

Opinion
Views

A newspaper, a nation, and the ashes of memory

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The Daily Star has been one of my favourite newspapers since the 1990s. It has become one of my staple sources of information about current events. I have followed how news stories and opinion pieces in *The Daily Star* in the later years of Hasina's misrule exposed her autocracy and chronicled the July 2024 movement.

In 2015, Sheikh Hasina sought to financially throttle the newspaper by making industries stop advertising in it. Ironically, the same English daily came under attack in the post-Hasina era. This happened while we were mourning the death of one of the most prominent leaders of the July uprising.

Therefore, those of us who farewelled Hadi with tears in our eyes experienced a double burden of sadness: we are saddened by the loss of Hadi and by the criminality of attackers of media houses, including *The Daily Star* building in Dhaka early on December 19, 2025.

The attacks were an affront on the very hallmark of Hadi's legacy and had the potential to shift attention from the tragedy of murder to atrocities against free media. Perpetrators offered Bangladesh's adversaries an opportunity to paint a negative picture of the country and tarnish the image of Hadi and other July 2024 warriors.



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Many foreign diplomats in Dhaka and beyond rely largely on *The Daily Star* for updates on events in Bangladesh. We should also bear in mind that the newspaper not only provides information about the country's socio-economic and political situation but also documents and promotes our literary and

cultural artefacts. It not only informs us about national and international affairs but also, through its literature and culture pages, helps preserve our traditions.

Besides, it has developed a strong digital archive which will help communicate our cultural legacy to future generations. The arsonists destroyed its archive, which contains print copies since 1991 and will be difficult to retrieve. This is a loss not only for the newspaper but also for the whole nation. While *The Daily Star* may eventually restore its operations, the nation's cultural loss—specifically the destruction of our collective history—far outweighs the newspaper's financial damages.

With dogged determination, sharp insight and hard work for decades, *The Daily Star* has been established as a media outlet that commands an international reputation and readership. As Bangladesh's leading English daily, it also represents our country internationally. In that sense, it is our bridge and mouthpiece to a global audience, and the attack on it was an attempt to stifle our voice to the world.

The English daily contributed to exposing Hasina's tyranny and corruption, and thus helped create global awareness of what was going on in Bangladesh. For instance, its report titled "S Alam's Aladdin's lamp," published in August 2023, considerably shook the foundation of the Hasina regime. The daily's coverage of the July 2024 uprising gave the movement intellectual support.

I am personally grateful that on August 4, 2024—the day before Hasina fell and fled—*The Daily Star* ran my essay "Violence against students: A tribute to our little John Hampdens," where I denounced the "gruesome and unbearable shoot-to-kill" strategy of the Hasina government that resulted in the "mass slaughter of students." The essay also celebrated the bravery of our young July 2024 heroes and heroines.

Moreover, in the aftermath of the uprising, the English daily brought out *The Great Wave*, where authors regard the movement as an "explosion of a united democratic desire among people of all classes and professions" (p. 140). These and hundreds of other instances make the newspaper pro-Bangladeshi, not pro-any foreign country.



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If some people believe that the English daily has not done enough or right, they can contest its journalism cerebrally, through constructing alternative narratives, not by attacking and vandalising its office and pillaging its property.

We all want a competitive media environment that will foster intellectual curiosity and scholarly conversations and ultimately benefit our country. However, that requires knowledge, expertise, professionalism, diligence, a sense of commitment, leadership and teamwork skills. The arsonists who attacked media houses and those who support them are obviously incapable of challenging free media intellectually. It is their dismal incompetence and intellectual bankruptcy that instigated them to resort to violence.

The Daily Star, Prothom Alo and other competitive media organisations are our national treasures. I challenge the detractors to establish a comparable daily in competition.

Dr Md Mahmudul Hasan is professor of English language and literature at International Islamic University Malaysia. He can be reached at mmhasan@iium.edu.my.

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