



Politicians, business leaders, academics, civil society members, students and others joined The Daily Star yesterday in celebrating its 35th anniversary in Chattogram. Among others, State Minister for CHT Affairs Mir Mohammed Helal Uddin and CCC Mayor Sahadat Hossain were present. The event at Hotel Agrabad marked the first stop in a month-long divisional tour, following the central programme in Dhaka on April 24-25. Coming just months after the December 18, 2025, mob attack on its Dhaka office, the gathering featured a documentary and photo exhibition on the incident. Similar programmes will next be held in Barishal, Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Rangpur and Mymensingh. PHOTOS: RAJIB RAIHANVA

## Attack on Star 'heinous'

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more than three decades of a journey guided by its founding motto "Journalism Without Fear or Favour".  
MASalam, former vice-president of the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association, termed the December 18 attack "heinous" and urged legal action from the government.  
Delwar Majumder, former president of the Institute of Engineers Bangladesh, Chattogram centre, said, "I spent the whole night in tension after learning that journalists were stranded on the rooftop during the assault."  
Mir Mohammad Helal Uddin, state minister for land and CHT affairs, said no community can sustain itself without press freedom. "I humbly request The Daily Star to criticise our work in a constructive manner."  
Chattogram City Corporation Mayor Dr Sahadat Hossain praised the newspaper's motto, saying the paper truly practises independent journalism. "I urge the editor to highlight the issues

of Chattogram more prominently in the newspaper reports."  
Abu Sufian, BNP lawmaker from Chattogram-9, expressed confidence that the paper would continue its commitment to the people in the future just as it has for many years.  
The celebration followed a central event held at the newspaper's Dhaka office on April 24-25. Chattogram marked the first stop in a month-long divisional tour that will see the anniversary celebrated in Barishal, Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Rangpur and Mymensingh as part of the month-long tour.  
Kamal Ahmed, the newspaper's consulting editor, said news media is inseparable from democracy. "We never thought we could come under an attack after the July uprising. The attack proves that those who don't like independent journalism are still active."  
Mahfuz Anam stressed that a newspaper's popularity depends on its connection with readers, pledging

more coverage of Chattogram as part of national development.  
"Those who are in power should understand that news media is the only way for the government to know the right information," he added.  
He urged the people of Chattogram to patronise the independent journalism, adding, "We pledge that we will be responsible."  
The programme commenced at 4:30 pm with the national anthem, followed by a one-minute silence observed in memory of the martyrs of the Liberation War and those who lost their lives during the anti-autocracy movement in 1990 and the July uprising in 2024.  
This anniversary carried a special weight, coming just months after last year's harrowing attack on The Daily Star office in Dhaka on December 18. During the incident, a mob set the building on fire, endangering the lives of 30 staff members, mostly journalists, who were trapped on the rooftop before being rescued.

Despite the destruction of six floors, the newspaper did not miss a single day of publication. The following morning, it hit the stands with a defiant, single-word headline: "UNBOWED".  
"Our support for more than three decades has helped us continue our work through the most difficult times," the newspaper stated in a tribute to its readers and patrons. "The headline 'UNBOWED' was not just a word; it was our commitment to ethical journalism."  
The Chattogram event featured a documentary screening and photo exhibition on the attack. Attendees included politicians from across the spectrum -- BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, left-leaning organisations, Helafat-e-Islam, the National Citizen Party, the Communist Party and Ganosambhati Andolon -- as well as leading business figures from BSRM Group, Pacific Jeans, Eastern Apparels, Asian Group, Independent Apparels and others.

## Farmers forced to sell paddy

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and traders at far cheaper rates.  
Farmers interviewed by The Daily Star said prices plunged from Tk 750-1,100 per maund (37.32 kg) earlier in the season to Tk 600 now, nearly half the production cost.  
Bidhan Sarkar of Kalmakanda upazila in Netrokona said he sold at Tk 750 per maund initially, but yesterday the price dropped to Tk 600.  
"Due to inadequate sunlight, paddy cannot be dried properly, leading to further decline," he said.  
The rates were similar at markets in Barhata upazila.  
At Fakir Bazar, farmer Roni Mia said the millers and traders were offering Tk 600 per maund. Just days ago, he sold the paddy at Tk 800.  
"No one is willing to buy my wet paddy," he said. Rice trader Khokon Mia said, "If wet paddy is stored, it sprouts. We bought some at Tk 600-650 [per maund] but faced losses. We will resume once there is sunshine."  
Rakibul Hasan, additional deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Netrokona, said 8,190 hectares of haor land and 5,276 hectares of non haor land were submerged, raising concern about meeting the production target for the district.  
The department estimates that more than 80,000 farmers have been affected directly due to the situation, according to him.  
In Kishoreganj, farmer Alim Uddin of Mithamoin said he cultivated paddy on nearly three hectares of land. "In mid-April, I sold at Tk 750-800 per maund. Just five days ago, I had to sell at Tk 700. Traders said the colour deteriorated, further reducing the price."  
Ashraf Islam of Ina upazila said he struggled to sell 100 maunds three days ago. "Traders offered Tk 600. After visiting 10 markets, I sold at Tk 650. But my production cost exceeds Tk 1,200 per maund."  
Md Sadiqur Rahman, deputy director of DAE in Kishoreganj, said rain since yesterday morning has raised river and floodwater levels, submerging nearly 7,000 hectares of haor paddy fields.  
Preliminary estimates suggest more

than 21,000 farmers have been affected, according to him.  
In Habiganj, farmer Azizul Islam of Baniachong said his harvested paddy is rotting due to cloudy weather. "At the start of the season, I sold at Tk 1,000-1,100 per maund. Now I am forced to sell at Tk 600."  
According to Habiganj DAE, 11,300 hectares of ripe paddy fields have been submerged, with about 20,000 farmers affected as of May 2, said Additional Deputy Director Deepak Kumar Biswas.  
The Bangladesh Meteorological Department has forecast heavy to very heavy rainfall in Dhaka, Mymensingh, Chattogram, and Sylhet divisions over the 48 hours from 1:00pm yesterday, warning of temporary waterlogging and possible landslides in hilly areas.  
As Boro production increased from 2.01 crore tonnes in FY22 to 2.13 crore tonnes in the last fiscal year, the government raised the target to 2.24 crore tonnes this season.  
The government's Boro acreage also increased by 3.29 percent to 50.50 lakh hectares in the ongoing 2025-26 fiscal year, according to provisional DAE data.  
Despite rising cultivation costs and losses due to the weather this season, the government on April 22 announced procurement prices would remain unchanged.  
The food ministry this season will buy five lakh tonnes of paddy at Tk 36 per kg, a fraction of the targeted production.  
Agriculture Minister Mohammad Amin Ur Rashid spoke to reporters about the haor region's situation after attending the inauguration of the nationwide Notun Kuri Sports 2026 by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman in Sylhet.  
Amin said announcements will be made at the union level to collect paddy at fair prices.  
If purchased directly from farmers, they could earn up to 30 percent more, he said.  
He added that, alongside a three-month food-friendly programme for severely affected haor farmers, new projects will be taken to extend support to other affected farmers as well.  
[Our Kishoreganj Correspondent Tafsilul Aziz contributed to this report]

## Harassment of journalists cuts across govts

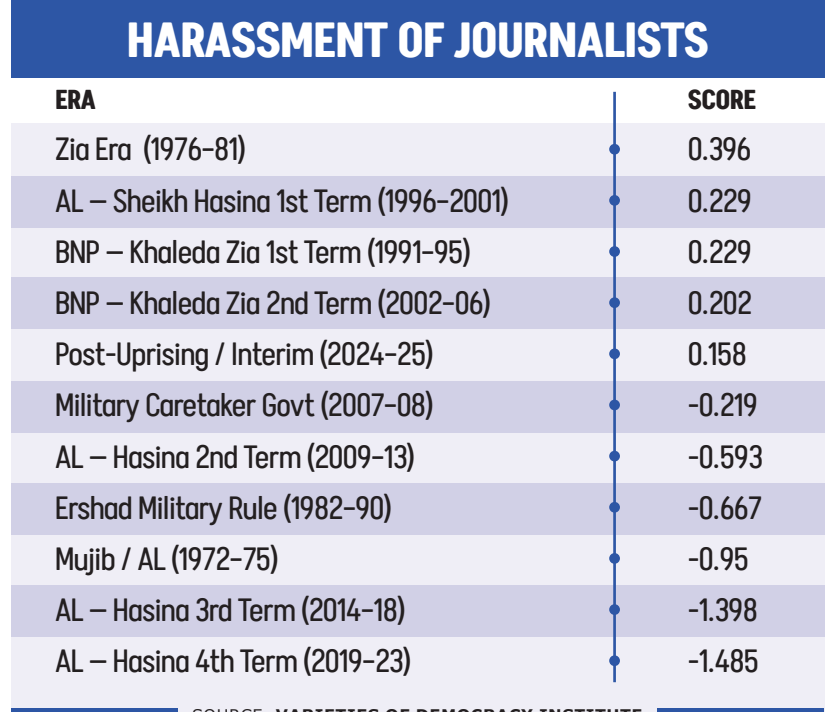
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The arrest triggered widespread concern among journalists, who saw it as a warning about the cost of critical reporting.  
Shams's case was not an isolated one. Journalists such as Mahfuj Ullah, Enayetullah Khan, Tasneem Khalil, Shahriar Kabir, Saleem Samad, Tipu Sultan and Priscilla Raj have faced arrest, torture, or intimidation under different administrations. Poet Al Mahmud, who once edited Ganakantha, the mouthpiece of the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, was also among those targeted.

of Gothenburg that tracks the state of democracy and fundamental freedoms across the globe over time.  
Its datasets are built from expert assessments by thousands of country specialists and are widely regarded as among the most comprehensive measures of democratic conditions, including press freedom. V-Dem data is frequently cited by international media such as The New York Times, The Guardian, and The Economist, and is used by governments, the United Nations, the European Union, and policy institutions.  
The V-Dem Harassment of Journalists indicator (v2meharjrn) tracks whether journalists are arrested, imprisoned, assaulted, or killed for carrying out legitimate journalistic work, whether by state authorities or powerful non-state actors.  
The figures used in this analysis are sourced from V-Dem's latest release, Country-Year Version 16, in March 2026. The data offers a statistical record of what many journalists in Bangladesh have long experienced firsthand.  
Notably, Bangladesh has had two distinct experiences -- one where journalists who offend powerful actors are almost always harassed and eventually forced to stop, and another where the environment is mixed, with some journalists suppressed while others manage to continue freely.  
WORST YEARS  
Bangladesh's record on press freedom shows three distinct periods when journalists faced the harshest repression: the final year of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's rule in 1975, the military dictatorship of General HM Ershad from the early 1980s to 1990, and the last two terms of ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, from 2014 to 2024.  
The most severe year on record was 1975, when Mujib introduced the one-party rule called Baksal. That move saw all privately-owned newspapers shut and the country's press reduced to just four state-controlled outlets.  
Press freedom again deteriorated sharply after Ershad seized power in March 1982. Throughout his nine years in office, journalists who challenged the regime were regularly censored, harassed, or intimidated. Newspapers were issued press notes instructing them on what to publish or avoid, and those that resisted faced bans or closure.  
Publications such as Jajai Din and weekly Bichinta faced closure during this period. V-Dem records show that conditions for journalists remained consistently severe throughout Ershad's rule, with only marginal improvement even as he later sought legitimacy through controlled elections.  
The longest and most sustained period of harassment, however, came during Hasina's final two terms. Nine of Bangladesh's 10 worst-ever scores on the V-Dem Harassment of Journalists Index fall between 2014 and 2024.  
During this period, conditions repeatedly reached levels indicating that journalists critical of powerful actors were often subjected to legal action, detention, or intimidation. Earlier

years in the same period also reflected widespread pressure on the press.  
The Digital Security Act of 2018 allowed journalists to be prosecuted under broadly defined offences that covered much of online and print criticism of the government.  
Contacted, Md Saiful Islam Chowdhury, associate professor at the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at Dhaka University, said that all Bangladeshi governments, irrespective of party, whether civilian or military, have been repressive.  
According to him, the same strategies

Yunus, although many journalists lost jobs or faced court cases on flimsy murder charges, Bangladesh recorded its second-lowest level of journalist harassment for journalistic work, according to the V-Dem data.  
Press freedom advocates attributed the improvement to the suspension of politically motivated prosecutions by the government, the easing of surveillance, and the absence of a dominant ruling party apparatus during the transition period.  
The longest stretch of comparatively lower pressure occurred between 1991

SCORE RANGE	MEANING
-3.33 to -1.78	No journalists dare to engage in activities that would offend powerful actors, as harassment or worse is certain
-1.78 to -0.32	Journalists who offend powerful actors are almost always harassed or worse, and are eventually forced to stop
-0.32 to 1.22	Some journalists who offend powerful actors are forced to stop, but others manage to continue practicing freely
1.22 to 2.80	Harassment of journalists is rare, and those responsible would be identified and punished
2.80 to 4.13	Journalists are never harassed by governmental or powerful non-governmental actors



and laws -- such as anti-terrorism law -- used to suppress opposition parties are also used to curb the media and newspapers.  
SHORT LIVED BETTER YEARS  
Bangladesh has experienced brief periods when pressure on journalists eased, but those moments proved fragile and temporary. V-Dem data shows lower levels of harassment between 1978 and 1981, during the rule of Ziaur Rahman.  
During this period, the government took steps that reduced direct state control over the press, including establishing the Press Institute of Bangladesh, forming the Press Council as an arbitration body, and granting land for the National Press Club.  
Media researchers note that these institutional moves created limited space for journalistic activities after the near-total press shutdown imposed under Baksal in 1975.  
During this comparatively better period, journalists who challenged the prevailing order were not spared. US journalist Lawrence Lifschultz was expelled from the country after reporting on the trial of Colonel Taher.  
Another relative improvement came after the fall of Hasina's government in 2024.  
In 2025, under the interim administration led by Muhammad

and 2005, following the restoration of electoral democracy. This period saw a set of legal reforms and rapid expansion of the media sector, with the launch of influential national dailies such as Aiker Kagoj, The Daily Star, and Prothom Alo, as well as the introduction of private television through ATN Bangla.  
While governments formed by both the BNP and Awami League retained restrictive laws, they largely refrained from dismantling independent media outright, allowing competition and audience growth to strengthen newsroom influence, analysis shows.  
Even the periods V-Dem identifies as relatively better were not without serious incidents. Between 1991 and 2005, both press and television channels came under government pressures. For instance, Prothom Alo journalist Tipu Sultan was attacked for journalistic work in 2001 and Ekushey TV was shut down in 2002.  
"Simply put, the Bangladeshi ruling class does not want to be questioned. They do not need to use force or jail journalists; intimidation works through surveillance by state agencies, legal harassment, and financial pressure, such as control over advertising. We have also seen mobs mobilised against the media in the post-uprising period," said Saiful Islam Chowdhury.

## Lively debate

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Optimism persisted as Prime Minister Tarique Rahman acknowledged several points raised by the opposition leader and urged cooperation.  
The opposition leader, in turn, committed to assist in positive government initiatives. In his concluding speech, the prime minister stressed that solutions to national problems must be found through dialogue with the opposition, and stability in parliament is essential for Bangladesh's progress.  
His remark -- that if either the ruling party or the opposition fails, then Bangladesh itself and the parliament will fail -- gave rise to hope for an effective House.  
As the parliament did not ratify several key ordinances issued by the interim government, 23 (some of them key to genuine reforms) lost validity. These included provisions for judicial independence, a stronger Human Rights Commission, prevention of enforced disappearances, an empowered Anti-Corruption Commission, and establishing a police commission.  
While this drew strong criticism both within and outside the parliament for weakening institutions and betraying public expectations, cabinet members pledged that they would return with stronger bills for these reforms later.  
Constitutional reform remains a flashpoint. The BNP's reluctance to form a constitutional reform council or chart a clear reform path has deepened uncertainty around the July charter. While the government avoided convening the council as mandated by the July National Charter Implementation Order, it instead proposed a special parliamentary committee to amend the constitution. The opposition, however, demanded time to decide on joining, insisting on broader reforms.  
The opposition staged four walkouts -- protesting against President

Mohammed Shahabuddin's opening address, parliament's failure to provide a resolution on adjournment motions, and the passage of what they termed "anti-people" bills. However, they returned to the House each time, which can only be seen as their commitment to the parliamentary process. The opposition's proposal for a fuel committee -- accepted by the government -- was a rare example of tolerance from the treasury bench.  
Still, some government decisions, such as sanctioning "MP office" at upazila parishads (described as "sitting places"), drew criticism for undermining local governance.  
With 220 first-time MPs -- the leader of the House as well as the opposition leader -- the parliament was wont to witness procedural lapses, which it did aptly.  
Lawmakers were often not provided with bills in time and sometimes received them barely an hour before debate, making proper review impossible.  
On several occasions cabinet members fumbled while presenting bills, opposition MPs failed to engage meaningfully, and the unusual practice of allowing debate after passage of a bill broke the rhythm of parliamentary work.  
On several instances, the chief whip's interventions in minor procedural matters -- issues that could have been easily conveyed through parliamentary staff -- irked many, said parliament officials.  
On at least two occasions when the prime minister was not present, ruling party MPs were noticeably missing, including several who were scheduled to speak. The chief whip candidly admitted that treasury bench members were reluctant to speak without the audience of the prime minister, a trend that could only reinforce the advice that parties must rise above their old habits to lay a solid foundation of the parliament as an institution.