

CGS PEACE REPORT

an initiative of BPO

CGS
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**Crime and Violence in
Bangladesh:**
An analysis from BPO

News and Fake News

**Fake News
Phenomenon in
Bangladesh**

Commentary on Fake News:
Mr. Md. Masudur Rahman PPM

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Contents:

From the Editor's Desk.....	I
Crime and Violence in Bangladesh: An Analysis from BPO	3
Violence Update: (April - May 2019).....	3
Fake News Phenomenon in Bangladesh: F. M. Arafat.....	11
News and Fake News.....	24
Rohingya Crisis	24
Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)	27
US Presidential Election, 2016	28
Anti-Fake News Legislations: A Comparison between Bangladesh, Singapore, Malaysia, and Germany.....	31
Commentary on Fake News: Md. Masudur Rahman PPM.....	35
Annex:	39

Figures:

Figure 1: An Overview of Incidents (April- May 2019)	3
Figure 2: Bi-monthly Comparison of Number of Incidents	4
Figure 3: Consequences of the Violent Incidents (February-March 2019)	6
Figure 4: Consequences of the Violent Incidents (April-May 2019).....	6
Figure 5: Comparative analysis of Incidents (April- May 2019)	7
Figure 6: Bi-Monthly Divisional Distribution of Incidents (April- May 2019)	10

Table:

Table 1: Anti-Fake News Legislations: A Comparison between Bangladesh, Singapore, Malaysia, and Germany.....	31
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From the Editor's Desk

One of the earliest references to 'fake news' is found in the epic, *Mahabharata*. Drona, the skillful teacher and a key strategist aiding the Kurus, could not be persuaded to stop fighting the Pandavas. The only way it could be done is by telling Drona that his son, Ashwatthaman, has been killed in the battle. Now killing Ashwatthaman was no easy task. The Pandavas then devised a way or what could now be referred to as a 'fake news' by spreading a lie that Ashwatthaman is dead. It was no other than Yudhishtira who had attained a reputation of being truthful and it is to whom Drona sought for verification of the news that claimed that Ashwatthaman has been killed. But it was not Drona's son, rather it was 'an elephant' whose name was also Ashwatthaman that the Pandavas had killed. Interestingly, Yudhishtira 'verified' this news to Drona only by lowering his voice and turning his head away when uttering the word 'elephant' and so Drona only heard that 'Ashwatthaman...is dead.' Drona instantly became motionless and it did not take long for the Pandavas to cut off his head. At the end, Arjuna, although a member of the victorious Pandavas, could not help telling his brother, Yudhishtira: "Your greed for victory has corrupted you. You've slipped into a lie like the rest of mankind."¹ The end (defeating the Kurus), however, was achieved, albeit deceitfully, for which the Pandavas much to their shock ended up in Hell!

'End justifies the means' has always been a part of the realpolitik, with 'fake news' increasingly being utilized whenever convenient. Some critics believe that the matter is no different when officials of the Indian government claimed that the airstrike on Balakot in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in Pakistan killed as many as 300-400 Islamic terrorists. This 'airstrike' was in retaliation to the suicide terror attack at Lethpora in the Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir in India, which killed 46 members of India's Central Reserve Police Force. Neutral sources, however, have asserted that nothing more than 'rocks and trees' were actually hit by the airstrike and that no 'terrorists' were killed.² But that did not stop the 'fake news' from having an impact on the minds of the Indian population, which, as some critics have alleged, helped the ruling party, BJP, to win the national election for a consecutive second term. Fake news, indeed, can contribute towards producing winnable results!

But the person who has made a big name out of 'fake news' is none other than the 45th President of the United States of America, Donald J. Trump. According

¹ Jean-Claude Carriere, *The Mahabharata: A Play Based Upon the Indian Classic Epic* (London: Methuen Drama, 1987), p. 196.

² Martin Howell, Gerry Doyle, Simon Scarr, "Satellite images show buildings still standing at Indian bombing site," *Reuters*, 6 March 2019. Cited in <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-kashmir-pakistan-airstrike-insi/satellite-images-show-buildings-still-standing-at-indian-bombing-site-idUSKCN1QN00V>. Accessed on 5 October 2019.

to CNN, Trump on the average made 59 'false claims' or 'fake news' per week for the 12 weeks that the CNN had monitored.³ A classical case was in 2012, indeed, long before he was taken seriously as a presidential candidate, when Trump ran a baseless campaign based on the untrue belief that President Obama was born in Kenya,⁴ presumably as a ploy to delegitimize his presidency. Such 'fake news,' of course, would not have been an issue if it were not coming from an incumbent President of a superpower and a country with 243 years of democratic tradition, although many critics would contend that the 'democratic tradition' of the United States was beset with racial abuses at home and deceptions and brinkmanship abroad for centuries. Fake news only made it more complex and the system now less trustworthy.

More at home, eight people were killed in vigilante lynchings in Bangladesh when rumours or 'fake news' began to circulate on social media that children were being kidnapped and sacrificed as offerings for the construction of the Padma Bridge. Since the bridge is being built by China, critics smell foul play in the circulation of such fake news, indeed, with the objective of 'deliberately trying to trigger panic or unrest in the community,'⁵ and in the process make the construction of the bridge controversial if not to foment anti-Chinese sentiments within Bangladesh.

Have we then entered the age of 'post-truth,' where the 'unreal' is considered 'real,' while the 'real' gets devalued and publicly mocked? But if 'post-truth' replaces 'truth' and becomes the new normal, what would be the fate of emancipatory goals and the civilizational quest for justice? Hopefully, this edition of Peace Report would make the readers seriously ponder on the menace of 'fake news' so that they can start devising practices required for putting an end to it.

Imtiaz Ahmed

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³ Daniel Dale and Tara Subramaniam, "Fact check: Trump invented imaginary CNN studio, made 58 other false claims last week," *CNN politics*, 2 October 2019. Cited in <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/10/02/politics/trump-59-false-last-week-september-imaginary-studio/index.html>. Accessed on 5 October 2019.

⁴ See, James Ball, *Post-Truth: How Bullshit Conquered the World* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2017), p. 281.

⁵ See, Agence France-Presse, "Bangladesh: eight lynched over false rumours of child sacrifices," *The Guardian*, 24 July 2019. Cited in <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/25/bangladesh-eight-lynched-over-false-rumours-of-child-sacrifices>. Accessed on 5 October 2019.

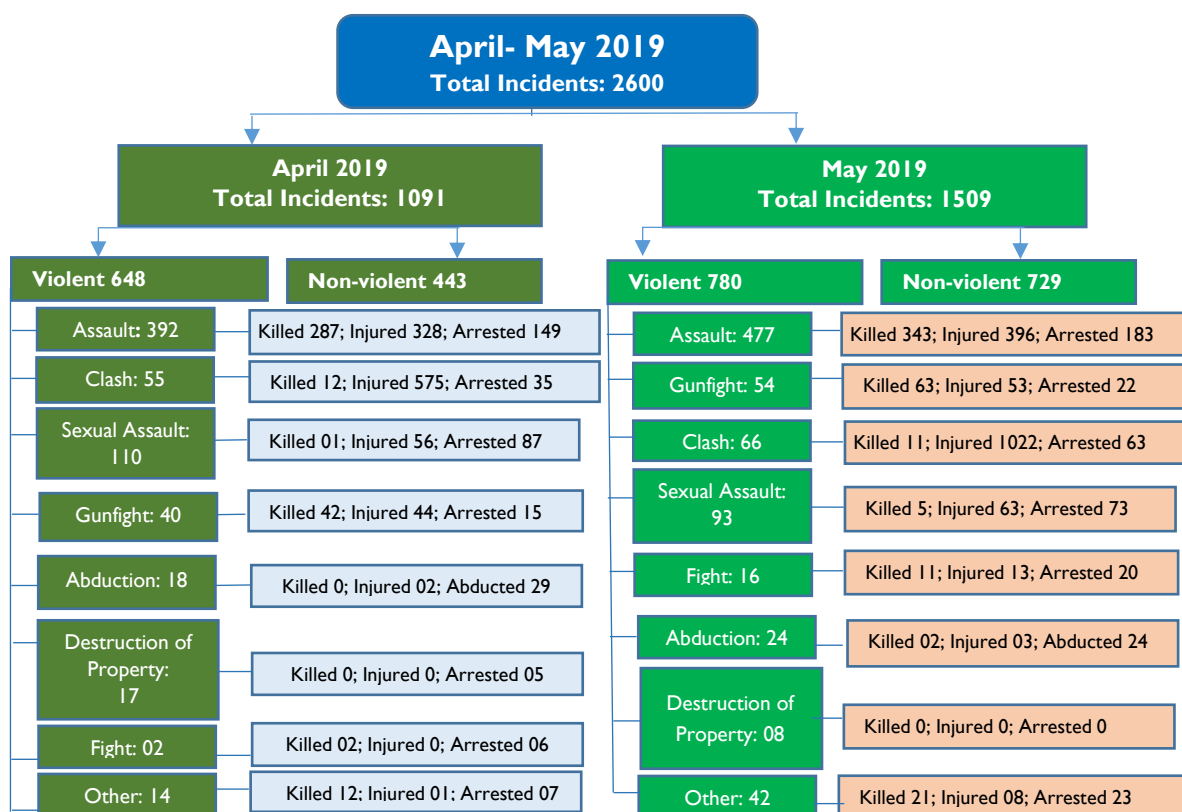
Crime and Violence in Bangladesh: An Analysis from BPO

Violence Update: (April - May 2019)

The Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) brings together different streams of publicly available data on violence using news reports from prominent national dailies. From April 2019 to May 2019, BPO recorded 2600 violent⁶ and

non-violent⁷ incidents all over the country. Figure 1 segregates these incidents into some general categories by type of violence. A brief description of each category is given in the Annex.

Figure 1: An Overview of Incidents (April- May 2019)

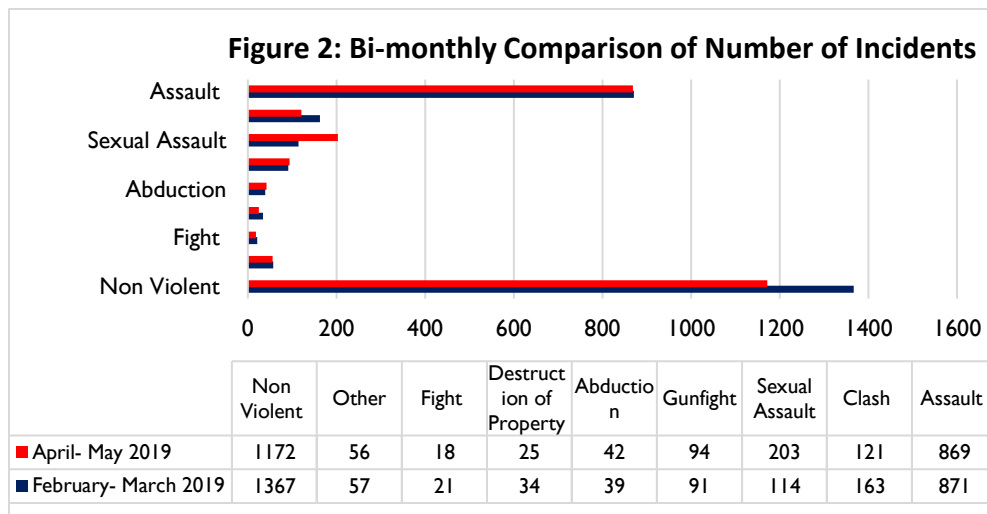


⁶ **Violent Incident:** According to BPO Codebook: The reported incident involved the intentional use of physical force by an individual or group against another individual or group, in a manner that resulted or could have resulted in death, injury or any other form of physical harm to persons or property.

⁷ **Non-violent Incident:** According to BPO Codebook: The reported incident did not involve the intentional use of physical force by an individual or group against another individual or group, in a manner that resulted or could have resulted in death, injury or any other form of physical harm to persons or property, e.g. arrest, peaceful protest, rescue and recovery.

According to BPO data, on a comparative basis the number of incidents has decreased in recent months in Bangladesh. During April-May 2019, incident prevalence decreased by 5.69% (from 2,757 to 2,600) compared to February-March 2019. This decrease

was 9.61% (from 3,050 to 2,757) for February-March 2019 compared to December 2018- January 2019. Figure 2 shows incident prevalence of past six months subdivided into two bi-monthly groups.



The data suggests that despite the decrease in the total number of incidents, there is a significant rise of 78.07% in the number of incidents of sexual assault and a slight increase in gunfight and abduction. In the previous months, i.e., in February-March 2019, there was a 72.73% increase in sexual assault than December 2018- January 2019. During April-May 2019, a total of 225 persons were victims of sexual assault in which six were killed and 119 were injured. On the other hand, a total of 105 people were killed, 97 were

injured in 94 incidents of gunfight, which mostly occurred between the law enforcement agencies and alleged criminals of drug peddling and robbery. Also, in 42 incidents of abduction, a total of 53 people were abducted and according to the reports, at least 25 of them were rescued and law enforcement agencies arrested 46 in this regard. Apart from these three, drop in the prevalence of assault (by 2 less reported incidents), clash (25.76%) and property destruction (26.47%) is noticeable during April-May 2019.

Apart from the above, the number of non-violent incidents decreased by 14.26% in April-May 2019 than February- March 2019. In August-September 2018, a total of 5,774 people were arrested while in October-November 2018 the number of arrests was 7,104, indicating a 23.03% rise during the period in review while previously there was a 23.55% decline recorded in August-September 2018 than June-July 2018. In December 2018-January 2019, a 1.90% rise was observed with reported arrests 7,239 in 1,665 incidents. But again, in February-March 2019 the reported 7,157 arrests indicates 1.86% decline than December 2018- January 2019 while in the following two months the total number of reported arrests was 5,104 indicating a 28.68% drop in the number of arrestees. (Figures 3 & 4). But the figure also indicates that, although the number of incidents was less in February-March 2019 but the number of people killed is higher in these months by 167 than December 2018- January 2019. A monthly breakdown is given below.

A monthly breakdown of April 2019 and May 2019 reflects a gap by incident prevalence and consequences (figure 5). The figure indicates that there

is a trend of an overall increase in May 2019 than April 2019 in terms of the total number of reported incidents (38.31%), death (28.09%), injured (54.56%), and arrests (59.34%). In case of the number of reported injuries, in April 2019, a total of 1,008 people were injured in 233 violent incidents while in May 2019, a total of 1,558 people were injured in 313 violent incidents. Most of the reported injuries were caused by assault, sexual assault, and clash related to political confrontation, establishing supremacy, land dispute, personal issues, raid operations, and gunfight. In April 2019, 168 injuries out of the total injured were caused due to political violence, which included inter/intra party clash, local elections, and establishing supremacy. The number of the injured was 273 during May 2019. Again, during April and May 2019, more than hundreds were reportedly injured in clash triggered by infrequent issues like dispute during wedding function, protest against establishing acid factory in locality, temple land, cattle trespassing to another's crop, setting electric pole, postponing exam, cricket/football match in different districts of Bangladesh.^{8,9,10,11,12}

⁸ *The Daily Purbokone* (2019). Accessed 14 August 2019. Available at: https://www.edainikpurbokone.net/content/2019/2019-05-04/zoom_view/a16.jpg, https://www.edainikpurbokone.net/content/2019/2019-05-04/zoom_view/k12.jpg.

⁹ *The Daily Star* (2019). Accessed 14 August 2019. Available at: http://epaper.thedailystar.net/contents/2019/2019_05_06/content_zoom/2019_05_06_15_2_b.jpg.

¹⁰ *The Daily Ittefaq* (2019). Accessed 14 August 2019. Available at:

https://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/2019/05/15/images/06_101.jpg.

¹¹ *The Daily Jugantor* (2019). Accessed 14 August 2019. Available at: https://epaper.jugantor.com/2019/04/03/25/details/25_r3_c1.jpg.

¹² *The Daily Jugantor* (2019). Accessed 14 August 2019. Available at: https://epaper.jugantor.com/2019/04/11/2/details/2_r15_c2.jpg.

Figure 3: Consequences of the Violent Incidents (February-March 2019)

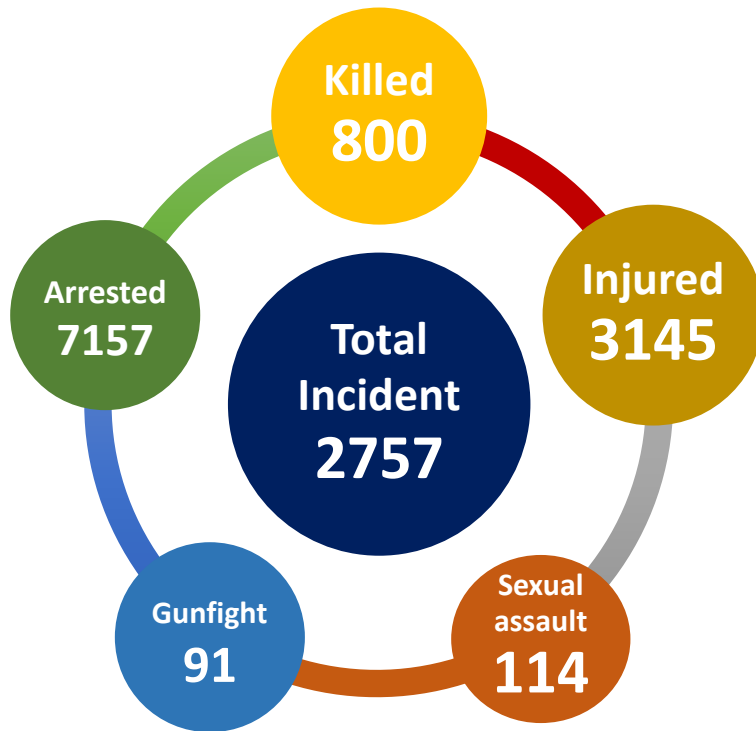


Figure 4: Consequences of the Violent Incidents (April-May 2019)

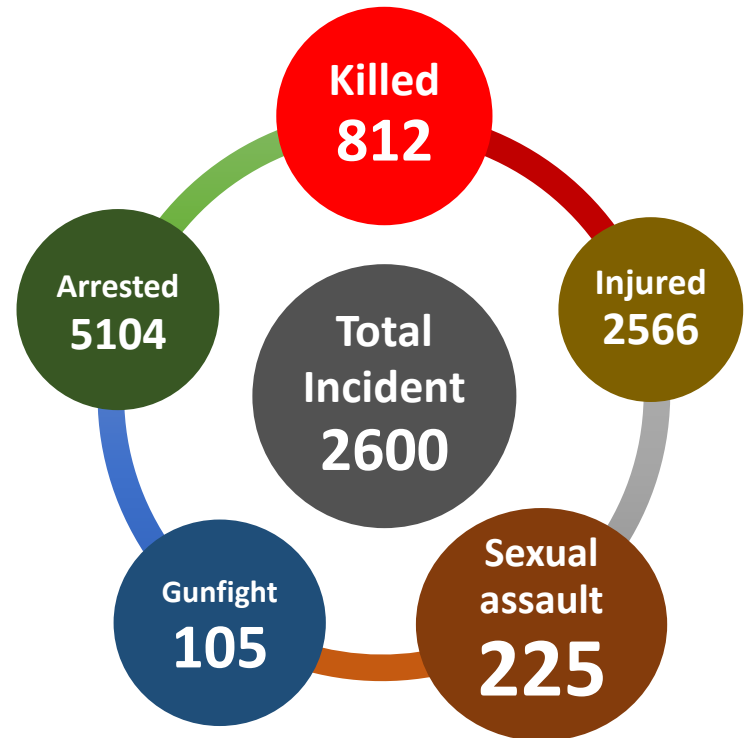


Figure 5 indicates an increase in the number of total people killed in violence in May 2019 compared to April 2019. A total of 356 people were reportedly killed in 326 incidents of violence in April 2019, while 456 were killed in 422 incidents of violence in May 2019. According to BPO data, the number of reported death are mostly

prevalent in incidents like sexual assault, domestic violence, land related violence, gunfight, social issues, economic disputes, and robbery. Also during April-May 2019, a total of 162 people committed suicide and at least 195 were reportedly killed by unknown perpetrators all over Bangladesh.

Figure 5: Comparative analysis of Incidents (April- May 2019)

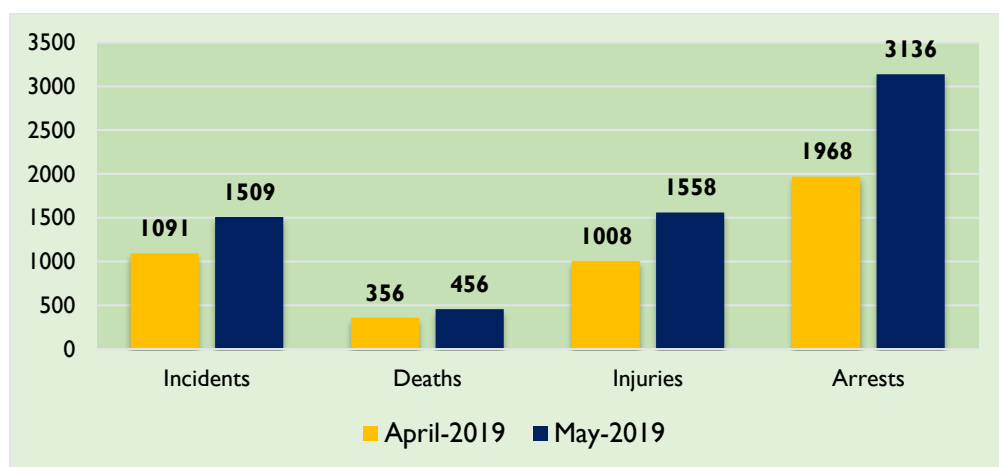


Figure 6 provides a spatial glimpse through the divisional distribution of the recorded incidents in BPO and their consequences. The figure indicates that Dhaka is at the top in terms of incident prevalence (814), reported death (229), injuries (814), and reported arrests (2,349). This suggests that Dhaka is in an allover top position. During April-May 2019, of all the divisions, Dhaka (229), Chittagong (208), and Rajshahi (111) divisions have the highest numbers of reported deaths. During these months, a total of 548 (including 192 women) people reportedly died in 498 violent incidents in these three divisions. Notably, among them, 98 were victims of sexual and gender-based violence, 102 reportedly committed suicide, 84 allegedly killed in gunfight, and 14 reportedly killed in clash.

Among the reported deaths, a shocking incident occurred on 6 April 2019 in Feni, a small town 100 miles (160km) south of Dhaka. On that day, Nusrat Jahan Rafi a 19-year old Madrasah student was doused with kerosene, set on fire on the roof of her Madrasah, and was burned to death after she had reported of sexual harassment by the Headmaster of her Madrasah to authorities. She suffered burns over 80%

of her body. Four days later, on 10 April 2019 Nusrat died at the Dhaka Medical College and Hospital. In the ambulance during her transfer to Dhaka from Feni, fearing she might not survive, she recorded a statement on her brother's mobile phone. In her statement, she said, "The teacher (Headmaster of the Madrasah) touched me, I will fight this crime till my last breath". Nusrat also stated that a fellow female student took her to the roof of the school, saying one of her friends was being beaten up. When Nusrat reached the rooftop four or five people, wearing burqas, surrounded her and allegedly pressurised her to withdraw the case against the Headmaster. When she refused, they set her on fire. The case sparked mass protests in Bangladesh and abroad and put the vulnerability of the victims of sexual assault and harassment on the spotlight. On 29 May 2019, sixteen individuals, including two politicians, were charged with murdering her.^{13,14,15,16}

In case of injuries, Dhaka (689), Sylhet (492), and Chittagong (413) divisions has the maximum number of people injured in violence. Most of this violence occurred in the form of sexual violence, domestic violence, political violence including electoral violence and

¹³ BBC (2019). Accessed 14 August 2019. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-47947117>.

¹⁴ BBC (2019). Accessed 14 August 2019. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48441604>.

¹⁵ The Daily Star (2019). Accessed 14 August 2019. Available at:

<https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/nusrat-jahan-rafi-murder-a-well-planned-grisly-murder-1750333>.

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch (2019). Accessed 14 August 2019. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/16/bangladesh-ensure-justice-murdered-student>.

clash among different actors over land, economic and natural resources. Among the divisions, despite being the second lowest in incident prevalence, Sylhet has the second most reported injuries in Bangladesh. Seven large-scale clashes¹⁷ took place in different parts of Sylhet division in which 305 people were injured. The reasons include establishment of electric pole, football match, toll collection, and other economic and social issues.¹⁸ In Chittagong two large-scale clashes took place in which more than 60 were injured. One of the clashes took place over raid against drug peddling while the other was a land related clash.^{19,20} In case of Dhaka, only one large scale clash took place in the capital while other

clashes occurred in Faridpur, Kishoreganj, and Gazipur districts.^{21,22,23,24}

In terms of arrests in February-March 2019, BPO data suggests that Dhaka (2,368), Khulna (1,568), and Rajshahi (1,116) divisions have the maximum number of people arrested by the law enforcement agencies respectively. Most of the arrests occurred due to raids and special drives against drug peddling, subversive activities, and combing operations.

¹⁷ Incidents of clashes in which 30-60 people were reportedly injured.

¹⁸ *The Daily Star* (2019). Accessed 14 August 2019.

Available at:
http://epaper.thedailystar.net/contents/2019/2019_04_05/content_zoom/2019_04_05_6_2_b.jpg.

The Daily Ittefaq (2019). Accessed 14 August 2019.

Available at:
http://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/2019/04/08/images/06_10_5.jpg.

The Daily Ittefaq (2019). Accessed 14 August 2019.

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https://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/2019/05/16/images/17_10_5.jpg.

The Daily Ittefaq (2019). Accessed 14 August 2019.

Available at:
https://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/2019/05/16/images/06_10_7.jpg.

The Daily Ittefaq (2019). Accessed 14 August 2019.

Available at:
https://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/2019/05/17/images/15_11_1.jpg.

The Daily Jugantor (2019). Accessed 14 August 2019.

Available at:
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https://epaper.jugantor.com/2019/05/21/7/details/7_r1_8_c3.jpg](https://epaper.jugantor.com/2019/05/21/7/details/7_r1_8_c3.jpg).

The Daily Ittefaq (2019). Accessed 14 August 2019.

Available at:
https://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/2019/05/27/images/06_10_1.jpg.

¹⁹ *The Daily Ittefaq* (2019). Accessed 14 August 2019.

Available at:
https://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/2019/05/09/images/16_10_5.jpg.

²⁰ *Daily Prothom Alo*, 22 May 2019, Page 05.

²¹ *The Daily Star* (2019). Accessed 14 August 2019.

Available at:
http://epaper.thedailystar.net/contents/2019/2019_04_17/content_zoom/2019_04_17_12_3_b.jpg.

²² *The Daily Star* (2019). Accessed 14 August 2019.

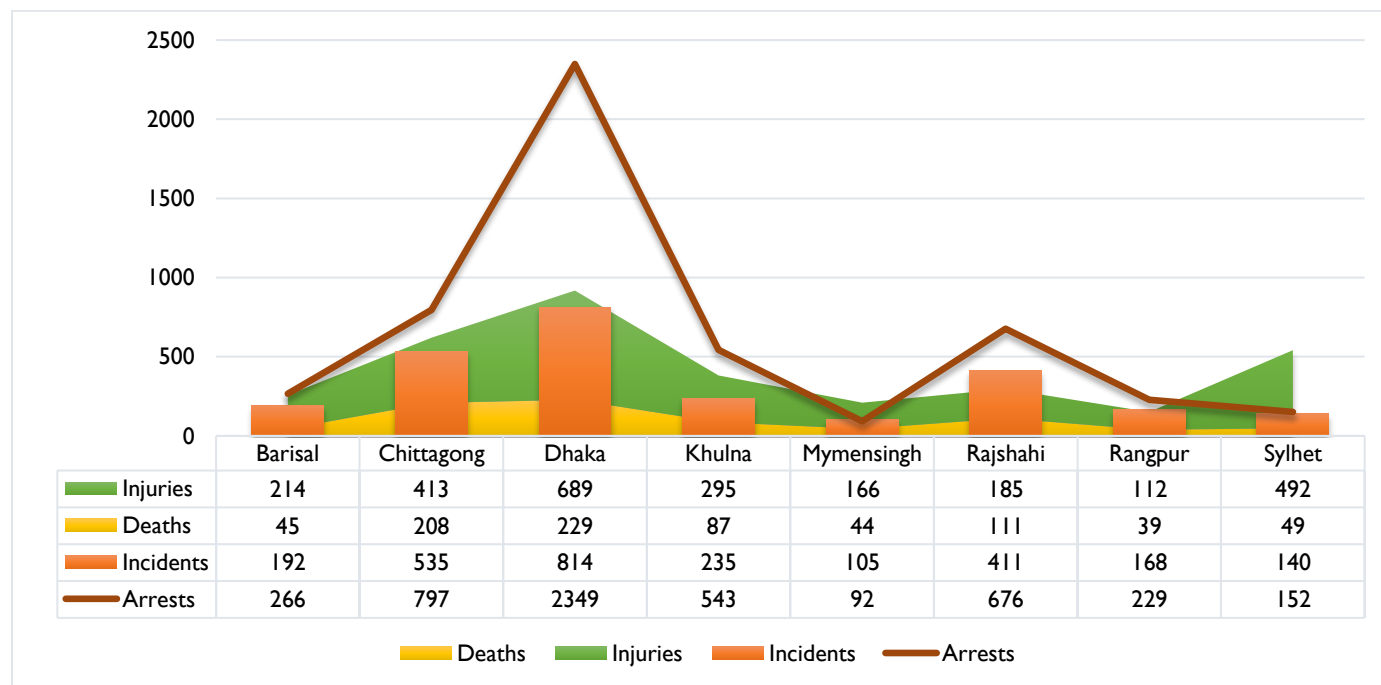
Available at:
http://epaper.thedailystar.net/contents/2019/2019_05_03/content_zoom/2019_05_03_7_1_b.jpg.

²³ *The Daily Ittefaq* (2019). Accessed 14 August 2019.

Available at:
https://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/2019/05/10/images/16_10_2.jpg.

²⁴ *Daily Prothom Alo*, 15t May 2019, Page 09.

Figure 6: Bi-Monthly Divisional Distribution of Incidents (April- May 2019)



Fake News Phenomenon in Bangladesh

F. M. Arafat²⁵

Fake news has become a 'buzzword' in the fickle era of post-truth or post-fact in which objective facts are becoming more contentious and 'less believable'.²⁶ As the social media platforms are expanding, these are turning into the creators and distributors of news and information through opinionated citizen journalism. Since more and more people are getting their daily dose of news from social media platforms like Facebook, it has become easier for belligerent forces to spread manipulated news or fake news through social media. The consequences of fake news dissemination can be very dire.²⁷ It can incite violence of any kind by targeting the social fabric of an area. In case of Bangladesh, the impact of the dissemination of fake news is multifaceted. First, fake news; social

media posts from fictitious accounts were used to carry out multiple attacks against minorities in different parts of Bangladesh such as Rangpur, Brahmanbaria, and Cox's Bazar in recent years.²⁸ Second, numerous false and absurd rumors were spread in the social media platforms to halt a major construction project over the Padma river in July, 2019.²⁹ Third, a few incidents of mob violence have occurred recently in which the false accusation of 'child trafficker' was purposefully disseminated to provoke people to attack the accused to seek justice.³⁰ Fourth, fake news or blatant wrong information was disseminated through the social media to have an impact on widespread student mobilizations like 'Quota Reform movement' or 'Road Safety movement'.³¹ Finally, fake news is

²⁵ Research Data Analyst, Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO), Centre for Genocide Studies (CGS).

²⁶ Farkas, Johan, and Jannick Schou. "Fake news as a floating signifier: hegemony, antagonism and the politics of falsehood." *Javnost-The Public* 25, no. 3 (2018): 298-314.

²⁷ Rashkin, Hannah, Eunsol Choi, Jin Yea Jang, Svitlana Volkova, and Yejin Choi. "Truth of varying shades: Analyzing language in fake news and political fact-checking." In *Proceedings of the 2017 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing*, pp. 2931-2937. 2017.

²⁸ Minar, Matiur Rahman, and Jibon Naher. "Violence originated from Facebook: A case study in Bangladesh." (2018). See at <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1804.11241.pdf%20and%20https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/bangladesh> (Accessed 20 August 2019).

²⁹ "Stern action for spreading rumour over Padma Bridge: Quader" 11 July 2019. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/politics/stern-action-for-spreading-rumour-over-padma-bridge-1769917> (Accessed 20 August 2019).

³⁰ "Bangladesh: eight lynched over false rumours of child sacrifices" 25 July 2019. Cited in <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/25/bangladesh-eight-lynched-over-false-rumours-of-child-sacrifices> (Accessed 22 August 2019).

³¹ "Spreading rumour: Online news portal official, 2 students detained" 9 August 2018. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/student-arrested-in-bogra-spreading-rumour-on-social-media-over-student-protest-for-road-safety-demand-1618153> (Accessed 20 August 2019).

often used to create chaos and volatile environment as demonstrated in the rumors of child sacrifices. A few have died in the vigilante lynchings in Bangladesh sparked by rumors in the social media platforms.³²

According to conventional wisdom, fake news is often referred to the viral posts originating from fictitious accounts made to look like real news.³³ But fake news is frequently connected with misinformation and disinformation in broader scholarly discourse. Misinformation refers to 'the inadvertent sharing of false information' while disinformation refers to 'the deliberate creation and sharing of information known to be false'.³⁴ But fake news is not a new phenomenon. Fake news was present throughout the history in guise of political parody or news satire.³⁵ Orson Welles directed radio drama 'The War of the World' adopted from H. G. Wells's novel bearing the same name is renowned for creating panic among listeners as the drama depicted actors as news presenters for the first time.³⁶ The Indian army gained slight advantage during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War when BBC, the only reliable news

platform during that period erroneously broadcasted that a brigade of 'Gurkhas' had landed at Sylhet. This was incorrect. But this misinformation was useful for the joint forces of Bangladesh and Indian soldiers' victory on 16 December 1971.³⁷ 'The Daily show' hosted by John Stewart and 'The Colbert report' hosted by Stephen Colbert popularized the news satire medium through television shows which became the source of news consumption for many people in the United States.³⁸

This write-up will use fake news in a broader way in which the term is not exclusively related to social media and alternatively used as propaganda or rumor although the term is uniquely used in the context of social media platforms, as it has become the part of daily conversations after the 2016 US Presidential election. The usage of the term has become looser in the mainstream media in the meantime as it is constantly used to target and accuse media platforms. Consequently, the distinction between news satire and objective facts has become visibly blurred.

³² *Op.cit*, The Guardian.

³³ Gelfert, Axel. "Fake news: A definition." *Informal Logic* 38, no. 1 (2018): 84-117.

³⁴ Tandoc Jr, Edson C., Zheng Wei Lim, and Richard Ling. "Defining "fake news": A typology of scholarly definitions." *Digital journalism* 6, no. 2 (2018): 137-153.

³⁵ *ibid*.

³⁶ "The War of the Worlds panic was a myth" 6 May 2016. Cited in <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/radio/what-to-listen->

[to/the-war-of-the-worlds-panic-was-a-myth/](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/radio/what-to-listen-to/the-war-of-the-worlds-panic-was-a-myth/) (Accessed 10 August 2019).

³⁷ "When BBC error helped India in 1971 war" 27 July 2016. Cited in <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/when-bbc-error-helped-india-in-1971-war/story-3eVYagB0TfT8t3Ic2OjpOP.html> (Accessed 12 August 2019).

³⁸ *Op.cit*, Tandoc Jr, Edson C., Zheng Wei Lim, and Richard Ling.

The write-up discusses the 'fake news' phenomenon in Bangladesh in the context of post-truth reality. It categorizes the types and manners in which fake news is used and propagated in Bangladesh. Fake news is used as a tool for inciting communal and gender based violence (GBV), influencing political and apolitical movements, spreading unheralded rumors about key development projects and child trafficking and spreading fear about dengue epidemic among masses in order to create chaos and test the strength of objective facts from conventional sources.

Conceptualizing 'Fake News' and 'Post-truth'

The term commonly refers to false or misleading information made to look like a fact based news story in order to influence public opinion.³⁹ Fake news is interlinked with the term 'post truth', which refers to 'a situation in which people are more likely to accept an argument based on their emotions and beliefs, rather than facts.'⁴⁰ Fake news creates an environment in which truth

can be altered and post-truth politics based on so-called 'alternative facts' can germinate and thrive.⁴¹ In other words, fake news is the fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent, which in turn lacks the news media's editorial norms and processes for ensuring the accuracy and credibility of information.⁴² Fake news is usually either wholly false or contains deliberately misleading elements incorporated within its content or context.⁴³ It often takes the form of propaganda entertainment, which is a combination of scandalous material, blame and denunciations, dramatic music and misleading images taken out of context.⁴⁴ It is also defined as hoax-based stories that perpetuate hearsay, rumors, and misinformation.⁴⁵ At its broadest, it has been identified as news stories that have no factual basis but are presented as news.⁴⁶

Practice of Fake News in Bangladesh

Fake news dissemination has led to dire consequences in Bangladesh. It has

³⁹ Jacob L. Nelson, Harsh Taneja, "The Small, Disloyal Fake News Audience: The Role of Audience Availability in Fake News Consumption", Research Gate Publication, pp. 1-18, January 2018.

⁴⁰ "Post-truth" Cited in <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/post-truth> (Accessed August 15 2019).

⁴¹ Hendricks, Vincent F., and Mads Vestergaard. "Alternative Facts, Misinformation, and Fake News." In *Reality Lost*, pp. 49-77. Springer, Cham, 2019.

⁴² Lazer et al., "The science of fake news: Addressing fake news requires a multidisciplinary effort", *Science*, VOL 359 ISSUE 6380, pp. 1094-1096, 9 March 2018.

⁴³ Vian Bakir, Andrew McStay, "Fake News and the Economy of Emotions: Problems, Causes, Solutions", *Digital Journalism*, 6(2), pp. 154-175, 15 July 2019.

⁴⁴ Irina Khaldarova & Mervi Pantti, "Fake News", *Journalism Practice*, 01 June 2016.

⁴⁵ Paul Mihailidis, "Spreadable Spectacle in Digital Culture: Civic Expression, Fake News, and the Role of Media Literacies in "Post-Fact" Society", *American Behavioral Scientist*, pp. 1-14, March 2017.

⁴⁶ Allcott H and Gentzkow M, "Social media and fake news in the 2016 election", *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31(2), pp. 211-236, 2017.

exposed the communal division of the country in the line of religion and ethnicity. It signals the prowess of social media in terms of news consumption and dissemination. Overall, the phenomenon has created an environment of constant chaos in which, one fake news can only be replaced by another. In recent years, fake news has led to communal violence, mob violence, vigilante lynchings, and GBV. It has also created roadblocks to social movements as demonstrated in the events of 'Safety Road Movement' and 'Quota Reform Movement'.

I. Communal Violence

Communal violence, unfortunately is an on again, off again occurrence in Bangladesh. Minorities like Hindus are often the targets. The repression of

Hindus after the 2001 general elections in Bangladesh is well documented.⁴⁷ But such incidents have become more frequent in recent years propelled by the dissemination of fake news in the social media platforms. The very first incident with such characteristics was the Ramu incident in September 2012 that revealed how a Facebook post from a fictitious account with a pseudonym can lead to widespread violence, minority repression and destruction.⁴⁸

I.1 Ramu Incident

The incident is commonly known as 'Ramu Incident' as it occurred in Ramu, a sub-district of Cox's Bazar, the southern most district of Bangladesh. The incident took place on September 29-30 in which Muslim mobs attacked the Buddhist temples and houses.⁴⁹ The



⁴⁷ "Bangladesh 'persecution' panel reports on 2001 violence" 2 December 2011. Cited in <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-15987644> (Accessed 17 August 2019).

⁴⁸ "Three years after Ramu" 30 September 2015. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/editorial/three-years-after-ramu-149155> (Accessed 17 August 2019).

⁴⁹ "Ramu incident shame for all" 4 September 2013. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/ramu-incident-shame-for-all> (Accessed 17 August 2019).

events originated with a Facebook post that showed Uttam Kumar Barua, a local Buddhist, was tagged in an image depicting desecration of a Quran, the holy book of Islam. The investigators later found, that the image was photoshopped and the person who was accused had nothing to do with the post.⁵⁰ The rumor of a Facebook post that illustrated the desecration of a Quran spread quickly to the adjacent sub-districts, Ukhia and Sadar and district town, Chittagong and a riot erupted. A mob of hundred rampaged the Buddhist monasteries and houses in Ramu. Eyewitnesses and police mentioned the assailants set fire to at least six Buddhist temples and nearly 20 homes and looted and damaged hundred others until 3:00 am on September 29 in the hate attack.⁵¹ The following day, the violence spread to adjacent sub-districts, destroying a total of 8 temples and monasteries, including two Hindu temples, and homes of Buddhists.⁵² The fire of hatred also burned down the years old legacy of Buddhist community

with the destruction of 250 year old monastery, the 100ft high Buddha statue that was under construction, the intrinsic designs of Khadi wood in Sima Bihar and the rare world heritage piece of 12 statues of Buddha on a seat.⁵³

1.2 Communal Violence in Pabna, 2013

The communal violence in Pabna occurred at Bonogram in Santhia sub-district. In this incident, Hindu communities were targeted over an alleged Facebook post that denigrated Prophet Mohammad. The copies of the Facebook post were circulated among masses by a group of people in the area. They claimed that Rajib Saha, a class-X student committed blasphemy



⁵⁰ Op.cit, Minar, Matiur Rahman, and Jibon Naher.

⁵¹ 'Buddhist temples, homes burned, looted in Ramu', BDNNews24.com, 29 Sep 2012, Cited in <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2012/09/29/buddhist-temples-homes-burned-looted-in-ramu> (Accessed 17 August 2019).

⁵² Sushmita S Preetha, "THE FLAMES MAY BE LONG GONE...", The Star, The Daily Star, Volume 11, Issue

41, October 19, 2012,

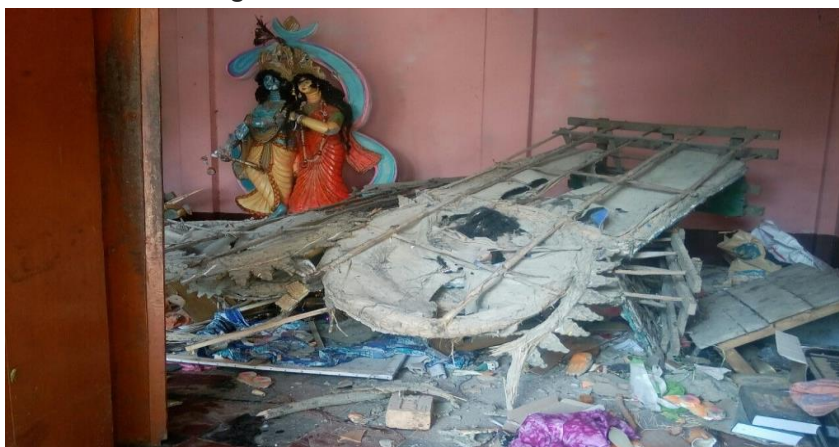
<https://archive.thedailystar.net/magazine/2012/10/03/cover.htm> (Accessed 18 August 2019).

⁵³ Kaberi Gayen, "A Known Compromise, A Known Darkness: 'Ramu-nisation' of Bangladesh", Forum, The Daily Star, Volume 6, Issue 11, November 2012.

through a Facebook post, which later proved to be false. The fake Facebook post angered the masses and violent mob burnt down the house of the accused and vandalized 26 Hindu homesteads and temples.⁵⁴

1.3 Communal Violence in Comilla, 2014

Rumors of defamation of Prophet Mohammad in Facebook posts by some Hindus triggered a violent mob attack against the Hindu community at Bakshitarampur village, Homna Sub-district in Comilla in which at least 28 houses and temples of Hindus were ransacked.⁵⁵ A call was made to launch the attacks from the loudspeakers of a local madrasha prior to the attacks. Additionally, leaflets were circulated claiming that two Hindus denigrated Prophet Mohammad in Facebook post. Police detained both persons but both denied posting such remarks.⁵⁶



1.4 Communal Violence in Brahmanbaria, 2016

A Facebook post illustrating Kaba, the sacred site of Islam juxtaposed with Lord Shiva, a Hindu deity had led to a series of communal attacks against Hindus at Nasirnagar sub-district in Brahmanbaria by a violent mob in October 2016. The mob consisted of angry madrasha students and a pressure group, Hefazat-e-Islam demanded the persecution of Rasraj Das, the alleged creator of the Facebook post that defamed Islam and its holy sites and attacked religious sentiments of the Muslims. The violent mob vandalized more than 150 Hindu homesteads and 15 temples including several idols. It also looted valuables from the houses. More than 100 people including several temple devotees were injured in violent

⁵⁴ "Hindus attacked in Pabna" 3 November 2013. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/hindus-attacked-in-pabna> (Accessed 19 August 2019).

⁵⁵ "Hindu houses attacked on Facebook rumours" 29 April 2014. Cited in

<https://www.thedailystar.net/hindu-houses-attacked-on-facebook-rumours-22087> (Accessed 19 August 2019)

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

clashes.⁵⁷ The intensity, casualties and the destruction of the incident was significantly higher than the prior incidents of Pabna and Comilla. Police had detained six suspects for interrogation. Several hundred locals staged demonstration in inter-city highways to protest the Facebook post. Later it was found that Rasraj Das, the creator of the Facebook post did not have any involvement in terms of creating or sharing the post. One of his professional enemy opened a Facebook account in his name and later manufactured the post with a religiously insensitive picture with offensive portrayal of Islam to gain in the professional field.⁵⁸

1.5 Communal Violence in Rangpur, 2017

A violent clash erupted at Thakurpara village, Gangachara sub-district in Rangpur on 10 November, 2017 following a Facebook post that allegedly defamed Islam in which thousands of people attacked the Hindu neighborhood of the village. The mob vandalized and burned houses and looted valuables including cattle from them. The Facebook post was uploaded on November 5 by MD Titu in which he allegedly denigrated Islam. The name and profile of the user indicted one Titu Chandra Roy from Rangpur as it bore the phone number and address of the accused. Although it was later found that Titu Chandra Roy was illiterate and it



⁵⁷ “10 temples destroyed in Brahmanbaria, over 100 injured” 30 October 2016. Cited in <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2016/10/30/least-10-temples-demolished-brahmanbaria> (Accessed 19 August 2019)

⁵⁸ “Attack on Hindus in Brahmanbaria: Ambition, not religion” 9 December 2016. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/attack-hindus-brahmanbaria-ambition-not-religion-1327456> (Accessed August 20 2019).

was almost impossible for him to write the particular Facebook post, the immediate effect of the post was very clamorous. A widespread campaign was launched depicting the defamation of Islam by a Facebook post and demanding punishment of Titu Chandra Roy prior to the attack by the local mosques and madrashas supported by local Jamaat-e-Islami members. Copies of the screenshot of the Facebook post were distributed among the general people. Loudspeakers from local shops and mosques were used to organize rallies to protest the Facebook post, which ultimately led to violence. The issue of the Facebook post was also the subject of discussion at a local Waz Mehfil (religious gathering) in which speakers urged the religious devotees to stage protests. The protesters torched and vandalized at least 30 Hindu houses. The clash resulted in one death and more than 20 injuries. Many victims alleged that the attack was aimed at evicting Hindus from their land.⁶⁰

Communal violence is regrettably an integral feature of fake news dissemination in Bangladesh. A few commonalities of the aforementioned incidents may be observed. First, all the social media posts that had led to communal violence originated from fictitious accounts and were proven to be fake. Second, a

vested quarter was involved in mobilizing the protests, which later turned violent. Third, a widespread campaign was launched in almost all cases, which continued for days prior to the incidents. Fourth, violent protesters looted valuables from the households during the riots. Fifth, all the personnel who allegedly wrote the social media posts and later detained by Police were ultimately cleared by the Police.

2. Rumors Surrounding Development Projects

Just received news – truth, not rumor, Padma Bridge wants blood, over one hundred families flee homes, Padma Bridge work is shutting down for the lack of blood, four missing – panicked villagers flee, caught red-handed during theft.⁵⁹ –Facebook status of Arman Hossain; Arrested for spreading rumors regarding the construction of the Padma bridge.

⁵⁹ “Bangladesh arrests eight over ‘human heads, blood for Padma Bridge’ rumours” 13 July 2019. Cited in <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2019/07/13/bangladesh-arrests-eight-over-human-heads-blood-for-padma-bridge-rumours> (Accessed 19 August 2019).

⁶⁰ “Rangpur Mayhem: Hatred stirred up for days” 12 November 2017. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/rangpur-mayhem-they-whipped-hatred-days-attack-1489861> (Accessed 19 August 2019).



Creation and circulation of absurd and scientifically false rumors through the social media platforms is a common trend of fake news dissemination in Bangladesh. One of those is that human heads and blood are required to build the Padma Bridge, which was circulated in the Facebook on July 12, 2019. The rumor mill went to such extent that the authorities of Padma Bridge project were forced to react sharply to this horrifying rumor, saying it was an act by “vested quarters” and none should pay any heed to such a baseless story.⁶¹ The security personnel of Bangladesh arrested eight people on charges of spreading rumors through the Facebook pages about the Padma bridge project under the Digital Security

Act. These Facebook posts regarding the Padma bridge were deliberately used to trigger panic and unrest in the community.⁶²

3. Rumors of Child Abduction, Mob Violence and Vigilantism

The rumors of child abduction for human sacrifices are associated with the



⁶¹ “Rumor seeking human heads for Padma Bridge” 10 July 2019. Cited in <https://www.daily-sun.com/printversion/details/406007/2019/07/10/Rumo>

r-seeking-human-heads-for-Padma-Bridge (Accessed 20 August 2019).

⁶² *Op.cit*, The Guardian.

rumors of blood donation required for the construction of Padma Bridge. Both rumors started with a Facebook post, claimed that a young man had been found allegedly carrying the severed head of a child in Bangladesh's northern district of Netrokona.⁶³ Another Facebook post mentioned that "child abductors are on the prowl to collect heads and blood for the construction of Padma Bridge".⁶⁴ Both Facebook posts went viral and created widespread panic and fear among people, which later transcended into masses. Eight people were reportedly killed in vigilante mob violence throughout the country.⁶⁵ Among them was a 42 years old mother of two, Ms. Taslima Begum Renu. Locals supposedly became suspicious of Ms. Begum when she visited a school at Badda in Dhaka to enquire about the admission of her child. A violent mob dragged her down from the head teacher's room claiming that "an abductor has been caught". As she was being thrashed at the main gate, eyewitnesses were busy filming the incident. The teachers called police, but the violent mob who were carrying metal rods killed her without paying heed to what others were saying and before the law enforcers could arrive.⁶⁶ Police arrested a few in the charges of

spreading rumors including a man from Fatikchhari upazila of Chattogram who uploaded a video in which children were asked not to go to school as they will be kidnapped.⁶⁷

4. Rumors and Student Activism

Fake news worked as a blockade to student activism as demonstrated in the events of 'Road safety movement' and 'Quota Reform Movement' in 2018. The Road Safety protests began on July 29, 2018 when two teenage students of Shaheed Ramiz Uddin Cantonment College in Dhaka were killed in Airport Road by a speeding bus. The protesters demanded safe and secure road and transportation system. Like other similar types of movement, this was also infringed with a set of rumors. A set of rumors surrounding Bangladesh Chattrra League, student body of the ruling party of Bangladesh, Awami League was shared in the Facebook. The rumors claimed that Bangladesh Chattrra League members abducted and raped some female students and murdered four male student protesters at the Dhanmondi party office of Awami League and they kept their bodies in the party office. Thousands of students and people shared the news on social media.

⁶³ "Bangladesh lynchings: Eight killed by mobs over false child abduction rumours" 24 July 2019. Cited in <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-49102074> (Accessed 20 August 2019).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Op.cit.*, The Guardian.

⁶⁶ "'No-one listened to what she said': Witnesses recount lynching of a mother in Bangladesh" 24 July 2019. Cited in

<https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2019/07/24/no-one-listened-to-what-she-said-witnesses-recount-lynching-of-a-mother-in-bangladesh> (Accessed August 22 2019).

⁶⁷ "Man arrested for spreading rumours" 2 August 2019. Cited in

<https://www.thedailystar.net/city/news/man-arrested-spreading-rumours-1780507> (Accessed August 22 2019).

Bangladesh Chattra League rejected the allegations clearly which later proved to be true.⁶⁸ Bangladesh Chattra League members brought five protesters at the party office to audit their claim but they found no dead bodies.⁶⁹ The TV actress Nawshaba was arrested as she shared false claims in the social media. She went on to Facebook live on 4 August and accused Bangladesh Chattra League



attackers for killing two students and exterminating another student's eye at Jigatola in Dhaka.⁷⁰

Another Facebook post became viral that claimed a fellow student protester was caught by police. It demanded assistance from journalists and lawyers as shown in the screenshot.

The claim was later found to be false as the involved protester was fine.

A set of rumors also stalled the 'Quota Reform Movement' of April, 2018. A rumor misinformed people about the death of Abu Bakar Siddique, a protester who had been injured when a rubber bullet hit him on the left eyebrow during the protests. One of the movement's conveners also told a private TV channel that one of the protesters had been killed. Facebook pages like 'Troll Du,' 'Quota Songskar Chai,' the organizers of the movement and 'Basher Kella' which is allegedly administered by Shibir activists ran on the news without verifying it which had a long lasting impact on the movement.⁷¹ Another rumor shared widely in the social media platforms stated that a rubber bullet fired by the police had hit one of the protesters in the scrotum.⁷² Police later identified at least 200 Facebook accounts that were accused of spreading 'false propaganda'

⁶⁸ "BCL denies allegations of rape, detention of female students", 4 August, 2018. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/politics/protest-for-safe-roads-bangladesh-chhatra-league-denies-allegations-rape-detention-of-female-students-1615861>, (Accessed in 16 July 2019).

⁶⁹ "Fact Check: Rumors that spread during Saturday's protests", 4 August, 2018. Cited in <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/dhaka/2018/08/05/fact-check-rumours-that-spread-during-saturday-s-protests>, (Accessed in 16 July 2019).

⁷⁰ "Rab detains actress Quazi Nawshaba for spreading rumors on Facebook" 4 August, 2018. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/city/rab-detains-actress-quazi-nawshaba-ahmed-rumours-facebook-student-protest-bangladesh-1616020>, (Accessed in 16 July 2019).

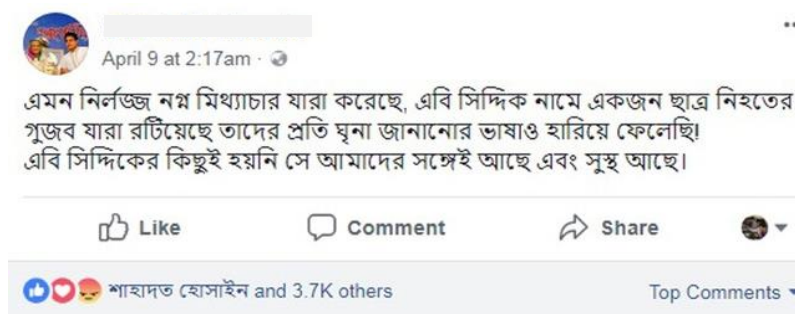
⁷¹ "How rumours and fake news shaped the quota reform protest" 17 April 2018. Cited in <https://www.dhakatribune.com/opinion/special/2018/04/17/rumours-fake-news-shaped-quota-reform-protest/> (Accessed 23 August 2019).

⁷² *ibid*.

online regarding quota reform protests by students and job seekers.⁷³

5. Rumors on Dengue Epidemic

The mosquito carrying disease, Dengue has become an epidemic in the rainy season from July to September in Bangladesh. The epidemic killed 115 to



172 people in Bangladesh citing different sources mostly in Dhaka city.⁷⁴ Therefore, the disease created an environment of chaos and fear among the masses. As it was mentioned earlier that fake news thrives in the chaos and panic environment, a fresh wave of rumors regarding the dengue epidemic has hit social media users. Many social media posts are asking people to pour bleach and Harpic cleaner in toilets.⁷⁵

⁷³ "200 Facebook accounts identified for spreading 'false propaganda' on quota reform" 14 April 2018. Cited in <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2018/04/14/200-facebook-accounts-identified-for-spreading-false-propaganda-on-quota-reform> (Accessed 23 August 2019).

⁷⁴ "Confusion over Dengue Deaths: DGHS confirms 47, to review 89" 26 August 2019. Cited in

Concluding Remarks

Fake news phenomenon is impacting upon the peace and stability of Bangladesh in many ways. In most instances, fake news is spread to create chaos and panic, which happened so in the aforementioned incidents. Fake news enables the 'post-truth reality' in which truth or objective facts do not carry the weight or believability as it used to do. Truth itself has become more malleable with the innovation

of social media and the outbreak of the fake news phenomenon. The impact of fake news is wider and far-reaching because of the rapid rise in the usage of social media platforms. As the people's consumption of daily news from their favorite social media accounts increases, the rate of fake news dissemination is inflating too. Fake news has become more threatening because of its easy accessibility. Anybody can create or distribute fake news by simply using social media websites.

<https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/bangladesh-dengue-situation-confusion-over-dengue-deaths-dghs-1790575> (Accessed 2 September 2019).

⁷⁵ "New wave of rumours hit Bangladesh: 'Pour bleach, toilet cleaner to stop dengue'" 30 July 2019. Cited in <https://bdnews24.com/socialmedia/2019/07/30/social-media-rumour-swirls-pour-bleach-toilet-cleaner-to-stop-dengue> (Accessed August 20 2019).

Fake news circulation through social media platforms in Bangladesh is fairly a new phenomenon. But it has impacted the daily conversations of the public discourse. Different unsuccessful yet dangerous remedies of dengue epidemic from many fictitious social media accounts is the talk of town because of the severe nature of the disease. Vigilante mob violence, child abduction and human sacrifice rumors were also discussed repeatedly in the public discourse as a result of the sensational nature of the issue. These rumors are considered to be alarming as they had led to violence and caused human casualties.

As the number of fictitious accounts or websites, which create and disseminate fake news is increasing, so does the plausibility of the fake news. In other words, fake news undercuts or delegitimizes the real news or objective facts to some extent and enables the 'post-truth' reality. Additionally, fake news is deemed more believable than real news as the real news lack the necessary sensationalism that people want to hear. It is indeed a challenge to restrict the dissemination of fake news in conventional ways.

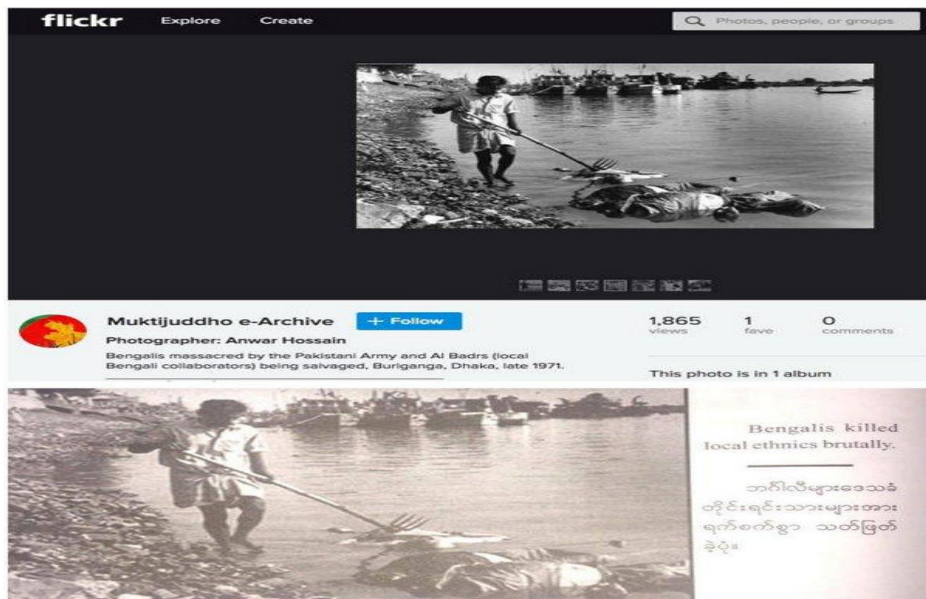
News and Fake News

BPO Team

Rohingya Crisis

Myanmar government, especially Myanmar army is using doctored historical photos to misrepresent the Rohingya crisis, which appears to be an attempt to rewrite history.⁷⁶ An anti-Rohingya social media wing is strong in Myanmar as it is feeding blatantly wrong information and manufactured photos to Myanmar people. An endless stream

of provocative photos and cartoons claims that there was no “ethnic cleansing” against Rohingyas. Instead, according to the posts, international news and human rights organizations are falsely accusing the military of carrying out atrocities against the Rohingyas to help terrorists invade the country, kill Buddhists and establish a separatist Islamic province in Rakhine state.⁷⁷

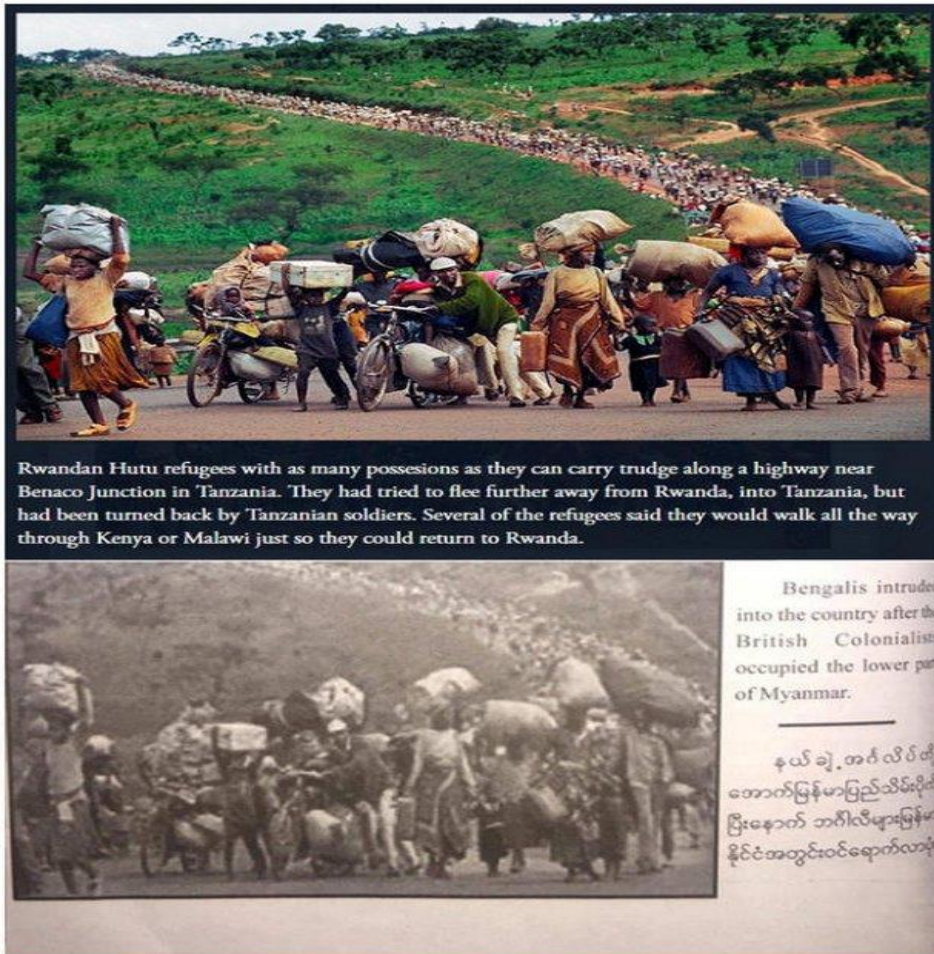


⁷⁶ “Myanmar Published “Fake Photos” Of The Rohingya In A New Book” 31 August 2018. Cited in <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/matthewchamp ion/rohingya-myanmar-fake-photos> (Accessed August 10 2019).

⁷⁷ “Fake news and social media fuelling Myanmar’s ‘ugly renaissance of genocidal propaganda’ against Rohingya” 9 December 2017. Cited in <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/2123613/fake-news-and-social-media-fuelling-myanmars-ugly> (Accessed 10 August 2019).

A photo in the book, Myanmar Politics and the Tatmadaw: Part I — using the official name of the army in the country — shows Buddhists murdered

by Rohingyas, but Reuters found that it was actually taken in Bangladesh in 1971, showing Bengalis killed by Pakistani troops.⁷⁸



A color photo in the top is from the Pulitzer Prize website, and shows

the migration of Rwandan Hutu refugees fleeing after the 1996 slaughter by the

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Tutsis. The Myanmar army's version has changed the photo to black and white and claims to show 'Bengalis' (i.e. Rohingya) intruding into Myanmar during the British colonial period.⁷⁹

Various social media sites in Myanmar are active to debunk the ethnic cleansing conducted by the Myanmar army against Rohingyas. The operation conducted by the Myanmar army was widely criticized and it forced almost one million Rohingyas to flee into Bangladesh from Myanmar. It was described as 'ethnic cleansing' by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch through referring to the satellite images.⁸⁰ The satellite images of Rakhine state showed the images of villages being burned down and the whole area was set ablaze. The most well-known administrator of anti-Rohingya social media posts is Ashin Wirathu, an enormously influential hard-line monk who started to write in Facebook after he was banned from public preaching for a year by the government. Wirathu 'likened Muslims to mad dogs and posted pictures of dead bodies of Buddhist allegedly killed by Muslims'.⁸¹

Mob Lynching and Anti-Rohingya Rumors

The local dissatisfaction of Rohingyas juxtaposed with the trending rumors of child abduction, human sacrifice have led to a few mob violence and vigilante lynching in Bangladesh in recent months. On 12 May, 2019, *Daily Karatoa* reported that locals had beaten a motor-cycle rider suspecting him to be a Rohingya kidnapper in Satkhira. Locals believe that those Rohingyas are involved in different types of crimes and child kidnapping which is also helping to generate rumors about kidnapping and it ultimately led to mob violence and Rohingya lynching. There are also rumors about Rohingya child abductors who fled from the camps and ask for ransom in return of the hostages. On 21 May, 2019, *Daily Jugantar* reported that the locals caught a man who acted strangely. Locals thought he was a Rohingya child abductor. They beat him up brutally before handing him over to the police in Jhenaidah. Later they found the man was mentally unstable and they made a mistake.⁸² The rumors and fake news actually deepens the tension between local people and Rohingyas.

⁷⁹ "Myanmar army fakes Rohingya photos in 'True News' book" 31 August 2018. Cited in <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/special-reports/1531606/myanmar-army-fakes-rohingya-photos-in-true-news-book> (Accessed August 10 2019).

⁸⁰ "Min Aung Hlaing: Stop the Ethnic Cleansing in Myanmar now" Cited in

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/take-action/help-stop-the-violence-in-myanmar/> (Accessed August 10 2019).

⁸¹ *Op.cit.*, South China Morning Post.

⁸² "A man was beaten in Jhenaidah as locals suspect him as Rohingya" 22 May 2019. Cited in https://epaper.jugantor.com/2019/05/22/23/details/23_r2_c4.jpg (Accessed August 10 2019).

Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)

Fake news and disinformation create confusion and chaos among the locals in the CHT region like other regions of the country. Sometimes a hint of truth mixed with lies and exaggeration are used by certain vested quarters to draw reactions from the ethnically and religiously diverse locals. The reaction may be violent resulting in human casualties. In the CHT, the use of fake news is widespread and it is used to create a chain of hatred between the Bengalis and the Hill people in the region. In recent times the death of several political leaders of the ruling party created discontent against the Hill people in the region. More than 200

houses of the indigenous people in four villages at Langdu sub-district in Rangamati were torched by Bengali settlers after the killing of a Jubo League leader Nurul Islam Nayan by unknown assailants.⁸³ After the Langdu incident another wave of fake news spread through the social media platforms mainly in Facebook and online news portals. The news of the Langdu incident was hastily covered by the online news portal with fake photos and disinformation. Those photos were taken from the news of different past violent incidents. This misleads the readers as the fake photos were shared and disseminated in social media.

⁸³ “300 sued in Langdu arson attack” 3 June 2017. Cited in <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/150019/3>

00-sued-in-Langdu-arson-attack Accessed on 7 July, 2019.

US Presidential Election, 2016

The term 'fake news' resurfaced in the US electoral politics in 2016 amid rumors of Russian aided 'social media bots' that influenced the voting patterns of the US citizen. But the actual word was popularized by the US President, Donald Trump as he intermittently uses the word in Twitter to question the legitimacy and accountability of the traditional news platforms of the US using nicknames such as 'failing New York Times' or 'low-rating CNN'. The word, 'fake news' has become an integral part of the US popular culture and beyond as it is frequently referred in the late-night television shows, political parodies or even opinionated prime time news shows. Although the

discussions about the Russian infringement in the US Presidential Election are often hyperbolic, biases towards the politically congenial contents in the social media platforms are likely to extend misinformation.⁸⁴

The politically congenial contents are related to people's daily consumption of news from social media platforms. Usually, social media platforms, like Facebook or Twitter gives its users options to choose the sources of news. The users tend to like or follow the pages of the news sources they are familiar or ideologically accustomed to. This habit creates an 'online echo chamber' or 'filter bubble' in which people consume news familiar to their

political congeniality.⁸⁵ For instance, a conservative only receives news from conservative outlets and a liberal consumes news from liberal outlets.

Three statements that were deemed as 'fake news' according to independent analyses were widely circulated prior to the 2016 US Presidential Election targeting Hillary Clinton, the opponent of incumbent Donald

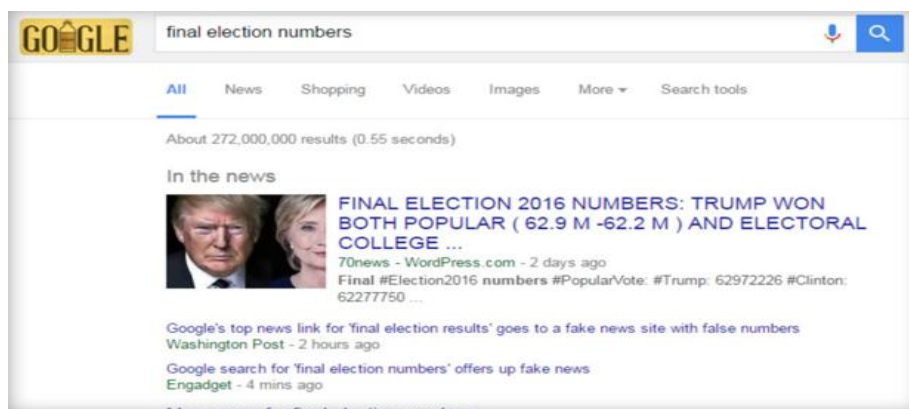


⁸⁴ Guess, Andrew, Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler. "Selective exposure to misinformation: Evidence from the consumption of fake news during the 2016 US presidential campaign." European Research Council 9 (2018).

⁸⁵ "Why fears of fake news are overhyped" 12 February 2019. Cited in <https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/11/why-fears-of-fake-news-are-overhyped.html> (Accessed 20 August 2019).

Trump.⁸⁶ First, Hillary Clinton was in poor health due to serious illness. Second, Pope Francis endorsed Donald Trump for President. Third, Hillary Clinton sold weapons to ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) jihadists during her reign as Secretary of State.⁸⁷ The role played by these fake news stories in influencing the overall outcome of the Election is very contentious. A survey conducted by three scientists from the Ohio State University—Gunther, Beck,

The automated accounts in Facebook and Twitter had played a disproportionate role in carrying out propaganda campaign and conspiracy theories against the candidates. Symantec, a leading cyber security firm in the US conducted an in-depth analysis of nearly 4,000 Twitter accounts in which they found that a St. Petersburg-based Internet Research Agency carried out a vast and coordinated propaganda campaign sponsored by the Russian



Google's top search result was actually fake news. / CBS NEWS

and Nisbet—found that the electoral support of Hillary Clinton dramatically dropped among people who believed in at least one of these fake stories.⁸⁸ The fake news campaign was so profound that few of the fake news stories were more widely circulated than real news.⁸⁹

government designed in part to help Donald Trump get elected.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ "The Danger of Fake News to Our Election" Cited in <https://www.cits.ucsb.edu/fake-news/danger-election> (Accessed 20 August 2019).

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

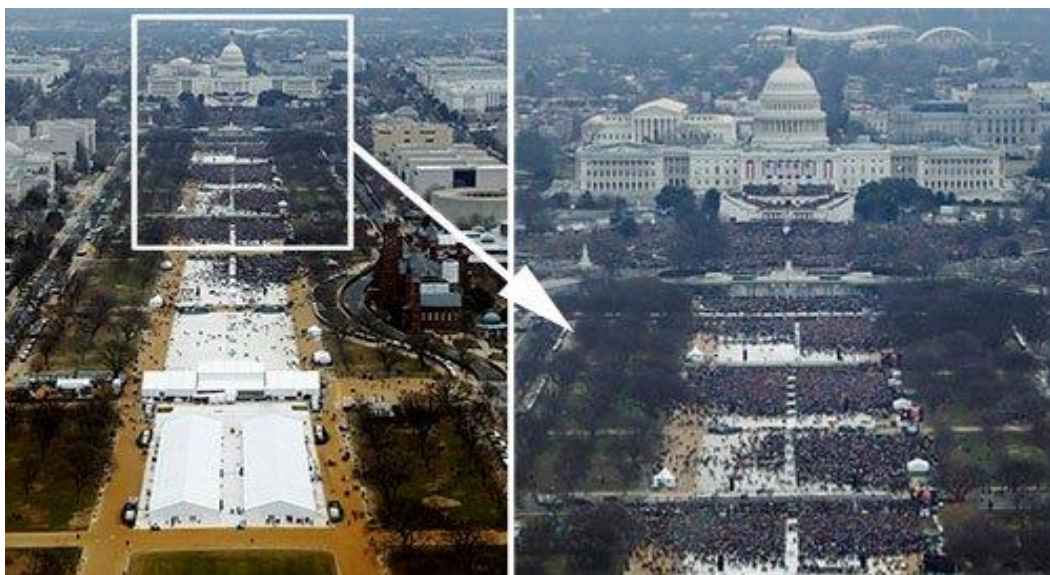
⁸⁸ R. Gunther, P. A. Beck, and E. C. Nisbet, "Fake News Piece for 'The Conversation' with Methodological Appendix," 15 February 2018. Cited in <https://cpb-us-west-2-juc1ugur1qwqqo4.stackpathdns.com/u.osu.edu/dist/d...> (Accessed 20 August 2018).

⁸⁹ Grinberg, Nir, Kenneth Joseph, Lisa Friedland, Briony Swire-Thompson, and David Lazer. "Fake news on Twitter during the 2016 US presidential election." *Science* 363, no. 6425 (2019): 374-378.

⁹⁰ "Russian trolls who interfered in 2016 U.S. election also made ad money, report says" 5 June 2019. Cited in <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/russian-trolls-who-interfered-2016-u-s-election-also-made-n1013811> (Accessed 20 August 2018).

The fake news stories continued following the US Presidential election too. A false claim that President-Elect Trump won the popular vote which he did not along with the Electoral College was extensively distributed in online

Donald Trump's inauguration to make the crowd appear bigger following a personal intervention from the President.⁹¹



platforms. The circulation of the story was so wide that it led the google search of 'final election numbers'. Numerous accounts in traditional and social media debated regarding the actual crowd size of President Trump's inauguration. A report claimed that a government photographer edited official pictures of

This illustration shows how cropping could make the viral Reuters photo of President Trump's inauguration in the comparison above.⁹²

⁹¹ "Trump inauguration crowd photos were edited after he intervened" 6 September 2018. Cited in <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/06/dona>

Id-trump-inauguration-crowd-size-photos-edited (Accessed 20 August 2018).

⁹² *Ibid.*

Anti-Fake News Legislations:

A Comparison between Bangladesh, Singapore, Malaysia, and Germany

Theme	Bangladesh	Singapore	Malaysia	Germany
Name of the Legislation	Digital Security Bill 2018	Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Bill	Anti-Fake News Bill 2018	Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG)
Highest Number of Sentence for disseminating Fake News	3(three) years of prison time or fine not exceeding 3(three) lacs taka or with both.	Fine not exceeding \$50,000 or prison time for a term not exceeding 5 years or to both	Five hundred thousand ringgit or imprisonment of ten years or both	Five hundred thousand euro to five million euro fine
Territorial Jurisdiction of the legislation	If any person commits any offense within this Act outside or inside Bangladesh, the provisions of this Act would be applicable in same manner.	The bill enables a court to try a person who commits outside Singapore an offense with extra-territorial application under the Bill, as if it had been committed in Singapore.	If any offence under this Act is committed by any person, whatever his nationality or citizenship, in any place outside Malaysia, he may be dealt with in respect of such offence as if the offence was committed at any place within Malaysia.	The regulatory offence may be sanctioned even if it is not committed in the Federal Republic of Germany.

Fake news Definition	Not Defined	Fake news is false statement of fact that is false or misleading whether wholly or in part and whether on its own or in the context in which it appears.	Fake news includes any news, info, data and reports which is or are wholly or partly false, whether in the form of features visuals or audio recordings or in any other form capable of suggesting words or ideas	Unlawful content as content that contravenes a number of provisions selected from the German Criminal Code
Purpose of the Act	The Act is enacted to ensure National Digital Security and enact laws regarding Digital Crime Identification, Prevention, Suppression, Trial and other related matters.	The purpose of the Act is- to prevent the communication of false statement of fact in Singapore and to enable the measures to be taken to counteract the effects of such communication	An Act to deal with fake news and related matter	Act to improve enforcement of the law in social networks
Agency that will implement the legislation	The government shall create an agency entitled, Digital Security agency	The Minister may appoint a statutory board	Session court	The Federal Office of Justice

Power of enforcement	Police	The Minister may authorize an authorized officer to exercise all or any of the powers in relation to the police investigations.	Police officer or authorized officer (under the Communication and Multimedia Act 1998)	Does not have an enforceable mechanism
Time limit of the investigation	60 days from the date of getting charge of the investigation.	Not defined	Not defined	Time between complaints being received by the social network and the unlawful content being deleted or blocked "within 24 hours to a week
Opportunity to Appeal	Any person aggrieved by the judgment of the tribunal may appeal in the Appeal Tribunal	Clause 17 provides for appeals to the High Court	Not defined	Not defined

Amendments	As soon as this Act comes into effect, the sections 54 55 56 57 66 of the Information and Communication Technology Act 2006 (Act no 39 of 2006) will be abolished	As the Bill has not passed in the Parliament yet, the amendment provisions are yet to include.	clause 14 empowers the Minister to amend the first and second schedules to the proposed Act	Article 2 of the act amends the telemedia Act. Last amended
General exemption	N/A	The Minister may, by the order in the Gazette, exempt any person or class of persons from any provision of this Act.	N/A	N/A

Commentary on Fake News



Md. Masudur Rahman PPM⁹³

Disinformation, rumor, propaganda and fake news are all inter-related. There are two main criteria - done in good faith (individual might not be aware of what she/he is talking about or doing) and the issue of doing it deliberately (committing a crime having a particular motive, aim or target). A recent incident that took place in Badda, Dhaka is relevant to understand the topic in question. A victim named Taslima went to a school regarding the admission of her child. Upon arrival, she was told by some people that this was not the time for admission. She was later taken to the Principal of the school. Meanwhile, a rumor spread among local residents that she was a child kidnapper. The situation got worse quickly. Unfortunately, the rumor agitated the mob that in turn cruelly beat her to death. The damage that occurred there cannot be undone.

In general criminal cases, the responsibilities of the police are to verify the truth, conduct investigations and carry out enquiries. When a case is filed in a Police Station, then the offense is categorized as *Cognizable Offence* (when a police officer arrests the suspect without warrant for the crime) and for *Non-Cognizable Offence* (includes simple hurt, public annoyance etc.) a General Diary is recorded in a Police Station. However, people are not aware of the laws concerning Cognizable and Non-Cognizable offences. As a result they try to take advantages by claiming Non-Cognizable offences to be Cognizable offences to incur additional benefits. At present, incident occurs in two ways - crime that happens practically and using information technology (IT). Using information technology, they can spread any types of rumor, can conduct any

⁹³ Deputy Police Commissioner, Media & Public Relations, Dhaka Metropolitan Police.
The interview was recorded by Ashique Mahmud, RDA, CGS and Mashiya Jafrin Hea, Intern CGS.

types of offence through it. If we consider the Safe Road Movement, we saw that rumors of rape in Dhanmondi area were spread, in which an actress also took part. Many old images were circulated claiming to be linked with the safe road movement to confuse people. Police have presented both the fake and real images alongside so that people don't get puzzled about the situation. If we suddenly post the information without confirming it on Facebook or any other social media, then it might cause severe clash, brawl and scrap, where the general law and order condition may deteriorate.

The policing mechanism is priority based. The primary concern of police is not filing case but to take the situation under control. To prevent a crime, they take preventive measures like stalling check posts, searching and patrolling. But in case of emergency situations, like that of Holy Artisan incident, they take control of the situation first and then file a case. For a real-time crime, police have an opportunity to verify the truth taking the help of eye-witnesses, CCTV camera footage (if there's any). However, for the crimes conducted using IT, they have less opportunities for verifying as they spread very quickly through social media. Now, we see that a large number of the users of social media are teenagers who do not have sufficient knowledge about laws and are also not aware of the consequences of spreading rumor that can incur damage,

clash, community clash and religious clash. To control such situations, the guardians, teachers or religious scholars of the young people can play a significant role along with focusing on self-awareness. Since the IT based crimes are borderless, it is important to control our dissemination of news in Facebook or any other social media. At times, we see that people give provoking comments or posts in social media without even knowing the truth. The damage done because of this cannot be undone even if the posts or comments are removed.

In order to combat and to prevent the crimes, police have a cyber-crime unit in Dhaka Metropolitan Police that works in affiliation with the CID, taking expert opinion from them. This unit is headed by a Deputy Police Commissioner in Dhaka Metropolitan Police and have their own lab facilities. The experts of the lab are trained in FBI academy, USA and many other institutions around the world. Cyber tribunals are also there to control ICT based crime. However, these cyber tribunal provisions are only located in Dhaka. The centralization of this tribunal makes it difficult to start trial of the cases that take place in other parts of Bangladesh. The mechanisms of investigation cannot be described in detail because of technical reasons. Since cyber-crime is a borderless crime, it can start at home or abroad. If it starts from the home country, then identifying the criminals is the first priority. Police

have arrested many of them and brought them under the jurisdiction of law. But if the crime is sourced from abroad and the criminal is a Bangladeshi citizen - then after he/she is identified, their travel information and date of arrival into the country is closely monitored. Some crimes were committed from abroad by Bangladeshi nationals, which might have some affiliation with the people staying in Bangladesh. In such cases, the Police have filed cases against them. If he comes to Bangladesh at any time, then he is brought under the jurisdiction of law.

The incident that has happened in the Padma Bridge rumors is similar what we have witnessed in various parts of the country. A particular group of people, with an ulterior motive, have spread the rumor of needing human head (in terms of giving sacrifice) in the construction of bridge. If previously built bridges didn't need any head, then why would head be needed now for Padma Bridge? The need for head is nothing but a stupid idea. It is perceived that the whole issue is a conspiracy to deteriorate the general law and order condition so that vested groups might take an advantage of the situation. Regarding the Padma Bridge rumor too, concerned authority have published an official statement about the whole situation and asked people not to believe in the rumors.

To control crimes, the government of Bangladesh has initiated

the practice of the biometric registration system to register for a SIM card. It is the responsibility of the mobile operators to do it correctly and properly. Crimes also take place using fake national ID. In order to control this, the government has introduced a website (<http://www.porichoy.gov.bd>), which provides a real-time Identity Verification Service.

If a rumor is spread through social media, then case may be filed under the Digital Security Act. If any person commits any offense intentionally or sends such information which is offensive or fear inducing, or which despite knowing it as false is sent, published or propagated with the intention to annoy, insult, humiliate or denigrate a person or publishes or propagates or assists in publishing or propagating any information with the intention of tarnishing the image of the nation or spread confusion or despite knowing it as false, publishes or propagates or assists in publishing or propagates information in its full or in a distorted form for the same intentions, the person will be penalized with imprisonment for a term not exceeding 3 (three) years or fine not exceeding 3 (three) lacs taka or with both. If any person commits the offense mentioned in sub-section (1) for the second time or recurrently commits it then, he will be punished with imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 (five) years or with fine not exceeding 10 (ten) lacs taka or with both (According to Digital Security Bill

2018). However, if the rumor is spread orally then the legal mechanism is different to bring the concerned person under the law. According to the laws, an accused person has the right to hire lawyers in favor of him/herself, right to appeal for bail, for which only the honorable Court has the ability to grant bail or not. If the convicted person gets bail then as long as the trial continues, he/she can be asked to be present before the court or the jury.

Message for people

If I say from the Islamic perspective, Surah Al-Hujurat (Verse: 6) which states that “O Believers, if an unrighteous person comes to you with information, you should verify it or else you might inflict harm on a people in ignorance and then end up regretting what you have

done.” In addition, Surah Al Nisa (Verse: 83) states “And when there comes to them news (a mere rumor), be it a matter of peace or of fear, they spread around. But had they referred it to the perfect messenger and to those authority among them, surely those of them who can illicit (the truth) from it would have understood it (and could make correct deductions).” So I suggest that while using the social media, we should not express our personal opinion in such a way that it causes damage to any person or society, as the personal opinion may vary from person to person. Furthermore, we should cross verify information before sharing it publicly. I would also like to add that everyone, especially the teenagers, should not share your phone and personal information with an unknown person. We should be aware and responsible in our behavior.

Annex:

Some definitional clarification according to BPO Codebook.

Gunfight. Shootout opposing the police or security forces to criminals, militants or other irregular forces that do not match the definition of a non-state armed group.

Clash. Two-sided violence between groups, outside of the context of war or insurgency. *Example: supporters of rival political parties fight each other.*

Assault. One-sided violence by an individual or small group against another individual or small group. *Example: stabbing, shooting of someone by a perpetrator*

Fight. Two-sided violence between individuals or small groups. *Example: brawl between 3-4 people.*

Sexual assault. One-sided sexual violence, such as rape or attempted rape, by an individual or small group against another individual or small group.

Destruction of property. One-sided violence perpetrated with the intent of damaging property. *Examples: vandalism, arson.*