

## **World Press Freedom Day 2006 Observed:**

### **Seminar on 'Media, Development and Poverty Alleviation' Held at Mymensingh**

Speakers in a seminar on 'Media, Development and Poverty Alleviation' held at Mymensingh said that press is the spokesman of a country and the democracy of the country depends on how much the press enjoys freedom and facilitate the access to information. The seminar was jointly organized by VOICE and Mymensingh Press Club on 5 May 2006 in observance of World Press Freedom Day 2006 with the support from UNESCO, Bangladesh and Manusher Jonno.

The seminar was presided over by noted scholar Professor Jatin Sarker while the open discussion session was moderated by eminent journalist Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, president of Bangladesh Federation of Union of Journalist and Executive Editor of Daily Sangbad. Around 70 participants from NGOs, civil society, human rights activists, women leaders, teachers, and journalists joined the seminar.

Among others the secretary of Mymensingh press club Ataul Karim Khokon, Principal Lutfor Rahman Khan, vice-president of the Mymensingh press club, noted journalist and editor of Dainik Jahan and vice-president of the Mymensingh press club Habibur Rahman Sheikh and Principal Abul Kasem, were attended the as panel discussants of the seminar. A wide range of civil society members, journalists, human rights activists, women leaders, NGOs representatives and different professional bodies attended the seminar.

Swadhin Chowdhury, coordinator of VOICE and Ataul Karim Khokon, general secretary of the press club gave a welcome speech and urged to actively participate in the seminar.

The keynote paper of the seminar was presented by Ahmed Swapan Mahmud, Executive Director of VOICE. He mentioned that media ensures peoples right to know the information and freedom of speech. Media is also a pillar of governance and development which bring peace in a country. The freedom of press can accelerate the development process that ultimately contributes to poverty eradication facilitating the access to information to the people who can utilize information for upholding their life and livelihood. He also referred to the policy bindings and the attitude of government that time and again create obstacles to the right to information and hampers the freedom of expression. The key note speaker also addressed that media controlled by the corporate houses certainly creates impediments to perform its role to promote human rights. He criticizes the growing phenomena of controlling media and media's own role to become the prey of corporate bodies. The key note presenter also urged to the journalists to play the greater role to establish democracy and governance that contribute a society free from injustice and hunger.

Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, executive editor of The Daily Sangbad as key discussant said that information is a right and media only can best to serve for the country providing information for its people. He also mentioned that there are a number of policies and laws such as official secrecy act etc must be reformed and journalists must have the access to all official information. It is the duty of government to help press so that the press man can really draw the truth which create accountability, transparency and uphold the human rights situation. He also said that there are many problems within the community but to fight against injustice and poverty we must have bigger unity and all should act together to fight against corruption and inequality. Only the professional attitude and being free from all sorts of temptations, journalist can play a wider role for the societal development, he added in his speech.

Ataul Karim Khokon, secretary press club said that the press must be aware of its responsibility towards the peoples and the press should keep its transparency. The freedom of press is vital for establishing peoples' right in country. Press freedom means people's right to know and express opinion. But it has been observed that government controls freedom of speech which is quite bad precedence for the society that is a main impediment to a democratic society. Government and concerned organizations should play positive role so that journalists can perform their role freely without fear he added.

Professor Lutfor Rahman Khan said, by focusing real and informative news, journalist can ensure their dignity. A journalist should abide by ethical standards. He also said that official secrecy act should be

eliminated which is a hindrance for the media professionals. Frequently, journalists are attacked by governments and terrorists.

Habibur Rahman Sheikh, editor of a local newspaper urged to all journalists to build up a common unity against unfair and unjust. He said media can have the opposite effect, aiding the covering up of abuses and fostering frustration in marginalized people. A free media is not only beneficial, but necessary in a free society.

A number of participants also spoke on the open discussion session. Among them Professor Riazul Islam, Ziauddin Ahmed, Professor Khoges Kiran Talikder, Professor Sabbir Reza, Women leader and president of Bangladesh Mohila Parishad, Mymensingh Ferdous Ara, Surajit Roy Chowdhury, Professor Julfiqar Rafiq Ranju, Afzal Hossain, Iftekhar Uddin Ahmed, Prof. Shahabuddin Ahmed, Sultan Ahmed, journalist Mosarraf Hossain spoke on the function. The speakers said that journalists should be given exemption from the criminal libel law to protect them from harassment. Official secrets act should be repealed as it curbs free flow of information. They urged to government ensures the freedom of press.

Eminent writer Jatin Sarker gave concluding remarks while he said that now everything is captured by money and it is so difficult to ensure freedom of press since the press is controlled by the corporations and businessman who act in favour of capitalism and serve as an agent of capitalist globalization. There is certainly a strong relationship among media and development and poverty alleviation but poverty will never be reduced until corruption, injustice, inequality etc eliminated from the society. He urged all to achieve freedom and establish one's right through continuous struggle.

### **Seminar held in Sylhet on**

A seminar on Media, Development and Poverty Alleviation has been held in Sylhet City Corporation auditorium with the presence of eminent people of all walks of life including journalists, local government representatives, NGO activists, women groups, human rights activists and civil society groups.

The seminar was presided over by the former president of Sylhet Press club and staff correspondent of the daily Star Iqbal Siddiqui while the present president of the press club and editor of a local newspaper Muhtabis-un Noor attended as a main discussant. Among others, Abu taleb Murad, the correspondent of Sunrise radion, London, Himangsu Mitra, Convenor of a political party Jubo Maitree attended as speaker of the function.

The Mayor of Sylhet City Corporation Badruddin Ahmed Kamran attended the seminar as chief guest. The seminar was conducted by Iqrqmul Kabir, executive director of Samadhan and also the Bureau chief the daily Prothom Alo, Sylhet. The key note paper was read out by Ahmed Swapan, Executive Director of Voice while in the key note paper Ahmed Swapan Mahmud, Executive Director of Voice said that information can play a pivotal role in making people's life well being, if they properly get and use right information in a right way. Information discourse has brought wide attention mainly due to the denial of giving/disseminating information in a public sphere or imposes restriction by particular group or agencies or by the state. With the views in concern information is seen as right perspectives while the global civil society bodies, national and international organizations including the UN and the state considered and recognized information as a right. And right to information in recent times has been considered as a central theme for the comprehensive development he added in the speech.

The Mayor Badruddin Ahmed Kamran said that Bangladesh Constitution has recognized [Article 39(2)] a) the right of every citizen to freedom of speech and expression, and b) freedom of the press. If press will not be free, society can not be free from evils. Media acts as forerunner in the society and we all should extend cooperation so that they can play their key role in promoting people's life. He also said that there are certain rules and regulations that hinder the right to information or expression but the situation will get improve if we all work together.

Saying the importance of media, he emphasized that if media stop to pass through information, everything will be collapsed. Media can play the role to form public opinion against all sorts of odds and evils including

corruption, violence, etc. He also condemn the attack on journalist that is widespread in the country and also he added that only united force including journalists, civil society etc can fight together to resist them. Democracy can be upheld only when people get information and press can work freely.

But the Mayor also raised his concern that media is now becoming an industry and it is now captured by the business man. It is now used to grasp power and personal interest that also hampers its role for the greater humanity. Media should come out from the industrial corporate lobby and should serve more to the people he suggested.

Muhtabis-un Noor, the president of Sylhet Press club said in his key discussant that media's role in development is important. It can raise awareness among people which are quite helpful for the people. The whole nation will be benefited if the people become aware on good and evils as well as of their rights. He gave an example that immunization programme was a successful case because media played a very important role disseminating the information.

He suggested maintaining the ethics of media and really working for a journalistic cause not to be bias to any one or any political parties. He said the division among journalist communities creates the opportunity for others to attack on journalist. He said that responsibility is the question. Media sometimes creates confusion among people and people become puzzle and finally withdraw their confidence toward media. He told to be patient and cautious enough to carry out the duties being a journalist. He also fined out some dangerous turn that the media is taking worldwide toward corporate giants that may hamper the true journalistic zeal. He also added that democratic practices can be upheld while media is free and responsible as well.

Abu Taleb Murad of Sunrise Radio, London said that official secrecy act is one of the major obstacles of asserting right to information. The conception of community radio can work for giving information to the poor communities and it can help the way of their life and livelihood.

Himangsu Mitra said that MNCs control over media must be resisted and media particularly should work so that the poor communities get information. He told to organize such seminar to the outreach.

Sirajul Islam, correspondent of Jai Jai Din condemns the attack on journalist and said to resist the miscreants and those who attack journalist by any means. He also added that the ruling party generally acts against journalist without any reason. He said to serve following the media ethics and code of conduct mentioning the social responsibility while media can contribute a lot to social upliftment and poverty reduction.

### **Seminar Observed in Chittagong**

From the very beginning to date, mass media always wants free and independent working environment. But hardly has it got such expected freedom. Violence against journalists and press is rapidly widening in the whole world that gives a threat to free press and journalism. According to IFJ, last year almost 150 journalists have died in different places of the world either by state police and in the hands of influential sections of the society including the political war held in Iraq. And all of that were unexpected deaths.

In observance of the World Press Freedom Day, a seminar on 'Media, Development and Poverty Alleviation' has been held at Chittagong Press Club Auditorium on 9 May, 2006 jointly organized by VOICE and YPSA in cooperation with UNESCO, Bangladesh.

Around 80 participants from different sections such as journalists, civil society, students, human rights activists, women leaders, lawyers, teachers, and NGO activists joined the seminar while the eminent scientist Professor Jamal Nazrul Islam presented as chief guest. The special discussants were Omor Kaisar of the Daily Bhorer Kagoj; Shahidul Alam, president, Chittagong Journalist Union; M Nasirul Haque of the Daily Suprovat Bangladesh; Shamsul Haque, senior journalist of the Daily Prothom Alo; Nazim Uddin Shyamol, senior reporter of the Daily Independent and Shirajuddin Bellal, program officer of YPSA. The key note paper by Ahmed Swapan Mahmud was read out by Md. Ali Shahin of YPSA, Chhittagong.

Dr. Jamal Nazrul Islam said that mass media can not drive development alone. Society and government also have some responsibilities to protect the rights of freedom of expression and the interest of journalism for its own sake. A journalist can contribute to the society through providing information to the people. He also said that development is not possible until we achieve self-dependency. He said that mass media can easily create mass awareness among different communities.

Omor Kaisar of the Daily Bhorer Kagoj said that mass media is not totally free and independent. Mass media workers have been facing violence and threats in their day to day activities. For a democratic society, free media is essential. If mass media can work freely, then it can play important role in poverty reduction strategy.

Shahidul Alam, president of Chittagong Press Club said that people's right to know should be ensured and mass media needs to be free and independent from any authoritarian rule. But there are some regulations imposed by the state that goes against the ethics of freedom of press and right to information. These restrictions clearly violated the universal declaration of freedom of expression in relation people's right to freedom. On the other hand media itself can play the right role because of its allies with large industries and corporate agents while those giants give advertise of huge amount in the daily newspaper and satellite channel. And media can deliberately serve the news against them. Any influence over media either by government or by corporate giants and influential section hinder the freedom of press.

Shamsul Haque of the Daily Prothom Alo said that information is the nucleus of society. A person who is well-informed is powerful than the person who is not informed. Influential and the rich possess more information while the poor lack the information that creates a divide in the society. Information, if rightly used, can easily change the condition of society and contribute to poverty alleviation.

Development journalist and the senior reporter of the Daily Independent, Nazim Uddin Shyamol said that there are few groups who have the control of power of the country. They never want free mass media. A programme can be undertaken to resist them while media also play the vital role in this regard.

### **Seminar on Media, Development and Poverty Reduction held in Khulna**

Realizing the important role of freedom of media and right to information in poverty eradication, the main theme of the World Press Freedom Day 2006 is defined as "Media, Development and Poverty Alleviation". In observance of the World Press Freedom Day, a seminar on 'Media, Development and Poverty Alleviation' has been held at Khulna, a divisional city of Bangladesh on 10 May 2006 jointly organized by VOICE and Coastal Development Partnership (CDP) in cooperation with UNESCO, Bangladesh.

The seminar was presided over by Ashraf-Ul-Alam Tutu, coordinator of CDP. Around 80 participants from different sections such as journalists, civil society, students, human rights activists, women leaders, lawyers, teachers, and NGO activists joined the seminar while Alhaj Liakat Ali, president of Khulna press club attended as chief guest, Dr. Md. Rezaul Karim, chairman of Urban and Rural Planning Discipline of Khulna University and eminent columnist Prof. Anowarul Kadir and the staff reporter of the Daily Prothom Alo, Sheikh Abu Hasan attended as special guests. The key note paper by Ahmed Swapan Mahmud was read out by Jahangir Hossain of Massline Media Centre (MMC), Dhaka.

Among others the panel discussants were Oahidujjaman Bulu, representative of Channel-1, Mamun Reza of the Daily Samokal, Ershad Ali of the Daily Naya Digonto, Subir Roy of the Daily Purbanchol, NGO activists Abdur Razzaq and Devprasad Saha, human rights activist Shahid Ahmed Mukul, eminent scholar Jafar Imam and others.

Oahidujjaman Bulu said that journalism in Khulna is getting worse gradually that takes a very danger turn, a big threat for the journalist communities. Only the united force among journalists and civil society groups can fight the evil.

Mamun Reza of the Daily Samokal said that journalists should be well trained on development aspects since the media has a great role in development, many of the journalist are not well aware of their role. He requested the organizers to take continuous programme building their capacity so that they can contribute to the development and poverty alleviation.

Subir Roy said that democracy and good governance can ensure press freedom. And if the press is free and independent, it creates a culture of democratic and human rights practice on the ground. Devprasad Saha also said that newspaper should be more responsible to provide information to the readers that are interlinked with their struggle of life and livelihood. Their dependency on business communities must be reduced for the greater interest.

Professor Dr. Md. Rezaul Karim said that government should help press for the smooth running of press which can create accountability, transparency and uphold the human rights situation. He also said that journalists should be well educated and well trained. The press must know the aspects of development and only then they can play their role.

Eminent scholar Jafar Imam gave importance on value of free media for poverty eradication. He also said that journalists can play very important role in the development of a society. And the rules and regulations which create impediment for the free press must be redefined or new regulations should be taken place.

Ashraf-Ul-Alam Tutu, the chair of the seminar said seminar on such kind hardly takes place in Khulna though it is quite important to work over the issue. He has strongly recommended organizing such kind of program regularly in Khulna. He said that there is a strong relationship between free media and development and poverty alleviation. He urged all to achieve freedom of press and right to information to establish one's right that help reducing poverty.

On behalf of the organizers, Rajib Rana Das, Associate Coordinator of VOICE has given vote of thanks to all participants. He said by providing right information to a right person in a right time, journalists and media can play important role in development. He also thanked co-organizers to make the event successful.

### **Seminar on Media, Development and Poverty Alleviation held in Barisal**

Speakers of a seminar on Media, development and Poverty Alleviation said that mass media can play important role in poverty reduction and national development. The seminar was jointly organized by VOICE and SPEED Trust at Abdul Khaleq Khan Auditorium, Barisal on 17 May 2006.

Advocate Manobendra Batbal was the moderator of the function while the chief discussants were Minto Basu, cultural organizer and Saikat Habib, sub-editor of the Daily Jugantor, Dhaka. The key note paper was read by Ahmed Swapan Mahmud, Executive Director of VOICE.

Dr, Sunil Baran Haldar, the district representative of BSS and the Chairperson of the Speed trust gave a welcome address while he draws the importance of right to information and freedom of expression without which a society can not democratically run. He said that the situation is getting worse and the journalists are facing threats in performing their duties and responsibilities. He also suggests everyone to protect the rights of journalists and create a congenial atmosphere where journalists can play their right role to perform their activities.

In the key note paper Ahmed Swapan Mahmud, executive Director of Voice said that without free and independent media, the democratic practices of the society can not be enshrined while he gave example of the laws and regulations of the country that hinder the process of right to information and freedom of expression. Access to information and freedom of expression is human rights and without its realization, socio-cultural practices can not be upheld. He said that the official secrecy act must be reformed and there are other such laws that hinder the freedom of expression n must be reform. He also emphasized that the draft right to information act and the draft broadcasting act should be enacted soon. He suggests raising people's movement to claim the rights of people.

The key note paper also delineates the feature on how the media can alleviate poverty reducing corruption while it can create public discourse against corruption and all evils remaining in the society. Even to achieve the millennium development goals free media and independent media can play the greater role. The divide that already exists in the society in relation to information can be reduced if information is properly given to the people. And in this concern media and journalists can play the vital role.

Besides, he also observed the danger and cited that the media is now concentrating on money and power where the multinational corporations are dominating the whole media sector that is a big threat to the independent media. If media can not come out from the corporate giants, it can suppress the people and can not play the role as of expectation of the people in general.

Dr. Syed Habibur Rahman, eminent educationist, Asish Kumar Dasgupta, journalist Shyamol Sarker, Md. Akkas Sikder, NGO activist Hasina Parveen, Md. Jahid Hosain and Mahfujur Rahman also spoke on the occasion.

Dr. Syed Habibur Rahman said that mass media can create accountability, transparency and uphold the human rights situation. He also said that journalists should be well educated and well trained. The press must know the aspects of development and only then they can play their role.

Renowned journalist Minto Basu said that journalists can play very important role in the development of a society. And the rules and regulations which create impediment for the free press must be redefined reformed and new regulations should be taken place. Sharing the experiences of his journalistic career he said that journalist particularly mofassal has to face lot of troubles to carryout his job and they are always accountable to the people because for any misinformation, the concerned people may ask question anytime that need to be clarified to them.

Among others the seminar was attended by journalists, civil society groups, students, human rights activists, women leaders, lawyers, teachers, and NGO representatives etc.

### **Seminar held at Rajshahi on**

A seminar on 'Media, Development and Poverty Alleviation' was jointly organized by CCD, Swa-Unnaya, Rajshahi and VOICE held at UPHCP Training Auditorium, Rajshahi City Corporation on 10 May 2006 and in observance of World Press Freedom Day 2006 with the support from UNESCO, Bangladesh and Manusher Jonno.

The seminar was presided over by ex-mayor Rajshahi City Corporation while the open discussion session moderated by Mustafijur Rahman Khan, General Secretary of Swa-Unnayan and staff correspondent of Bangladesh Observer. Around 60 participants from NGOs, civil society, human rights activists, women leaders, teachers, and journalists joined the seminar.

Among others the editor of a local daily Dainik Sonali Sangbad, Hasan Millat, S.M.A. Kader editor of another local newspaper Dainik Barta, Nazib Wadud, chair, Rajshahi journalists union, were attended the as panel discussants of the seminar.

Mustafijur Rahman Khan, General Secretary of Swa-Unnayan and A.H.M. Abdul Hai, coordinator, CCD gave a welcome speech and they urged to remember for those journalists who lost their lives in the exercise of their profession.

The keynote paper of the seminar was presented by Ahmed Swapan Mahmud, Executive Director of VOICE. He mentioned that the influence of government over media impedes the way of work that ultimately blocks the freedom of people's choices for expressing their ideas and views. The government policies have the influence on media performance, and the media also has the power over government in certain cases. Media ensures peoples right to know the information and freedom of speech. Media is also a pillar of

governance and development, which bring peace in a country. The freedom of press can accelerate the development process that ultimately contributes to poverty eradication facilitating the access to information to the people who can utilize information for upholding their life and livelihood.

Hasan Millat, editor of Dainik Sonali Sangbad said, newspaper is not opposition of the government. When the blood circulation is not properly circulated, the human body faces some problems. For a country, free media plays such important role. Media affects by politics. If the political leadership is strong then the media will free from all corruption He critics the role of editor, he said now editor is an agent for multinational companies. Moreover, news has published on their favour.

S.M.A. Kader, editor Dainik Barta said, journalists are depended on their livelihood on media owner. Therefore, they use journalists. Journalists did not do neutral reporting. Owner, political party, biases them. Therefore, people were not getting right information.

Nazib Wadud, chair of Rajshahi Unnayan Sanghotok called media is media of performer. The freedom, which we are enjoying, we need to question ourselves that how can we use freedom. With the lacking of intrinsic value of news people are not relay on news. However, it is important to recover the reliability of news. The responsibility of media should come first. He also added that media should avoid all biasness news.

Mustafizur Rahman Khan Said that media is now controlled by influential group. Newspapers and journalists have the right to express their views strongly on controversial issues. Journalist can focus the true picture of the society, political situation, transparency and governance. By publishing true situation of a country, media helps government to take necessary steps against corruption.

A number of participants also spoke on the open discussion session. Among them Shafikul Islam, deputy chair of Rajshahi Press Club, Sikander Ali, business unity parishod, Fajjullah Choudhury, Director Borendra Unnayan Academy, Mahtab Uddin, Secretary, Saptahik Gonokhobor, Abdullaha-al mahmud Bablu, editor of dainik upachar, A.M.A. Goni Director DISA, general secretary of Rajshahi city press club, Abdur Sobur, S.M. Abdul Munsij, editor, Saptahik Khobor spoke on the function. The speakers said that media is now captured by capitalism not journalism. As a result, journalists are harassed. And Journalists are fighting with poverty. But journalism is a noble profession. Women violence, governance and the issues of human rights, journalists plays a vital role.

Abdul Hadi, former Mayor of Rajshahi City Corporation gave concluding remarks while he said that now we are passing crucial time. We have to decide how we overcome the problems that keep impact on media. Media has the sole responsibility to take role on development and poverty alleviation. The main problems of media are government's restrictions and also media ownership. We know government is elected by the people and media should be spokesman on people's voice. We need to build a common unity so we can come out the contrary situation. A booklet and poster on world press freedom have been distributed among the participants.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

There were a number suggestions and recommendations drawn from the divisional level seminar. A few of them are extracted below:

- ✍ The demand for enactment of Right to Information law will have to come from the people. The people must understand the need for such a law, which may improve their lives. The draft law must be shared to the people and soon it should be enacted.
- ✍ Right to Information law should not be restricted to public and government institutions; Government policies must ensure people's right to know and access to information, freedom of speech; Official secrecy act must be changed and reformed.
- ✍ The draft broadcasting law must be enacted soon for wider implication and demand of people that will be complementary to take up people's interest band democratic practices of the society.

- ✍ Media should play non-bias non political role. It needs to maintain ethics and code of conduct.
- ✍ Media should play greater role and it should be come out from the corporate interest it serves for the agencies. Media as an industry must be ethical and responsive towards people's interest.
- ✍ All institutions should be held accountable and they should maintain a standard of disclosure.