, director of ISPR; and Lieutenant Colonel Md Junnun Nahid, both of whom were recognised in absentia.

Also honoured were Kazi Nazmuzzaman, PFM, assistant director of the Fire Service and Civil Defence Directorate; Md Nazim Uddin Sarker, PFM, senior station officer at the Tejgaon Fire Station; Mohammad Ibne Mizan, deputy commissioner (Tejgaon Division) of from Jacket 1

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## THE GRASSROOTS NATION BUILDERS

Four individuals recognised for their outstanding contributions to society



**RAHIMA KHATUN** (Social Cause/ Healthcare)

Rahima Khatun's journey is not only one of service, but also of quiet resilience shaped by deep personal hardship. Early in her life, her mother-in-law cast her out, leaving her to struggle for survival and dignity at a time when support systems for women were scarce. Rather than breaking her, this experience strengthened her empathy for others, especially vulnerable women facing rejection, poverty, or neglect. Over more than three decades as a grassroots health worker in Chuadanga,

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**BALLAL HOSSAIN** (Farming)

Ballal Hossain's journey is a powerful story of resilience and transformation, from a struggling day labourer to a successful agricultural entrepreneur in Jashore. Forced to leave school after Class Five due to financial hardship, he took low-paid jobs just to survive. Instead of giving up, he gradually turned to farming, starting small and enduring setbacks such as storms that destroyed his early efforts. With determination and support from agricultural initiatives, he adopted

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**SHIRIN AKTER** (Sports)

For Shirin Akter, becoming Bangladesh's fastest woman was never just about speed. It was about refusing to stop, even when life tried to hold her back at every turn. From a young girl in a village, borrowing Tk 10 to make a phone call and running barefoot to a competition with torn sandals in her hands, she grew into a determined athlete who stood alone against doubt, even from her own family. Her journey is built on quiet defiance and deep resilience. The day a

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**NAGINA NAJNIN BANU** (Entrepreneurship)

At the heart of Thakurgaon's mozzarella cheese revolution stands Nagina Najnin Banu, a woman whose determination transformed not only her own life but also the lives of countless others around her. What began as a personal struggle gradually became a source of hope for an entire community. In a place where women's roles were often confined within the walls of their homes, Nagina dared to dream differently. Through hardship and uncertainty, her relentless

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Guests stand for the national anthem, followed by a one-minute silence in remembrance of those who laid down their lives for the country during the 1971 Liberation War, the 1990 anti-autocracy movement, and the July 2024 mass uprising, and also for the victims of the Rana Plaza tragedy. PHOTO: STAR