

COVERAGE OF MINORITY ISSUES IN THE SELECTED NATIONAL DAILIES DURING THE 10TH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN BANGLADESH

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***Abstract:** Attack, intimidation and oppression on the minority communities are significant socio-political phenomenon in Bangladesh. Media reports and experience show that the minority communities face harassment and oppressions by the religious fundamentalists, terrorists and the vested interest groups around different national parliamentary elections. Due to perceived disobedience of the religious minorities to particular political parties, they reportedly come under attack in different political and communal violence. Since the minority issue is a socio-political matter, the role of media in portraying the issue is also diversified and agenda-based. It is expected that being a social organization media should play its role responsibly in regard to the social issues and the functions of the media can be evaluated by determining its political economy. The study depicts how the leading national dailies of the country looked into the minority issues and presented their content during the 10th parliamentary elections in Bangladesh.*

***Keywords:** Coverage, Minority, Communal violence, Marginalization, Role of media.*

Introduction

‘Twenty first century is the century of media’ – it has become a familiar slogan in recent time. It cannot be said that this is the sense of the media personnel and specialist. It is the common scenario that major portion of the mass people are aware of media’s dynamic and splendid diffusion, and vital role. Media along with information sector drew attention of mass people while it also play significant role in creating information-worthy and responsible citizen (Sinha, 2003).

Newspaper, the earliest form of mass media has significant role in a given society. It informs the readers, provides them interpretation on issues, gives world view and portrays the social reality. While covering the issues, the newspapers follow some criteria to determine the news element and news value. In this process some issues get preferences and covered by the newspapers which sketch vivid pictures of reality at the same time represent

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the newsworthy subjects. Thus the newspapers play a vital role in representation, shaping public consciousness and help the decision makers to take their proper action.

Religious groups of all kinds face increasing persecution, restriction, harassment and marginalization in much of the world (Shah, 2013). It has become a common scenario in recent decades that the religious minorities are always in threat during the national parliamentary elections in Bangladesh. Minorities, most notably the Hindu and Buddhist communities had always been subjected to political victimization in Bangladesh (Mahadi, 2013). The Buddhist settlements in Ramu and Ukhiya of Cox's Bazar were razed on Sep 29, 2012. Homes, temples and monasteries there were left devastated by waves of arson attack. During the 10th parliamentary elections in Bangladesh which was held on January 5, 2014, attack on religious minorities especially on the Hindus took place in some districts of the country.

According to the reports of different media in Bangladesh, as soon as the voting ended, BNP and Jamaat-Shibir men looted, vandalised and burned Hindu houses. Most of the attacks took place in the minority dominated villages in the northern districts of Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra, Lalmonirhat, Gaibandha, Rajshahi, the southern district of Chittagong and western Jessore. Bangladesh media reports suggest that Hindus in particular have become easy targets of anti-election activists who attacked their houses and other properties, thinking that they voted for the ruling Awami League and did not heed their directive to refrain from voting (Habib, 2014). This form of communal violence in the name of political violence had spread out over the country and continued for days after the elections. In those days different group of people protested against the violence, appealed for immediate necessary action and forming special tribunal to try the attackers, visited the spots and provided relief for the victims. At the same time the government and the law enforcers also took some steps. Different newspapers of Bangladesh along with the other media covered these minority issues on the election-day and following days of the polls from their capacity and point of view.

Objectives of the Study

The study was conducted for the following:

- a) To analyze the frequency and quantity of contents (news reports, editorials, articles and letters to the editor) on minority issues in the national dailies of Bangladesh.
- b) To examine whether there is slanting to news.
- c) To evaluate the editorial inclination regarding the minority issues.
- d) To identify the major issues of coverage and assess the journalistic standard maintained by the dailies while covering the minority issues.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The theoretical framework of the study is based on three influential and effective schools of thought in media and communication studies to access the function of media which are: social responsibility theory of press, agenda setting and framing functions of media and political economy of communication.

The social responsibility theory of press emphasized the need for an independent press that scrutinizes other social institutions and provides objective, accurate news reports. The most innovative feature of social responsibility theory was its call for media to be responsible for fostering productive and creative “Great Communities.” Social responsibility theory appealed to the idealism of individual media practitioners and tried to unite them in the service of cultural pluralism-even when this might reduce their profits or antagonize existing social elites. Social responsibility theory challenged media professionals’ ingenuity to develop new ways of serving their communities. It encouraged them to see themselves as front-line participants in the battle to preserve democracy in a world drifting inexorably toward totalitarianism. By helping pluralistic groups, media were building a wall to protect democracy from external and internal foes (Baran & Davis, 2012). Denis McQuail (1994) summarized the basic principles of social responsibility theory as follows:

- Media should accept and fulfill certain obligations to society.
- These obligations are mainly to be met by setting high or professional standards of informativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity, and balance.

- In accepting and applying these obligations, media should be self-regulating within the framework of law and established institutions.
- The media should avoid whatever might lead to crime, violence, or civil disorder or give offense to minority groups.
- The media as a whole should be pluralist and reflect the diversity of their society, giving access to various points of view and to rights of reply.
- Society and the public have a right to expect high standards of performance, and intervention can be justified to secure the, or a, public good.
- Journalists and media professionals should be accountable to society as well as to employers and the market.

Agenda-setting is the process whereby the news media lead the public in assigning relative importance to various public issues (Zhu & Blood, 1997). The core idea is that the news media indicate to the public what the main issues of the day are and this is reflected in what the public perceives as the main issues (McQuail, 2005). The media agenda influences the public agenda not by saying “this issue is important” in an overt way but by giving more space and time to that issue and by giving it more prominent space and time (Miller, 2002).

In the narrow sense, political economy is the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, the mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication resources. This formulation has a certain practical value because it calls attention to how communication business operates (Mosco, 2010). Political economy theory identifies a socially critical approach that focuses primarily on the relation between the economic structure and dynamics of media industries and the ideological content of media. It directs research attentions to the empirical analysis of the structure of ownership and control of media and to the way media market forces operate. From this point of view, the media institution has to be considered as part of the economic system, with close links to the political system (McQuail, 2005).

Perhaps more than ever before, media and communication are the centre of our everyday lives. Sometimes on our own and sometimes in the company of others, media entertain us, enable connections with friends and communities,

provide interpretations of the world around us and offer resources for the forging of identities and imaginations (Hodkinson, 2011).

Some approaches regard media as constructors or shapers, arguing that the content they distribute has the power to influence people affect the future of society. Some warn that stereotypical portrayals of religious, ethnic or sexual minority groups might increase the marginalization of such groups within society. Others focus not on how media content shapes us but on the way it reflects or mirrors society. The predominant role of media, according to this view, is to reflect back to us events, behaviours, identities, social relations or values that already are important (Hodkinson, 2011).

Victoria Alexander (2003) shows, the belief that media reflect society has prompted some analysts to try and learn about changing structures, cultural norms or politics within real society by studying media content. The media-as-mirror approach is useful in reminding us that, rather than being invented out of thin air, media content often relates closely to real events and prevailing social trends and cultural values. Media content does not reflect these perfectly or neutrally, however. Media producers are highly selective with respect to what they include and they present the elements they do include in very particular ways. They do not, then, offer us a mirror but a selective, manufactured set of representations (or re-presentations) of the world (Hodkinson, 2011). Stuart Hall (1982) explains: 'representation is a very different notion from reflection. It implies the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping.'

The media occupy a key site and perform a crucial role in the public representation of unequal social relations and the play of cultural power. It is in and through representations, for example, that members of the media audience are variously invited to construct a sense of who 'we' are in relation to who 'we' are not, whether as 'us' and 'them', 'insider' and 'outsider', 'colonizer' and 'colonized', 'citizen' and 'foreigner', 'normal' and 'deviant', 'friend' and 'foe', 'the west' and 'the rest'. By such means, the social interests mobilized across society are marked out from each other, differentiated and often rendered vulnerable to discrimination. At the same time, however, the media can also serve to affirm social and cultural diversity and, moreover, provide crucial spaces in and through which imposed identities or the interests of others can be resisted, challenged and changed. Today the media landscape is fast changing (Cottle, 2000).

Newspaper is one of the most influential forms of mass media all over the world. Some critics say the newspaper started its journey merely as a bulletin board. Its purpose at the outset was to inform. Through the years, however, the press developed other functions and today's newspaper, has four outstanding reasons for being. The modern newspaper is published: a) to inform, b) to interpret, c) to serve: i) the community, ii) the reader, iii) the advertiser and d) to entertain. Edmund Burke, who first called the newspaper "the Fourth Estate of the Realm", also hit on an equally cogent phrase of the newspaper's importance when he described, it as "the history of the world for a day." It takes us everywhere. It tells us everything. If used intelligently, the newspaper can indeed be a source of knowledge (Bond, 1955).

A newspaper is a publication containing news, information and advertising, usually printed on low-cost paper called newsprint. It may be general or special interest, most often published daily or weekly. General-interest newspapers are usually journals of current news. Those can include political events, crime, business, culture, sports and opinions (editorials, columns, or political cartoons). Newspapers use photographs to illustrate stories, they use editorial cartoonists, usually to illustrate writing that is opinion rather than news (Chaudhary, 2007).

The first printed newspaper was published in 1605, and the form has thrived even in the face of competition from technologies such as radio, television and the Internet. Recent developments on the Internet are, however, posing major challenges to the business model of many newspapers. Paid circulation is declining in most countries, and advertising revenue, which makes up the bulk of most newspapers' income, is shifting from print to online, resulting in a general decline in newspaper profits. This has led some predictions that newspapers' role in society will shrink or even disappear, although historically, new media technologies such as radio and television never supplanted print media (Chaudhary, 2007). Newspapers have survived the coming of broadcasting to remain the leading means of communication in public affairs (Nayyar, 2007).

Some researchers assert that the first printed newspaper appeared in Peking (Beijing) in the 8th century A.D. the Chinese did the printing using separate wooden blocks for type, which could be used over and over again. Pi Sheng invented printing from movable type almost half a millennium before Johann Gutenberg, considered the inventor of movable type printing in Europe. The first printed newspaper of Indian subcontinent was Hicky's Bengal Gazette or

Calcutta General Advertiser, also known as Hicky's Gazette, which was in English, edited and published by James Augustus Hicky, an ex-employee of the East India Company published in 1780 (Vilani, 2005). It initiated a splendid journey and expansion of newspapers for more than two hundred years in this subcontinent.

According to the report of DFP (Department of Film and Publication, Ministry of Information, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh) published in August 2013, there are 325 daily newspapers in Bangladesh registered with it as 'media category' of which 124 are published from the Dhaka Metropolitan area while the remaining 201 are published from various regions of the country.

Who are the Minorities?

The word 'minority' was originated in late 15th century (denoting the state of being a minor) from French *minorité* or Medieval Latin *minoritas*, from Latin *minor* 'smaller' (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014).

According to the Encyclopædia Britannica (2014) minority is a culturally, ethnically, or racially distinct group that coexists with but is subordinate to a more dominant group. Cambridge Dictionary (2014) defines, minority is any small group in society that is different from the rest because of their race, religion, or political beliefs, or a person who belongs to such a group.

According to Oxford Dictionaries (2014), minority is a relatively small group of people; especially one commonly discriminated against in a community, society, or nation, differing from others in race, religion, language, or political persuasion.

When used in its statistical sense, the term 'minorities' refers to groups that are small in number, less than the majority (Wilson & Gutiérrez, 1985). The notion of minority groups (ethnic minorities) is widely used in sociology and is more than a merely numerical distinction. In sociology, members of a minority group are disadvantaged when compared with the dominant group (a group possessing more wealth, power and prestige) and have some sense of group solidarity, of belonging together. The experience of being the subject of prejudice and discrimination usually heightens feelings of common loyalty and interests. Thus sociologists frequently use the term 'minority' in a non-literal way to refer to a group's subordinate position within society, rather than its numerical representation (Giddens, 2006).

When sociologists define a minority group, they are primarily concerned with the economic and political power, or powerlessness of that group. A minority group is a subordinate group whose members have significantly less control or power over their own lives than the members of a dominant or majority group have over theirs (Schaefer & Lamm, 1998).

The term ‘minority’ as used in the United Nations human rights system refers to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities as laid out in the United Nations Declaration on the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities (General Assembly resolution 47/135 of 18 December 1992) and in Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (UNDP, 2008).

Religious Minorities in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh majority of the population are Muslims. Beside this the majority beliefs are Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. There are some other people of different beliefs, though in a very negligible quantity. These days a Muslim sect Ahmadiyya or Kadiyani stands in the same footing as to the other minority groups. The existing minority composition on the basis of religion can be understood from the latest census of Bangladesh conducted in 2001. According to the census 89.6% of the total population are the Muslims, 9.3% are Hindu and 0.2% are of other religions (BBS, 2011).

Issues of Minority in Bangladesh Politics

Some political and social analysts consider the attack on minorities during the 10th parliamentary elections in Bangladesh as an eerie reminder of the trauma Bangalee nation, especially its Hindu segment, faced in the course of the War of Liberation when the occupation Pakistan army and its local collaborators went after the proponents of Bangalee nationalism.

A very large-scale exodus of Hindus took place at the time of the partition of India in August 1947, when for understandable reasons it became a question of the survival of the community in a country fashioned out of a so-called two-nation theory. Three years later, in 1950, communal riots led to a newer group of Hindus leaving what was then East Pakistan and making their way to neighbouring West Bengal in India. In 1964, through the instigation of the Ayub-Monem clique in Pakistan, more Hindus left East Pakistan. The crisis was contained only when a secular Bangalee political leadership, among whom was the future Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, put up a

determined resistance against communalism and succeeded in containing what might have become a conflagration (Ahsan, 2014).

In 1971, the Pakistan army went with a vengeance after Bangladesh's Hindus, an outrage that was to go on for nine long months. In the process, the soldiers not only killed such revered Hindu figures as Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta, Govinda Chandra Dev, Dhirendranath Dutta and others but also mowed down hundreds of Hindu students who resided at Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University. Things ought to have been different in independent Bangladesh. And yet, in post-1975 circumstances, the country's Hindu community once again became a target of assault, in many instances through the subtle and not-so-subtle encouragement of the ruling classes. Over these past four decades, many more Hindus have left Bangladesh, with most trekking off to India. The more fortunate ones, in terms of academic excellence or economic strength, have made their homes in the developed world. Today, the country's Hindu population, which in 1971 numbered as high as 25 per cent of the total population, has declined appallingly to below 10 per cent. Hindu homes have been vandalised for close to four decades; Hindu temples have been destroyed; Hindu-owned property has been looted systematically; Hindus have been looked upon as Indian agents (Ahsan, 2014).

The political culture depicts Awami League, the present ruling party of Bangladesh as the savior and patron of those minority communities. Since 1971, when the Pakistan Army started their armed campaign against Hindu minorities, Awami League being the only pro-liberation political party then, was the last resort of minority communities. On the contrary, BNP and especially Jamaat (which is been described by many as a radical Islamist party with extreme communal hatred) are thought as the key people behind all violence against them (Mahadi, 2013).

A vibrant democracy might have been a prerequisite to ensure a peaceful coexistence of diverse communities. History says Bengal's struggle against colonisation and for democracy was, in fact, against the communalism imposed by the invaders, colonisers, and undemocratic usurpers. The politics that spreads the communal hate is not only against the ideas and values of the liberation war, but also against the spirit of democracy. As news reports suggest, the growing Hindu migration from the country was driven by various forms of repression and marginalisation, added to economic deprivation and exploitation (Siddique, 2014).

Research Questions

The study was based on the following research questions:-

- Do the newspapers of Bangladesh give importance to the minority issues?
- What are their criteria while setting news agenda on minority issues during national polls?
- Do they cover the minority issues sensibly and maintain good standard of journalism?
- Is the coverage of minority issues politically biased?

Methodology and Sampling

The study was carried out applying ‘Content Analysis Method’ which is a specific research approach used frequently in all areas of the media. The method is popular with mass media researchers because it is an efficient way to investigate the content of the media. Walizer and Wienir (1978) define it as any systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded information; Krippendorf (2004) defines it as a research technique for making replicable and valid references from data to their context. Kerlinger’s (2000) definition is fairly typical: Content analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communication in a *systematic, objective, and quantitative* manner for the purpose of measuring variables.

Riffe and Freitag (1997) found that about 25% of the 1,977 full-length research articles published in *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* from 1971 to 1995 were content analyses. Kamhawi and Weaver (2003) revealed that content analysis was the most popular data-gathering method reported in major mass communication journals between 1995 and 1999. An informal content analysis of three journals that focus on mass communication research (*Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, and Mass Communication and Society*) from 2007 to 2008 found that content analysis was still a popular method, used in about one-third of all published articles (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

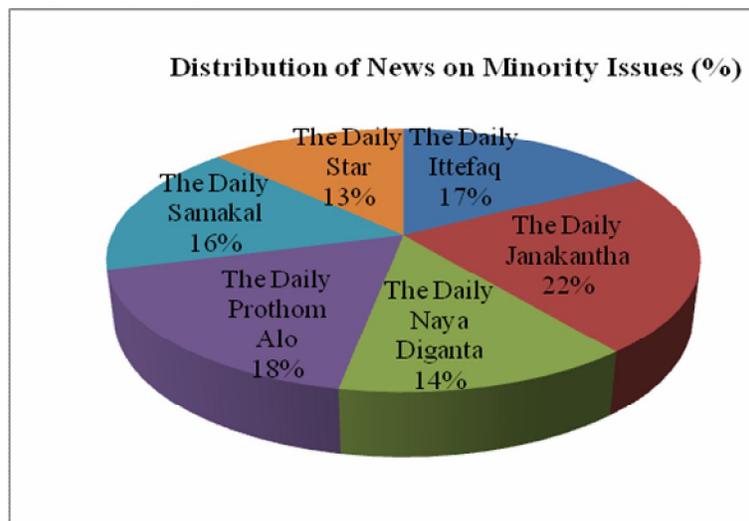
Six national daily newspapers of Bangladesh were selected for the study. They are the *Daily Ittefaq*, the *Daily Janakantha*, the *Daily Naya Diganta*, the *Daily Prothom Alo*, the *Daily Samakal*, and the *Daily Star*. The newspapers were selected based on circulation and popularity, experience and

emergence, reach and coverage ability, pattern of ownership, and affiliation with political ideology. Fourteen issues of each daily were analyzed for study from January 6 -20, 2014. It is mentionable that all the daily newspapers were closed on the occasion of Eid-e-Miladunnabi. Therefore there was no issue of any newspaper on January 15, 2014. News reports, features, news analysis and commentary, editorials, articles, letter to the editor, as well as relevant picture on minority issues during the study period were extracted to accomplish the research objectives.

Data Analysis and Findings

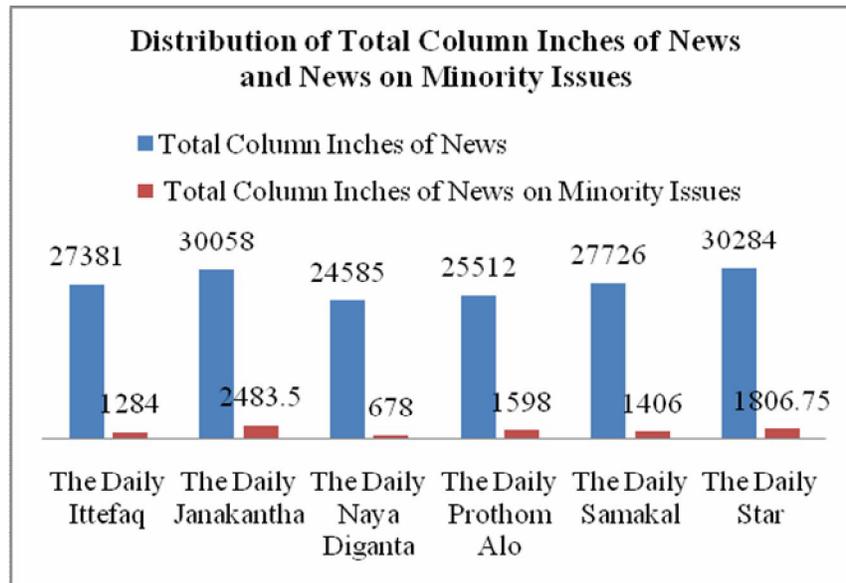
Frequency and Quantity of News Items

During the study period (January 6-20, 2014) the dailies published 501 news items on minority issues out of their total of 11588 news items. The *Daily Ittefaq* published 86 news on minority issues out of its total 2272 news items while the *Daily Janakantha* published 111 news out of 1836 news items, the *Daily Naya Diganta* published 68 news out of 1985 news items, the



Prothom Alo published 90 news out of 1843 news items, the *Daily Samakal* published 82 news out of 2139 news items and the *Daily Star* published 64 news on minority issues out of 1513 news items.

The *Daily Ittefaq* published 17%, the *Daily Janakantha* published 22%, the *Daily Naya Diganta* published 14%, the *Daily Prothom Alo* published 18%, the *Daily Samakal* published 16% and the *Daily Star* published 13% of the total number of news on minority issues during the study period. The *Daily Janakantha* published the highest number of news on minority issues which is 6.04% of its total news items while the *Daily Naya Diganta* published the lowest number of news on the same. The *Daily Naya Diganta* published news on minority issues only 3.42% of its total news items. The *Daily Ittefaq* published 3.78%, the *Daily Prothom Alo* published 4.88%, the *Daily Samakal* published 3.83% and the *Daily Star* published 4.23% news on minority issues of their total news items. Besides, the *Daily Janakantha* gave the highest coverage of 2483.5 column inches and the *Daily Naya Diganta* gave the lowest coverage of 678 column inches in news on the minority issues while the *Daily Ittefaq* gave 1284, the *Daily Prothom Alo* gave 1598, the *Daily Samakal* gave 1406 and the *Daily Star* gave 1806.75 column inches of coverage.



Different Types of News on Minority Issues Covered by the Dailies

A total of 501 news items on minority issues were published in the six dailies during the study period. The news items were categorized as straight jacket

news, interpretative news, investigative news, soft news (feature), news with picture and photo news. The *Daily Janakantha* published 91 straight jacket news reports, 2 interpretative news reports and 26 news reports with picture which were highest in number among the dailies. The *Daily Star* published highest number of investigative news reports and photo news among the dailies which were 8 and 17 in number respectively. The *Daily Samakal* published 2 soft news reports which were highest in number among the dailies. Any form of news report which was covered with related picture was counted as news with picture. So the number of news with picture represents the sum of the reports (straight jacket, interpretative, investigative or soft news) with related picture which were also counted in their unique categories. Newspaper-wise distribution of total numbers of different types of news on minority issues is shown in the following table:

Name of the Newspaper	No. of Straight Jacket News	No. of Interpretative News	No. of Investigative News	No. of Feature (Soft News)	No. of News With Picture	No. of Photo News
The Daily Ittefaq	77		4		16	5
The Daily Janakantha	91	2	2		26	16
The Daily Naya Diganta	62		2		10	4
The Daily Prothom Alo	78		4	1	20	7
The Daily Samakal	70	1	3	2	25	6
The Daily Star	38	1	8		14	17

Table: Distribution of different Types of News on Minority Issues Covered by the Dailies.



খাবারের জন্য কাঁদছে শিশু বিপাশা বর্মণ। কাঁদছেন মা সঙ্কিতা বর্মণও। কারণ, ঘরে খাবার নেই। খাবার আসবে কোথা থেকে? ঘরই তো নেই! ঘরদোর, সহায়-সম্বল গেছে এমন ১২২টি সংখ্যালঘু পরিবারের। গত রোববার নির্বাচনের পর রাতে যশোরের অভয়নগর উপজেলার চাঁপাতলা গ্রামের মালোপাড়ায় বাড়িতে হামলা, ডাঙচুর ও লুটপাট চালানো হয়। পুড়িয়ে দেওয়া হয় ১০টি বাড়ি। জামায়াত-শিবির এ নারকীয় হামলা চালিয়েছে বলে জানান স্থানীয় লোকজন। ছবি: এহসান-উল-দৌলা

Picture: A picture of the victims published in the *Daily Prothom Alo* on January 9, 2014.

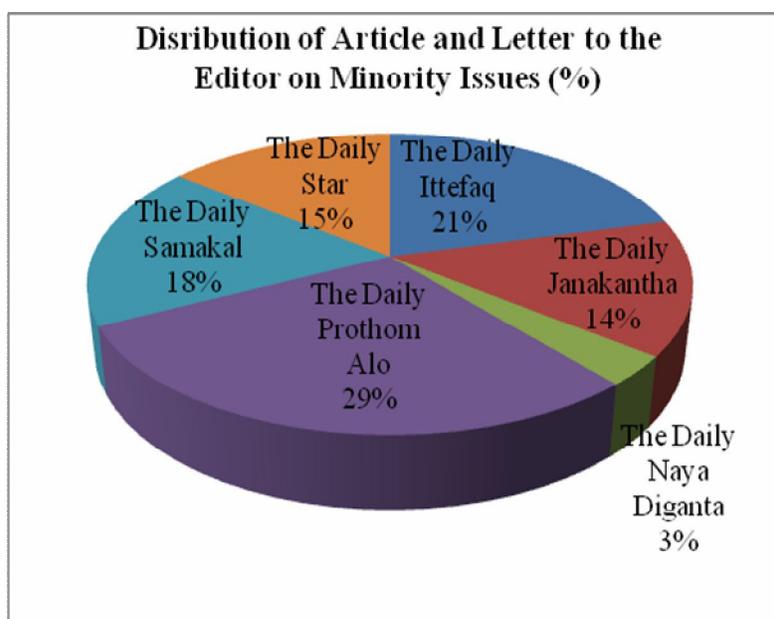
Frequency and Quantity of Editorials, Articles and Letters to the Editor

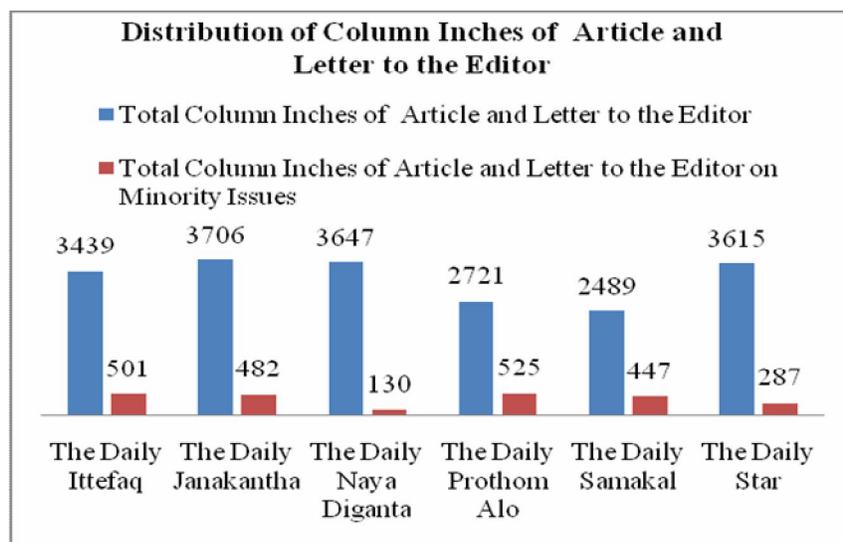
During the study period (January 6-20, 2014) the *Daily Star* published 4 editorials which is the highest number of editorials on minority issues while the *Daily Janakantha* and the *Daily Samakal* published the lowest number which is 1 editorial for each. The *Daily Star* allocated the highest space that is 42 column inches and the *Daily Janakantha* and the *Daily Samakal* allocated 19 and 14 column inches respectively for their editorial opinion on minority issues. The *Daily Ittefaq*, the *Daily Prothom Alo* and the *Daily Naya Diganta* published 2 editorials each on minority issues with 40, 31 and 34.5 column inches coverage respectively.

Besides, the dailies published a number of 62 articles and letters to the editor on minority issues out of their total 594 of the same contents. The *Daily Ittefaq* published 21%, the *Daily Janakantha* published 14%, the *Daily Naya Diganta* published 3%, the *Daily Prothom Alo* published 29%, the *Daily*

Samakal published 18% and the *Daily Star* published 15% of the total articles and letter to the editor of the dailies on minority issues during the study period.

The *Daily Ittefaq* published 13 articles and letters to the editor on minority issues out of its total 105 of the same items while the *Daily Janakantha* published 9 articles and letters to the editor out of 80 items, the *Daily Naya Diganta* published 2 articles and letters to the editor out of 100 items, the *Daily Prothom Alo* published 18 articles and letters to the editor out of 94 items, the *Daily Samakal* published 11 articles and letters to the editor out of 80 items, and the *Daily Star* published 9 articles and letters to the editor on minority issues out of 135 of the same items.





The *Daily Prothom Alo* published the highest number of articles and letter to the editor on minority issues which is 19.14% of the total articles and letters to the editor of the daily while the *Daily Naya Diganta* published the lowest number of articles and letter to the editor which is only 2%. The *Daily Ittefaq* published 12.38%, the *Daily Janakantha* published 11.25%, the *Daily Samakal* published 13.75% and the *Daily Star* published 6.66% articles and letter to the editor on minority issues of their total of the same content.

The *Daily Prothom Alo* allocated the height space of 525 column inches and the *Daily Naya Diganta* allocated the lowest 130 column inches space for articles and letter to the editor on the minority issues while the *Daily Ittefaq* allocated 501, the *Daily Janakantha* allocated 482, the *Daily Samakal* allocated 447 and the *Daily Star* allocated 287 column inches for the same.

Slanting of News

It was found during the study period the *Daily Ittefaq*, the *Daily Prothom Alo*, the *Daily Samakal* and the *Daily Star* covered the minority issues with more accuracy. They covered the issues on the basis of proper sourcing, comparatively with good news structure and maintaining journalistic ethics. No intended meaning in the news stories or intentional reports were found in these dailies. Besides, it was found in some reports that the *Daily Janakantha* tried to highlight the BNP and Jamaat-Shibir involvement in the attacks on minorities using indicative headlines and statement of the news

sources. At the same time the *Daily Naya Diganta* tried to make an impression through their reports that BNP and Jaamat-Shibir were not involved in the attacks whereas Awami League and their allies were involved in attacks. They have mentioned in some reports that rather BNP-Jaamat gave shelter to the victims in some cases. The statements and activities of BNP and Jaamat-Shibir specially Jaamat-Shibir and anti Awami League statement regarding minority issues were significantly covered in the *Daily Naya Diganta*.

The *Daily Naya Diganta* didn't cover the attacks on minorities on the first two days of the study while other dailies published a good number of reports on the same. First few days through their reports the *Daily Naya Diganta* wanted to say it was not that much sure who are the attackers on minorities, then they starting to propagate that ruling Awami League men are involved in the attacks. They are doing so to misguide public's thought to another dimension, taking political advantage and keeping the BNP-Jamaat cornered by making them convicted for the attacks on minorities. While rest of the newspapers found BNP-Jamaat men involved in the attacks.

Editorial Inclination Regarding the Minority Issues

The *Daily Ittefaq* urged for thorough investigation to find out why the administration failed to prevent such kind of communal violence. They sought to take legal steps in the cases of attacks on minorities as the attackers are identified and asked for strict role of the Election Commission and the higher administration, to increase the strength of the law enforcers and administration for the sake of public security. Through the editorials the *Daily Ittefaq* highlighted the heritage of non communal attribute of mass people of Bangladesh and urged to uphold the same stream for the betterment of democracy and progress of the nation.

The *Daily Prothom Alo* asked for the judicial investigation of the attacks on minorities and to ensure trial of the perpetrators of all the attacks which took place during the 10th parliamentary elections and in the previous years. They cited if the government would take the culprits to trial for the previous communal attacks the evil power couldn't do the same. They analyzed the vulnerability of minorities from socio-economic and political context at the same time urged for the responsibility of the majority portion of population along with the government, all political parties and the law enforcers to protect the religious and ethnic minorities in Bangladesh.

The *Daily Samakal* blamed the government for their failure to ensure the trials of previous attacks on minorities as they promised to do so after getting brutal majority to form government in 2008 polls. They criticized either in polls-time or during any political movement an identified group of people always target the minorities to victimize. They urged for immediate action of the government to take the perpetrators of polls time and other attacks on minorities to prosecutions.

The *Daily Star* urged that the government should have been more vigilant in terms of protecting minority communities that scattered across the country. According to their opinion protection of minority rights is a part and parcel of how a pluralistic society functions, and is a measure of good governance in a democratic society. But the Election commission, local administration and above all the government failed to protect the minorities. The government also couldn't shirk its responsibility for not moving quickly to restore confidence among the minorities. It is the regime of impunity, perpetrators getting off scot-free because of political links or legal lacunae that are responsible for the recent spurt of communal violence in Bangladesh. It is a pity that this should happen in a country which prides itself as an example of communal harmony. And what is even worse is that they cannot recall an instance where an accused charged with committing or inciting violence against minorities has been punished.

The *Daily Star* demanded an immediate enquiry to identify both, the actual masterminds behind the violence as well the reasons for the failure of the administration and the agencies to respond failed to respond promptly. They fully endorsed the call by some civil society members that the perpetrators of violence against minorities in Bangladesh should be tried by special court and examples be made of them for their heinous acts. The *Daily Star* urged that the matter should not be taken as merely a law and order issue. Resistance against the communal forces must come from the society that should project a combined front against these forces cutting across caste, creed, political belief or religion.

The *Daily Janakantha* analyzed the minority issues from historical perspective. They pointed out the role of Jaamat during the liberation war and independent Bangladesh and blamed the BNP-Jaamat alliance for attacks on the minorities. At the same time they gave reminder that the constitution of Bangladesh was originated on the basis of non communal fundamental policy and urged for a non-communal Bangladesh and trial of attacks on minorities

both the present and previous attacks so that the attackers wouldn't dare to do the same in future.

The *Daily Naya Diganta* published two editorials on minority issues. In the first editorial (January 10, 2014) they demanded judicial investigation regarding attack on minorities and in the second editorial (January 16, 2014) mentioning a statement of Hindu, Buddhist, Christian Welfare Front they demanded Awami League was involved in the attacks.

The articles and letters to the editor published in the dailies during the study period were found similar to the editorials. The articles and the letters are solely of the writers' opinion regarding the issues they based on. Though there are some exceptions but mostly these post-editorial matters are published if they don't clash with the editorial view point of a given newspaper. The *Daily Prothom Alo* introduced a new trend in publishing 'opinion and counter opinion' on a contemporary issue but there was not such article in the daily on minority issues. Thus the articles and letters to the editor published in the dailies complemented their editorial view on minority issues.

Journalistic Standard of Coverage

It was found during the study the *Daily Star* and the *Daily Prothom Alo* maintained the highest standard of news coverage in terms of sourcing, following news structure, using language, maintaining accuracy and overall news treatment (priming and framing). The *Daily Ittefaq* and the *Daily Samakal* were so far good in maintaining the above mentioned criteria of objective journalism. News reports of the *Daily Janakantha* and the *Daily Naya Diganta* were found biased to particular political view and most of their reports were seemed subjective.

Six reports published in the *Daily Ittefaq* and the *Daily Samakal* were identified as investigative reports in nature but satisfactory degree of investigation were absent in those reports. The only two investigative reports published in the *Daily Janakantha* were collected from another news organization. The *Daily Naya Diganta* published two investigative reports which were lacking in-depth investigation and were apparently biased.

The newspaper's own opinion regarding an issue is expressed in the editorial and the articles and the letters as said before are solely of the writers' opinion regarding the issues they based on. So the editorials, articles and the letters to

the editor in the dailies were published with a view of their house policy and standard.

Major Issues Covered

News Items

- The major minority issue covered by the dailies in news was attack on the minorities mostly the Hindus. The news items described the incident including information on forms of attack i.e. vandalizing homes, shops, temples, damaging idols; beating up; torching shop, business, house, and paddy; hurling bomb; looting; robbery and rape. Some of these reports revealed the information about the perpetrators of attacks by interviewing the victims and other sources. Some reports were on threatening the minorities and creating apprehension among the minority communities by the local musclemen. Some of them were on 'flee after attack' and 'returning to the villages'. These news items were 128 in number and 25.54% of total news items on minority issues.
- Most of the reports were on demanding punishment for perpetrators of attacks on religious minorities. These news items were 276 in number and 55.08% of total news items on minority issues. Those news items gave significant coverage on procession, protest rally, token sit-in, protest road march, forming human chain, press conference, other programs, statement organized and delivered by writers, artists, journalists, teachers, students, labourers, professionals, cultural and political activists, eminent citizens, leaders and organizations of minority communities, different socio-cultural and political organizations and civil society bodies. They asked for explanation about why law enforcers were not present at the scenes during the attacks, why the government and Election Commission despite being aware of vulnerability of Hindus could not protect them from the post-election persecution.

Protestors demanded immediate arrest and exemplary punishment of the perpetrators involved in the attacks, demanding formation of a tribunal and new legislation to prosecute the perpetrators and urged the government to ensure security of the minorities, rehabilitation of the victims who lost their homes, worship places and businesses and incurred losses.

- Statement from the government, decision of forming special tribunal, constituting committee for investigation, briefing and other activities of the administration, speeches and statements of Awami League and alliance leaders were covered in 25 news items which is 4.99% of the total news items on minority issues.
- Speeches and statements made by BNP-Jaamat and their alliance were covered in 18 news items. In most of the cases they blamed Awami League and their other political wings for the attacks on minorities. These reports were of 3.59% of the total news items on minority issues.
- Visits of the civil society members, other activists, officials, political leaders, high commissioners to Bangladesh and their representatives to the spots of communal violence were covered in 20 news items which are 3.99% of the total news items on minority issues.
- The increasing vigilance and activities of the law enforcers, arrests of some accused and other legal actions against the polls-time attackers were covered in 14 news items which are 2.79% of the total news items on minority issues.
- Judicial Commission's suggestions on attacks on minorities and the High Court directive for government to immediately provide adequate security to the minority communities and other people vulnerable to post-polls attacks were also focused in 7 news reports.
- The rest of the news items focused the distribution of relief materials to the victims, bomb attack on road mach, statements from the foreign countries, investigative report and editorials of foreign media on minority issues in Bangladesh and so on.

Editorials, Articles and Letters to the Editor

Focal point of the editorials, articles and letters to the editor of the dailies was polls-time attack on minorities. The editorial boards, the writers of the articles and the letters expressed their views with references to the historical context, socio-economic aspects and political culture of Bangladesh. Proper action of the government to stop the attacks, investigation to identify the attackers, forming special tribunal to try the perpetrators, social resistance against the communal forces, responsibility of the majority portion of population along with the government, all political parties and the law enforcers to protect the religious and ethnic minorities, upholding the image

of Bangladesh as a country of communal harmony etc. were major focal points.

Conclusion

It was found in the study that overall tendency of the dailies except the *Daily Naya Diganta* was to highlight the minority issues. Among the minority issues covered by the dailies during the 10th parliamentary elections, attacks on minorities and protest against the attacks were the major issues. Most of the dailies covered the minority issues sensibly with good journalistic standard of news coverage in terms of sourcing, following news structure, using language, maintaining accuracy and overall news treatment. A significant number of news items on minority issues published in the *Daily Janakantha* and the *Daily Naya Diganta* were found politically biased. Editorials, articles and the letters to the editor published in the dailies followed the same standard of treatment maintained in the news items of their own. In-depth reports are necessary to disseminate detail unrevealed information and to give interpretation on a given issue. But it was found during the study period, most of the dailies did not publish that much number of interpretative and investigative reports on minority issues. Most of the news items were in straight jacket form while some reports were found investigative in nature but degree of investigation was not satisfactory.

As the religious minorities are always in threat of polls-time communal attack, the media can play a vital role parallel to the state to protect them. Being a social organization media have their responsibility to ensure a pluralist and peaceful society. Media can encourage other political, economic, social, and cultural forces to resist the communal evils by creating public consciousness on the issue and promote the sense of communal harmony.

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