

Bangladesh - Media Landscape

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Overview

The emergence of satellite television and the spread of Internet in the last one and a half decades have changed the media landscape in Bangladesh. Twenty-nine satellite television stations have reached viewers across the country, while faster

Internet services are driving people, particularly the young generation, towards ever-increasing online news services and social media. The immensely popular Facebook has become a growing source of information for citizens. The availability of smartphones is acting as a catalyst in this new, fascinating trend.

Satellite broadcasting has brought a whole new world to people. The news-based television stations that came in quick succession bringing updates and live telecasts of events are now considered to be the dominant media. Two recent media surveys show a higher consumption (over 80 percent) of television in the country. However, the television stations can't do what print does. Some newspapers are publishing stories that challenge the establishment and in consequence face intimidation, a factor which is nearly absent among ruling party- and businessmen-controlled broadcasters.

Radio is not lagging behind and is making its presence felt in the media landscape with the introduction of both commercial FM and community radio stations. A country that had only one state-run radio station before 1999 now boasts 35 radio stations. The commercial radio stations are popular among youths in the major cities. These stations are airing more entertainment programmes than news, considering the fact that the listeners are interested in enjoying music and the stories related to celebrities.

With competition among the media intensifying, some media companies have gone for multiple media platforms through introducing print, television, online and radio. In efforts to remain relevant, two leading newspapers – *ProthomAlo* (The First Light) and English-language *The Daily Star* – have gone for bilingual news services. *The Daily Star* is giving selected stories in Bengali while *ProthomAlo* has been operating a full-fledged English website for the last several years. *Bdnews24.com*, the first online news portal in the country, also has both English and Bengali news services.

Prior to the expansion of television stations and the Internet, people used to rely on newspapers to access authentic news. Now the country has numerous newspapers, TV stations and online news portals. Unfortunately though, the standard of journalism is very low. Media is seen to be less credible, mainly because of the political affiliation of the owners, editors and journalists. Some owners are not directly involved in politics or inclined towards the government, but they don't go against the establishment in order to protect their business interests. Some corporate houses have introduced both print and broadcast media that safeguard corporate houses and their proprietors. Journalists are sharply divided into two camps—one group supporting the government and the other group against it. All of these are damaging professionalism and the dignity of the journalist community.

The road traversed by the media has not been easy even in independent Bangladesh. Press freedom had its first blow in June 1975 when the then regime shut down all but four newspapers through an executive order. Then the country fell into the grips of the successive military juntas which undermined both democracy and independent journalism for the subsequent 15 years. Media began to thrive with the restoration of democracy in 1991. However, the authoritarian attitude of successive governments and media gagging gradually shut the door to free expression of news and opinion by the media. Today, the media are hardly in a position to disseminate the truth.

There is a growing concern among journalists about the government's attempt to dictate many media outlets. Nowadays owners and editors, particularly the television stations, are complaining about receiving phone calls from the authorities, asking them "not to telecast certain issues" that may hurt the government image or help its political rivals. Wiretapping and digital interception have also been increased alarmingly in the name of security while more and more journalists are facing defamation and criminal cases. The freedom of the press, guaranteed in the country's constitution, is shaken and journalists now work in a more hostile climate.

Journalism has become a job industry with more and more young people choosing the job but it hasn't really developed as a profession. Once there were few newspapers and weeklies but journalism was regarded as a noble profession for

maintaining dignity, professionalism and ethics. Today there are numerous media but with fast-declining professionalism, commitment and ethical standard. A big reason is journalists have no or little job security, get less pay, hardly offered training and work under many obstacles, including that of pressure and censorship from within and outside of the media houses. Journalistic ethics and professional practices are now in question due to motivated presentation of news. There is a growing perception that media no longer holds the value of serving public and provides news with certain interests or intentions.

Media

Print

Newspapers played a historic role in the politics and struggle of Bangladesh's liberation war and democracy. Although print is dying in US and Europe with the closure of many well-established newspapers, in Asia, the picture is not as bleak as in the West. Bangladesh is one of the few countries where newspapers industry may survive for many years despite the fact that some old newspapers closed down while some reduced their circulation drastically in the last two decades. *Daily Ittefaq* is the country's oldest newspaper which maintained a good circulation (over 425,000 copies) till the mid-1990s. The circulation of this daily has dropped to as below as 50,000 copies. On the other hand, the circulation of one of the new Bengali newspapers *Bangladesh Protidin*, founded in 2010, is several times higher than *Daily Ittefaq*.

Newspaper circulation was always low and that's mainly due to low literacy rate and poverty. The 24-hour television stations, faster Internet service and social media have further made it difficult for the press to maintain circulation. The younger generations have little interest in reading print versions, they are opting for the digital news services.

"Like the western countries, our print media is also under threat as most newspapers are losing circulation, readership and revenue with the arrival of television stations and online news portals in quick succession," evaluates Matiur Rahman, Editor and Publisher of the country's most read and influential Bengali newspaper, *ProthomAlo*. He believes only some good newspapers that are maintaining standards of journalism with credibility will survive the challenges of TV stations and new media while the rest will disappear in the coming years.

According to the 2016 National Media Survey (NMS), print is the second most widespread media in the country with 23.8 percent readership. The readership dropped slightly, 1.4 percent since 2014. One interesting feature is that print readership hasn't actually gone down that much even after the rise of TV and Internet. The 2002 NMS found 25.8 percent of the population read newspapers, which was higher than 12 percent in 1995 and 15 percent in 1998. Nielsen Bangladesh 2017 National Media and Demographic Survey also showed a similar trend with 26.9 percent readership in 2011 and 25.68 percent in 2015 but a sudden decline in readership (13.45 percent) in 2017.

Against this backdrop, leading newspapers are adopting new initiatives that include multimedia presentation of news, features, live telecast of events and interviews on Facebook pages. In some newspapers like the Bengali dailies—*ProthomAlo* and *Samakal*—and English daily, *The Daily Star* are investing more on their web outlets to compete with the broadcasters, online news portals and social media.

As per the disclosure of the Information Minister at the National Parliament in January 2018, there are 3,025 registered print media in Bangladesh and 1,191 of them are daily newspapers. Of the dailies, 470 are based in the capital city, Dhaka.

A key feature in this developing country is that newspapers are brought out in every administrative district. The latest counts of the Information Ministry shows there are 267 local dailies that bring out from outside of the capital. It needs to be mentioned that many of the local dailies don't publish regularly. But there are some popular and reputed ones, being published regularly. For example, *Dainik Karatoa*, *Dainik Purbokone* and *Dainik Puranchal* are popular in the respective areas.

Another astonishing revelation is the number of English-language dailies—as many as 32 English-speaking newspapers are printed, and few of them from outside of the capital. Likemany Bengali dailies, not all the English ones are published regularly. The truth is, except few, English dailies are not in demand in Bangladesh and have a minor circulation.

Newspapers don't disclose the actual circulation number and there is a tendency to inflate the number to get the benefit of becoming a subsidised newsprint and obtaining the government's advertisements. So, it is very difficult to know the actual circulation of most of the newspapers in Bangladesh.

According to various estimations, the total Bengali newspaper circulation is around 1.5 million copies. Ten leading national newspapers have over 90 percent of the circulation.

English circulation is also low, around 70,000. Like the Bengali circulation, residents of the capital are the buyers of English newspapers. *The Daily Star* is grabbing 77 percent of the total English circulation, according to the newspaper.

The number of weeklies is equally high. As many as 1,175 registered weeklies are being published from different places of the country. There are also several fortnightly and monthly print media. Nobody can say how many of them are actually bringing out today.

The media outlets run by each of these publishing companies or groups are outlined below:

- East West Media Group Limited: *KalerKantha* and *Bangladesh Protidin* (both Bengali dailies), *Daily Sun* (English), *Banglanews24.com* (news portal) and *News24* (TV station).
- Mediastar Limited: *ProthomAlo* (leading Bengali national daily) and *ABC Radio* (24-hours news and entertainment FM radio station).
- Mediaworld Limited: *The Daily Star* (leading English national daily).
- Beximco Media Limited: *The Independent* (English daily) and *Independent Television* (24-hour news and current affairs TV station).
- Jamuna Group Limited: *Jugantor* (Bengali daily) and *Jamuna TV* (24-hours news and views channel)
- Times Media Limited: *Daily Samokal* (Bengali daily) and *Chhanel24* (24-hour television news station).
- Ittefaq Group of Publications Limited: *Daily Ittefaq* (the oldest Bengali daily).
- Mediascene Limited: *BhorerKagoj* (Bengali newspaper), *Daily Dinersheshe* (evening newspaper) and *Desh TV* (news and entertainment TV).

East West Media Group, Mediastar Limited, Mediaworld Limited, Times Media Limited and Jamuna Group are leading in print publication. In addition to newspapers, East West Media Group, Jamuna Group and Times Media Limited have their own satellite news-based television stations.

ProthomAlo and *Bangladesh Protidin* are the two leading Bengali newspapers and together they have a circulation of nearly one million copies all over the country. According to data put on the Information Ministry's website, *BangladeshProtidin* is the highest circulated daily with 553,300 copies and *ProthomAlo* is the second with 501,800 copies. Many argue the figures would be less than the ones showed. In terms of quality and credibility *ProthomAlo* is better than *Bangladesh Protidin* but

people buy *Bangladesh Protidin* as it provides all news with half of what *ProthomAlo* costs for each copy.

Three other newspapers—*Jugantor*, *KalerKantha* and *DainikIttefaq*— have the same circulation of 290,200 copies, as per the ministry website data. Again, the actual circulation of the dailies is less than the numbers. As mentioned on the ministry's website, circulation of *The Daily Star* is 44,814. The circulation department of the daily claims that on average 55,000 copies are being sold daily. The second highest circulated English daily is *Financial Express*, a business paper, with 39,000 copies (the actual number is lower). Other English newspapers also have a minor circulation.

Some local newspapers have good circulation. The port-city-based *Daily Azadi* is the highest circulated daily outside the capital city with 27,000 copies. *DainikPurbanchal* has a circulation of 15,000 copies and both *Daily Karatoa* and *Daily Purbadesh* circulate 14,000 copies.

Despite increasing challenges and a declining trend in readership, the print press still remains influential and the traditional media plays a crucial role in opinion-building. Many in both urban and rural areas still depend on newspapers for stories and information. Although circulation hasn't gone down drastically, as has been the case in the west, newspapers are not yet dying in Bangladesh. Press is struggling and will survive for another two decades, as many predict, considering the fact that circulation of a few good newspapers is either stable or has slightly increased.

Radio

Radio is considered as a potentially strong media in Bangladesh but it did not grow much even after the arrival of commercial and community radio stations.

The history of radio is older than that of television. Radio came in the Indian subcontinent during British rule and its network spread during the Pakistan regime (1947-1971) when Bangladesh was part of Pakistan and called East Pakistan. Unlike television, radio had a glorious role during the nine-month War of Independence of Bangladesh in 1971. When war broke out, Pakistan Radio was renamed as *Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra* (Independent Bangladesh Radio Station) and started airing speeches and songs to keep the morale of the people strong and inspire freedom fighters. It eventually became the voice of the people and the government in exile during the war.

After independence, the radio continued broadcasting as *Bangladesh Betar*, airing both news and entertaining programmes. Radio was more available than television and people in both urban and rural areas were listeners. The radio had also a countrywide network and yet it did not flourish. Rather, it was increasingly becoming a tool for propaganda for successive regimes. Thus, the popularity of the radio station on which people depended for daily news and entertainment, dropped.

NMS (2002) shows radio reached 42 percent in 1998 but dipped to 24.1 percent in 2002. The rapid increase in the opportunity to watch television from the late 1990s and the subsequent years was a major reason behind the fall of radio listenership. According to NMS (2016), 12.4 percent of the population listens to radio with 16.7 percent in urban area. This equation puts radio operators in difficulty and they are now considering going for new initiatives to increase the popularity of the media.

Radio Metrowave was the first private station to begin airing in 1999, using the spectrum of Bangladesh Betar but the radio did not sustain. It was ended from operations for not renewing the license. However, more radios were in the pipeline and the country got two dozen stations in the next decade. *Radio Today*, *Radio Foorti*, *Radio Amar*, and *ABC Radio* are the stations that came one after another. As many as 35 commercial and community radio stations are now operating and a dozen more are expected to start functioning soon. Of the operational stations, 17 are commercial and the remaining 18 are community radios.

The commercial radio stations are urban based and entertainment oriented. They also give news updates briefly but mainly air popular music and live storytelling by celebrities. Since cricket is very popular sports in Bangladesh, few radio stations live telecast cricket matches that are organised in Bangladesh. Some of the programmes are aired late at night, aiming at certain groups of listeners. Through a mix of music talk shows, interviews and active participation of DJs, these stations have certainly added a new element to the urban dwellers.

Radio Foorti is basically a music radio station playing all types of songs. Apart from the capital city, it has separate stations in seven other major cities. *ABC Radio* is, on the other hand, a news-based station, regularly airing news bulletins, current affairs, and talk shows.

Community radio channels are mostly operating from outside of the cities, involving the community people, who can express their own views and listen to others in their own locality. In short, through the community radios, the community people communicate with each other and can access the information necessary for them.

Opened in 2011, *Radio Padma* is the first community radio opening a window for this media. Although 17 more community radio channels were launched after that, *Radio Padma* is still popular among the community. Programmes on various issues on family planning, health, society, technology, and awareness-building on natural disasters and violence against women, are featured in community radio channels.

There is also one specialised community radio ran by the government. *Krishi Radio* (Agriculture Radio), which began broadcasting from a coastal district in 2012, is dedicated to transmitting agricultural information in a community where people are involved mainly in farming and fishing.

Professor Shameem Reza, who teaches at the University of Dhaka and has been doing research on Bangladesh media, describes why radio is attracting mainly lower and lower-middle classes. A big feature here is that radio programmes can be heard through mobile phones. Commercial radio stations have been able to attract listeners with entertainment programmes while people in remote villages can connect with each other through the community radio channels. To make radio popular, operators should conduct research and studies on the listeners and their choices, believes Reza.

Recently, the government announced a policy for community radio, the Community Radio Installation, Broadcast and Operation Policy, underlining the importance of the radio stations and describing its importance. According to a government gazette notification, community radio is the “voice of the voiceless” and is playing a vital role to improve the area of education, culture, human values and dignity, and awareness building with a new dimension. Significant numbers of radio stations were established, operating with the participation and management of marginalised communities in their dialect. The new policy allows receiving funds from organisations and advertisers for the sustainability of the stations.

Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication or BNNRC, which has been working for the development of community radio, predicts a rapid growth of radio listeners in the country. It estimates over 6.5 million people are community radio listeners and the number will go up with the introduction of new stations.

International radio stations *BBC*, *Voice of America (VOA)*, and *Radio Veritas Asia* have been present in Bangladesh for several decades. An article titled, *Radio in Bangladesh: Growth, Decline and Transformation*, jointly written by Jude William Genilo, Bikash Ch. Bhowmick and Brian Brian Shoemsmith described that all the stations have a Bengali service targeting Bengali-speaking people in Bangladesh and West Bengal (India). *BBC* was launched in 1940 and has around 17 million weekly listeners in Bangladesh and 2.4 million in India. Launched in 1958, *VOA* can reach an estimated 10 million. *Radio Veritas Asia* is the only Catholic shortwave radio in the continent and is committed to proclaim the message of God’s love to

people in Asia, Its Bengali service is cited for its developmental programmes promoting dialogue and empowerment of people through information on issues prevailing in Bangladesh (Bangladesh's Changing Mediascape - *From State Control to Market Forces* (2013).

Internet radio is a recent phenomenon in Bangladesh.

Television

Television was introduced in 1964 in what was then East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. After the independence in 1971, the state-owned single broadcaster, *Bangladesh Television* or *BTV*, had limited viewers in some urban areas and was airing news, music, dramas, movies, games, and documentaries. Some Bengali and English drama serials were popular. The 1985 family drama *EiShob Din Ratri* was so popular that the busy streets of Dhaka used to get empty during its showtime. American TV serial *Macgyver* was also popular among viewers of all ages.

However, TV was an expensive media for people at that time. Even in the 1990s, a small number of people had television sets in rural areas. Those who could afford it used to watch weekly movies and dramas, and evening news bulletins. Absence of power supply was also a reason that held people back from availing of television up until the 2000s.

BTV was the only television channel in Bangladesh till the legalisation of the Television Receive Only Dish (TVRO) in 1992, which created scope for urban elites and the rich to watch other channels. Initially, *BTV* began to telecast *CNN* news bullets for a couple of hours in the morning. The scope widened as cable operators spread satellite dish networks among the middle class. The state-run *BTV* had a reputation of being the mouthpiece of the ruling party. So, there was a growing demand for independent broadcasters that would serve the public, not only the political masters.

Then came the commercial satellite televisions with the launching of *ATN Bangla* in 1997, followed by another commercial TV, *Channel i*, in 1999. But the introduction of *Ekushey Television* in 2000 revolutionised television as a media in the country. This third commercial channel got access to the *BTV*'s unused second terrestrial channel, using which *Ekhusy Television* reached half the country's population. Its quality news bulletins and programmes run by trained staff won the hearts of the viewers and people were then seen glued to the station. The journey did not last long as a new government took over and revoked the license of the TV in 2002 over irregularities in the issuing of the license by the previous government. The new government awarded more television licenses, mostly 24-hour news and entertainment channels.

In their article, *From Few to Many Voices: An Overview of Bangladesh's Media*, Brian Shoemsmith and Shameem Mahmud write that since the mid-1990s Bangladesh has witnessed a proliferation of television broadcasters with terrestrial, satellite, and transnational broadcasting companies, all jostling for the attention of the Bangladeshi audiences.

Both NMS and Nielsen Bangladesh surveys showed a persistent increase in TV consumption. As revealed by NMS in 2016, the viewership almost doubled in just two decades—from 42 percent in 1998 to 82.9 percent in 2016. The urban-rural viewership gap has also been narrowed down as revealed in the survey. Nielsen 2017 survey also revealed TV is the most viewed media in Bangladesh as viewership rose to 84 percent in 2016 from 74 percent in 2011. However, it saw a little decrease 80 percent in 2017.

In Bangladesh, 30 television stations, 29 of them private, are in operation with the latest one, *Nagorik TV* came to the market in February 2018. A dozen more persons got TV license while licences of four stations were revoked while in operation.

A significant feature in having so many TV stations is that the two main political parties—the incumbent Awami League and its archrival Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)—that ruled the country alternatively since 1991, awarded TV licenses

without due diligence to people (politicians and businessmen) mostly loyal to them, with an expectation to get their support. This is one of the major reasons behind shutting down of the channels on the ground of “violating licensing conditions.”

Another feature is that, like in other Asian and Middle Eastern countries, some Indian channels have gained popularity in Bangladesh. *Zee Bangla*, *Zee TV*, *Star TV*, *Jalsa TV*, and few other movie and sports channels have viewers in Bangladesh. Global news channels *BBC*, *CNN*, and *Al Jazeera* are also available and a large number of Bangladeshis are regular viewers.

Although a number of TV stations are now available, they are failing to provide quality news and programmes, comparing to the Indian channels. Both the state-run and commercial channels can be watched in many Middle Eastern, European and North American countries. Lack of trained and experienced personnel is a reason, but on top of that is the lack of professionalism of the owners and their partisanship. In addition, among owners and journalists a certain culture of fear (partly because of legislation) prevails and, therefore, effects investigative journalism.

ZayedulAhsan, a senior journalist with over 25 years of experience in both print and television journalism, explains it candidly: Ownership of the TV channels matters hugely when it comes to investigative reporting, expose corruption, social injustice, and violations of human rights. You have to have the moral courage and professional standard to do so. Most owners can't do this as it may anger the government. They are not in a position to challenge the ever-powerful regime because they don't want to lose their business interests.

The advertising market is not big and its volume has not increased alongside the pace of the media. According to different advertising agencies, the advertisement volume ranges from US\$250m to US\$300m and television shares two-thirds of it. As most media struggle to survive, there is an unhealthy race is found among them to somehow manage advertisement, in many cases, even at the cost of news and journalistic ethics.

The government follows a discriminatory policy in distributing its advertisement which accounts for about 10 percent of the total advertisements, as per several estimations. There are examples of newspapers with low circulation that get more government ads than the top ranking ones. Also newspapers critical of the government are routinely deprived of the government advertisements. The authorities have gone further to punish their critics. Three years ago, the country's telephone companies that share nearly about one sixth of the advertisements stopped providing ads to *Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star* after an unofficial embargo on supplying ads to the two newspapers imposed by the government.

Digital Media

Increased Internet accessibility has brought another dimension to Bangladesh's media landscape and that is an increasing digitalisation. Most leading newspapers have web portals, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts and presence on Youtube. Some newspapers outside of the capital have their online news portals.

Most television stations have their separate digital news services. For example, the digital versions of *Channel i* and *NTV* are constantly coming up with news, views and interviews. They are in a good competition with the newspapers' online services.

Prothom Alo is the most circulated and influential Bengali daily that provides news from two separate dimensions—print and online portals in Bengali and English. The online portal of *Prothom Alo* is the number one Bangladeshi website in the world. This portal is accessed by an average 1.2 million visitors from different countries and territories across the globe with over 7 million pageviews every month. The newspaper has more than 13 million Facebook followers, nearly double of what was three years ago. A large number of people, around 1.3 million, are following it in Twitter. The English version of *Prothom Alo* has 382,000 followers on Facebook. The amount of revenue the newspaper earns from digital version has crossed US\$10m

and the amount is going up, according to the newspaper.

The Daily Star went online in 2006 and was developing slowly. However, it got a good lift in the last five years as the digital section has been growing significantly by engaging more staff and generating diversified content, including interactive and multimedia to attract both local and international readers. According to the newspaper, its website had over one million active users till January 2018 with over 70,000 daily active users. Most of the readers remain connected through their mobile. The daily has around 2.7 million followers on Facebook, 460,000 Twitter followers and 50,000 subscribers on Youtube. The addition of local-language stories has attracted readers too. Prominent and interesting stories are being translated in Bengali and are being read by a good number of people. This helped the daily to generate more revenue, with around 53 percent growth in 2017 than the previous year. In addition, there are numerous news portals on the web. According to the Ministry of Information, some 2,018 such portals have so far applied for registration.

Social Networks

Bangladesh is one of the countries where Internet is growing at a good pace. The number of Internet users has in fact shot up sharply in recent years due to powerful mobile technology.

According to the Bangladesh Telephone Regulatory Commission (BTRC), as of June 2017, over 80.82 million citizens have Internet access, two fold more than the number one decade ago, and a staggering 93 percent of them use Internet through their mobile network, while 6.17 percent through the Internet service providers and only 0.14 percent through WiMAX. Internet penetration data from BTRC, which regulates telephone and mobile networks, show more than half of the total Internet connections were activated in the last four years after the country entered into third generation (3G) mobile technology in 2014. Three years before the introduction of 3G, the number of Internet users was around 10 million. The rapid growth of Internet use is regarded as a technological revolution in Bangladesh, which is shaping the country's media landscape.

The Internet growth can also be assessed by the increased use of bandwidth. As of January 2018, the use of bandwidth was 557mpps, which was 380mpps a year ago. The use of bandwidth is taking off as more and more people are accessing to the gateways and websites, as per Bangladesh Submarine Cable Company Limited.

The NMS (2016) shows 8 percent growth of Internet in the country and an astonishing 148 percent growth in rural areas over 2014.

A significant of those with active Internet connections have Facebook accounts. The latest data of the Information Communication Technology (ICT) Division under the Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology puts the number around 30 million. Facebook is the most used social network in Bangladesh and it will remain so for many years. Users frequently scroll pages and read and share newsfeeds. Interactions in this social platform have been increasing with the rise of Internet users among people of all ages. People with little education are willing to open their Facebook accounts to get into the information hub and be updated about what is going on around them. Other social networks are not even in the closer distance. Although not popular yet, Twitter is the second most used social network as growing numbers of different professional reads and share news, not regularly though. A small number of people also use Google+, Instagram and LinkedIn. The country entered into the fourth generation (4G) era in February 2018 and this faster data service will further bolster the current trend, bringing more citizens in the digital space.

BTRC has the authority to block or shut down any apps and websites. On various grounds, it has previously blocked Viber, WhatsApp, Youtube and Facebook. Currently, it operates upon getting instructions by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Since the usage of digital platforms is increasing, their surveillance by various government agencies has also heightened, often with

censoring or blocking of digital contents.

Like other countries, search engines and websites are the two main gateways that are used to access content.

Opinion Makers

Several blogs were popular among youths before the fast spread and dominance of Facebook. Although there was no mass participation, bloggers used to discuss and debate politics, economy, and other social issues. There were some personal blogs also. The discussions and debates were based on information and logics. Pioneer amongst them was *Somewhereinblog*, Bangladesh's first Bangla-language community blog site, founded in 2005. This trend continued until some bloggers, considered as seculars, began writing about Islam, Allah and Prophet Mohammad from the late 2010s. Some of the views were very extreme. To counter their views, a new group of bloggers emerged and began to term others "atheists and anti-religious". *Basherkella* is the prominent among those blogs.

The division between bloggers took a grave turn in 2013 over the issue of trying those who had committed crimes during Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971. Some bloggers and online activists played a leading role to mobilise a citizens' movement in 2013, demanding execution of the war criminals. On the other hand, the Islamist bloggers launched campaign against the movement and issued death threats against their opponents. The next two years saw the killings of five bloggers, forcing the government to shut down many blogs, including *Somewherein* and *Basherkella*. A number of bloggers were also arrested.

Some blogs like *Mukto-mona* (free-thinkers), *Amarblog* (my blog) are being operated from in and outside Bangladesh but lost the vigor. Activities on the blogs are confined and controlled because of the government's action and also due to the popularity of Facebook.

Sources

Newspapers (Bengali)

- [Bangladesh Protidin](#)
- [BonikBartha](#)
- [Daily Janakantha](#)
- [DainikIttefaq](#)
- [DainikKaratua](#)
- [DainikPurbanchal](#)
- [DainikPurbokone](#)
- [Jugantar](#)
- [KalerKantha](#)
- [ManabZamin](#)
- [ProthomAlo](#)
- [Samakal](#)
- [Sangbad](#)

Newspapers (English)

- [Bangladesh Today](#)
- [Daily Sun](#)

- [Dhaka Tribune](#)
- [Financial Express](#)
- [New Age](#)
- [News Today](#)
- [The Daily Star](#)

Publishers

- [East West Media Group](#)
- [Jamuna Group](#)
- [Mediastar](#)
- [Mediaworld](#)

Television

- [ATN Bangla](#)
- [ATN News](#)
- [Bangla Vision](#)
- [Bangladesh Television](#) (BTV)
- [Boishakhi TV](#)
- [Channel i](#)
- [Channel24](#)
- [DBC News](#)
- [Deepto TV](#)
- [Desh TV](#)
- [Ekushey Television](#)
- [Independent Television](#)
- [Jamuna TV](#)
- [Maasranga Television](#)
- [Mohona TV](#)
- [Nagorik TV](#)
- [News24](#)
- [NTV](#)
- [RTV](#)
- [Somoy TV](#)

Radio

- [ABC Radio](#)
- [Bangladesh Betar](#)
- [DhakaFM](#)
- [Edge Radio](#)
- [Radio Amar](#)
- [Radio Bhumi](#)
- [Radio Foorti](#)
- [Radio Padma](#)

- [Radio SagorGiri](#)
- [Radio Shadhin](#)
- [Radio Today](#)

Opinion makers

- [Amarblog](#)
- [Mukto-mona](#)

Organisations

Trade Unions

The Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) is the apex union of professional journalists in Bangladesh. It is divided into two fractions—one group is affiliated with ruling Awami League while the other is aligned with another major political party, BNP. It split in the mid-1990s over political allegiance. The pro-AL union has some 4,500 members with 11 units across the country. All units operate as independent organisations according to their respective constitutions. But the constitution of each unit is pre-approved by the BFUJ. The units are affiliated organisations of BFUJ. The Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) is the biggest unit. The pro-BNP group has some 7,000 members with 14 units across the country, according to one of its former presidents. They have their own offices and almost regularly hold elections to choose their leaders.

The union has a role to play in protecting rights of the journalists and interests of the community. Apart from being vocal about new wage boards for journalists and newspaper employees, its members have been demanding the repeal of all laws and regulations that limit freedom of journalism and intimidate journalists from doing their duties. Top leaders of both factions have direct affiliation with the two big parties and there are examples of some of them participating in programmes of their respective political parties. The pro-government faction is thus seen not opposing the ruling party's policy even if that goes against the interest of the journalist community.

Journalist Associations

Bangladesh has numerous associations of journalists all over the country. Jatiya Press Club (National Press Club) with over 1,000 members is situated in the capital city. The offices of the BFUJ and DUJ are also housed on the same premises, making it a hub of journalists. The Press Club provides a forum for political, social and cultural groups and individuals, for holding press briefings and seminars. Like the trade unions, the National Press Club is also divided into the groups that are aligned with the two large political parties. It is run by an elected body.

Press clubs are also present at district headquarters and are not constituent of the National Press Club.

In addition, the Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU) is the largest body of reporters of Dhaka-based newspapers, television and radio, online portals, and news agencies. Founded in 1995 to work for the interests of reporters, it has now 1,500 members. DRU organises discourses, workshops and computer courses for members. Politics has little influence in DRU.

Associations like Bangladesh Parliament Journalists' Association, Dhaka Sub-Editors Council, Bangladesh Photo Journalists Association and Television Camera Journalists Association work for protecting the interests of their members. There are

many district - and *upazila* - (*region*) level organisations. Besides, there are associations for the reporters of specific news beats.

The Editors' Council is an organisation of editors of the highest-circulated newspapers in the country. Formed in 2013, the organisation aims to play an active role in protecting press freedom, developing professionalism, and strengthening the editorial institution. It often issues statements against government policies or actions that go against the journalists' community. The Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (NOAB) is an organisation of newspapers' owners. They often use their platform to bargain with the government on different business-related issues.

Journalists are not required to become members of either the union or the associations

News Agencies

Bangladesh has two major news agencies, one is official mainly serving the government and the other is private and maintains a neutral approach. Both Bengali and English newspapers subscribe to the services of the agencies. Established in 1972, a month after the birth of the country, the official news agency Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) has become a mouthpiece of the parties in power. It is critical of the opposition political parties but rarely writes anything that goes against the ruling parties.

On the other hand, the country's first private wire service United News of Bangladesh (UNB) has been able to achieve the reputation of a credible news service after its establishment in 1988. It has been serving readers both locally and internationally. However, the service of the news agency has shrunk due to a curtail of manpower. Both the news agencies were established to service English-language news but later introduced services in local language following the boom of newspaper outlets. There are some other news agencies providing services. *Bdnews24.com* and *Bangladeshnews24.com* are two of them.

Audience measurement organisations

Founded in 1995, MRB Bangladesh is one of the market research organisations and has been doing the task of audience measurement. The company pioneered syndicated media research in the country, including TV-audience measurement, according to its website. It is measuring the number of viewers of TV stations and their choices through installing a device (meter) in a limited number of households. The measurement is questionable as it is done on the basis of a small number of samples collected from only two cities.

There is no proper mechanism to measure the numbers of readership of print press. As per some estimations, one newspaper is read by 6 to 8 persons and that also varies from urban to rural areas. It is the Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC) that regularly detects and reveals the number of Internet audience.

Sources

Trade Unions

- [Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists](#) (BFUJ)

Associations

- [Dhaka Sub-Editors Council](#)
- [National Press Club](#)

News agencies

- [Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha](#) (BSS)
- [Bdnews24.com](#)
- [United News of Bangladesh](#) (UNB)

Policies

Media legislation

The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees the right to freedom of speech and expression; freedom of the press is also mentioned but this freedom is not an absolute one, rather subject to reasonable restrictions imposed by the law on several grounds.

Media freedom in Bangladesh is endangered because the country has both colonial and modern-day laws often being applied to curtail media freedom and intimidate journalists. These laws and some regulations are misused to allow the law enforcers and influential individuals to act against the media when their interests are affected by journalism. Ministers and lawmakers often criticise the media whenever any news goes against the government or damages the image of the ruling party. The tendency to sue journalists under so-called defamation cases filed by pro-government people is alarming. Journalists nowadays face more direct and indirect threats than ever. Although the government would deny the fact and say those laws and regulations are intended for streamlining the media, it seems to be pushing for new legislation to have further grip on the free flow of information through overt and covert interventions.

Old laws that exert influence upon the working of the media in one way or the other are *Special Powers Act of 1974*, *Official Secrets Act of 1923*, *Contempt of Court Act 1926*, *Copyright Act 2000* and the *Code of Criminal Procedure* (CrPC). There is a history of misusing these acts. Enacted during the British colonial era in 1898, CrPC has a provision for issuing direct arrest warrants against anybody including journalists, writers and publishers of any books or newspapers if they wrote or said anything considered defamatory. Journalists have long been demanding the scrapping of the provision, only to be ignored by the successive governments. However, in 2011 the Bangladesh Parliament passed a bill, scrapping the provision of issuing direct arrest warrants against journalists, writers and others for writing or saying anything defamatory. But it did not bring any relief to the media as more stringent laws were promulgated later.

The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act enacted in 2006 is notable. It has a provision to sue journalists on charges of defamation and hurting religious sentiment, and a jail term for 10 years. The law was amended in 2013 only to make it harsher, extending the jail term to 14 years and scraping the provision of bail. The law has, in fact, no safeguard for journalists and the result is that two dozen journalists were sued under its Section 57 of the Act alone in 2017.

Amid a growing demand, the government announced to repeal the controversial law and instead decided to promulgate a new law titled *Digital Security Act*. A draft of the new law got approval recently, bringing more frustration to the journalist community. The Section 57 of the previous law was incorporated in the draft and, once in force, that would further curtail the

freedom of media, especially the scope for investigative reporting. Fearing misuse, journalists demanded not to include any provisions that go against media freedom. They said these provisions are contradictory to the Right to Information Act.

In 2014, the government passed the National Broadcast Policy for television and radio stations, drawing widespread debates and criticism from rights activists, civil society and media personalities, who expressed concern about a possible misuse of some of its provisions and the scope of undermining the constitutional right to free media, access to information and freedom of expression. The policy includes some positive elements but it may turn out to be a convenient tool for the government to restrict the free flow of information and, thereby, establish more control on the media. Human Rights Watch has urged the government to revoke the policy, saying it imposes draconian restrictions on media freedom.

As per recommendations of the policy, the government prepared a draft of the Broadcast Act in 2016, incorporating provisions of jail terms and fines for violating the rules or regulations of the act and orders or directives of the proposed broadcast commission. The draft says criminal procedures would be followed in case of probe, trial and appeal concerning any offence that falls under the act. One may face a maximum penalty of three months' imprisonment or a fine of US\$50,000 or both for violating the rules or regulations and orders or directives of the commission. It listed as many as 27 different activities that a broadcaster cannot carry out without prior approval from the authorities concerned.

In 2017, the cabinet approved a draft of the National Online Mass Media Policy, keeping provisions similar to that of the proposed Broadcast Act. Transparency International, Bangladesh (TIB) called upon the government to halt the implementation of the policy for its potential threat to press freedom.

Soon after the emergence of Bangladesh, the Printing Press and Publication Act came into force in 1973. It gave a district magistrate the power to grant permission to publish newspapers. The act specifies the responsibilities of the newspapers. The Newspaper Employees (Condition of Service) Act of 1974 laid down rules for ensuring rights and privileges of the journalists and the employees of the newspapers. Under its Clause 20, the government can formulate rules concerning work hours, leave, provident fund and procedures to be followed by the wage board. However, the government brought journalists and employees under the Labour Law of 2006, making the 1974 act dysfunctional.

Accountability systems

In Bangladesh, there is no single mechanism to oversee media and ensure their accountability. Each media use their own internal system to ensure accountability. In many cases, several media houses published fake, baseless stories intending to serve economic benefits or political interests or targeting individuals or rival media organisations. In absence of any authority involving all media, it is quite impossible to stop this kind of practices. As a result, the government takes selective measures in this regard. It takes action if the fake or baseless stories go against it, but remain silence if they serve government purposes.

Like elsewhere in the world, fake news is a dangerous phenomenon in Bangladesh with little or no mechanism to proof it. Radical Islamists resorted to online propaganda through spreading fake and motivated news during and after the 2013 mass movement in the capital's Shahbagh square, targeting secular bloggers, intellectuals and LGBT activists and creating grounds to attack and murder them. They have been successful in doing so. Fake news has now become a political tool to malign or discredit political rivals in Bangladesh. A number of websites are being operated with an aim to spread fake news.

Regulatory authorities

The Bangladesh Press Council is the only formal regulatory authority for Bangladesh media. However, as it was seen in the past, successive governments have used their authority to regulate media.

The council was established in 1979 with the commitment of preserving and protecting the freedom of the press, and maintaining and improving the standard of newspapers and news agencies. The 15-member quasi-judicial body can hardly play any role in this regard. A Supreme Court Judge or anyone having such qualification is nominated by the president and heads the council as its chairman. Of the members, three are working journalists, three editors of news agencies and three owners or top executives of news agencies. The panel of experts will consist of three members of which one member will be nominated by the University Grants Commission, one by the Bangla Academy, and the other by the Bangladesh Bar Council. Two members of Jatiya Sangsad (National Parliament) are to be nominated by the Speaker.

It accepts complaints relating to media and resolves them in line with the Press Council Act and the Code for Conduct for newspapers and news agencies. As it enjoys some rights and jurisdiction of the civil court, the council can summon someone, asking them to present and deposit witnesses when dealing with a complaint. However, it cannot compel any media or journalist or editor to disclose the sources of their news. The council has seldom taken bold steps against governmental interference. On the other hand, aggrieved people rarely go to the council to lodge complaints due to its very limited jurisdiction.

In 2010, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Information said in an observation that the Council was nothing but a “paper tiger” and thus called for revamping it and amending the Press Council Act.

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Laws, Regulations and Intuitions

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- [Constitution](#)
- [Copyright Act, 2000](#)
- [Ministry of Information](#)
- [National Broadcast Policy](#)
- [National Online Mass Media Policy](#)
- [The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898](#)
- [The Contempt of Court Act, 1926](#)
- [The Official Secrets Act, 1923](#)
- [The Penal Code, 1860](#)
- [The Press Council Act, 1974](#)
- [The Printing Press and Publication Act, 1973](#)
- [The Special Powers Act, 1974](#)

Education

Universities and schools

Studies on journalism, mass communication and media were expanded over the past two decades. At least 19 universities—10 public and nine private—are currently offering courses on journalism. One of the reasons behind the increasing opportunity is the growth of mass media in the country that required a huge demand of human resources. Both the public and private universities mainly provide theoretical education and lack adequate practical courses which are much required for journalism students. The institutions that have been accredited to provide journalism education are:

- Communication and Journalism at the University of Chittagong
- Communication and Media Studies at the University of Development Alternative
- Film and Media at JatiyaKabiKaziNazrul Islam University
- Journalism and Media Studies at Jahangirnagar University
- Journalism and Media Studies at Manarat International University
- Journalism and Media Studies at Port City International University
- Journalism and Media Studies at Stamford University Bangladesh
- Journalism, Communication and Media Studies at Baredra University
- Journalism, Communication and Media Studies at State University of Bangladesh)
- Mass Communication and Journalism (Khulna University)
- Mass Communication and Journalism at Barisal University
- Mass Communication and Journalism at Begum Rokeya University
- Mass Communication and Journalism at Comilla University
- Mass Communication and Journalism at Jagannath University
- Mass Communication and Journalism at the University of Dhaka
- Mass Communication and Journalism at the University of Rajshahi
- Media & Mass Communication at American International University-Bangladesh
- Media and Communication at Independent University, Bangladesh
- Media Studies and Journalism at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh
- MSS in Journalism and Mass Communication at Daffodil International University

Professional development

There is huge lacking of professional training for journalists in Bangladesh. Most media houses too do not provide professional trainings to their staff. Usually, journalists learn as they go with their profession, mostly having assistance from their senior colleagues in the newsroom. However, there are some non-government organisations providing journalists with limited training courses.

The Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB), an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of Information, organizes trainings for journalists on different issues, undertakes research projects on various aspects of media and mass communication and their impacts, and publishes books, journals, booklets etc.

Sources

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- [Barisal University](#)

- [Begum Rokeya University](#)
- [Comilla University](#)
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- [Independent University, Bangladesh](#)
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- [Jahangirnagar University](#)
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- [Khulna University](#)
- [Manarat International University](#)
- [Port City International University](#)
- [Press Institute of Bangladesh](#)
- [Stamford University, Bangladesh](#)
- [State University of Bangladesh](#)
- [University of Chittagong](#)
- [University of Development Alternative](#)
- [University of Dhaka](#)
- [University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh](#)
- [University of Rajshahi](#)

Conclusions

Conclusion

Bangladesh is a country of numerous events. Political chaos, corruption, religious extremism, poor governance, and violations of human rights often rule the country. The role of the media is to expose them through reporting. In some countries media are doing this effectively but sadly, in Bangladesh, media are seldom seen doing this vital job. Both the media and the government are to be blamed for this. Amid a climate of fear, media owners and editors have become highly self-censored while the government's application of regulatory measures has squeezed the space for media. Journalists, on the other hand, are directly affiliated with the party politics in greater number, taking political parallelism from bad to worst.

Despite the credibility crisis and limitations, people have multiple options of getting news—from live and instant news services to details and analytical stories. The greatest outcome of having so many media is that they are bringing out everything occurring even at remotest part of the country.

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