Message’s on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day 2020

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Hat’s off to the journalists for being on the front line in the fight against COVID-19. Similar to their colleagues elsewhere in the world, journalists in Bangladesh have been fighting against the pandemic and an infodemic. Mainstream media have demonstrated their performance in two ways. First, they showed commitment and professionalism in collecting, processing, and circulating all the necessary cautionary information against the disease, helping to outperform the rumor mills operating in the social media. Second, they have exposed the weaknesses of the health sector and theft as well as mismanagement in relief distribution that aided the highest authority of the state to bring things in order. Unfortunately, one senior journalist died and some got infected by the virus. Some also saw their jobs evaporated without any prior indications. The World Press Freedom Day 2020 in Bangladesh passed by accompanying the signs of valiancy in crisis reporting, death, and the dismay of job loss.

Mr. AHM. Bazlur Rahman
Chief Executive Officer
Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC)

Community Radio Broadcasting in COVID-19 era:
Challenges of Community Media to Ensure Free Flow of Information in the Crisis and Way Forward in Bangladesh

Pandemic COVID-19 Corona virus has disrupted lives across the world; none of us are out of danger globally and locally. Mass media and journalists are facing challenges like others across the world.

Bangladesh is passing through the danger valley of the COVID – 19 pandemic. Reaching its peak, the number of infected and deaths are rapidly increasing. It’s disrupting daily lives, the economy, society
and business. Day laborers, in particular, have been left jobless, staying home while journalists, on the other hand are working 24 x 7, putting their lives at risk.

Addressing this unprecedented situation, Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC) has mobilized 17 Community Radios and 2 online community visual radio stations for animating civil society organizations (CSOs), Government, health service providers and communities for reinforcing collective action, keeping community people’s daily life and livelihood functional, and mobilizing cooperation between the government, CSOs, local markets and communities’ response from 1st March 2020. The main objective of the program is to help the Community Media face challenges, and to ensure free flow of information in the crisis of COVID-19 and the Way Forward in Bangladesh.

Community radios are now broadcasting 165 hours of programs. 800 community broadcasters are not able to work due to the lock down and only 200 community broadcasters are working via online. In this regard, 27th World Press Freedom Day 2020 is being observed in different ways in the COVID-19 era in Bangladesh. The rapid social distancing & quarantine/isolation have caused massive pressure on the community radio sector due to short notice. Fundraising processes have been cancelled and revenues from advertising income is being lost overnight, resulting in immediate cash flow problems, cuts in grant-funded projects & many community radio stations have few or no cash reserves to tide them over situations like this.

In the COVID-19 crisis period the community radio stations require Government and international communities’ urgent and sincere cooperation for taking financial support for flattening the curve, tamping down panic in line with misinformation, disinformation, and extending advice and comfort to the people most affected — wherever they may live. www.bnnrc.net

Ms. Anna Minj
Chairperson
Bangladesh Community Radio Association (BCRA)

“Journalism Without Fear or Favor ”

World Press Freedom Day is celebrated annually on May 3, it emphasizes the importance of a free press development and maintaining democracy in a nation towards its overall social and economic development. Today, when we celebrate this day, then the whole world is fighting against COVID-19 pandemic, people are facing consequences of COVID-19 in their social, economic and professional lives. It is also important to remember that violence against women is in rise during this crisis situation and at the same time reporting, access to services is limited. In this situation, providing reliable and factual information is very crucial. Under this circumstances we are observing the World Press Freedom Day- 2020 with the theme of “Journalism without Fear or Favor”.

Despite the exceptional challenges during this COVID-19 situation, the media and journalists are also playing an important role alongside the doctor’s, health workers, Government and other service providers. In Bangladesh, besides the mainstream media, social media and the Community Radios are
broadcasting programmes on mass awareness of COVID-19. The all 16 Community Radios are broadcasting programmes for total 180 hours daily and reached at least 7 million people through its different activities like Public Service Announcements, Songs, Drama, Radio Spot, Jingle, Kathika, Puthipath, interview and Phone in live programmes. The contents being covered by community radios are - what is the Coronavirus and how to prevent it, Symptoms of the patients, quarantine, isolation, social distancing, service providers’ information and services, Govt. hotline numbers etc. and role of the community people. Also airing Government messages, information, PSA, COVID-19 decisions and 31 instructions by Prime Minister continuously.

In addition to airing programmes, the community radios also distributed poster, leaflet, sticker, miking of recorded PSA on coronavirus prevention. Prepared audio video clips on corona awareness, social distancing and uploaded them in social media through community radio volunteers.

The world is passing through a difficult time and our life and livelihoods are at risk. In this situation, we need to stand beside the community people specially those who are living in the remotest areas, detached from other mainstream media and keep them informed with necessary information to protect their life and livelihood. It is also important to remind people that during this COVID-19 crisis period special attention to be given to those who are in most vulnerable situation like women, persons with disabilities, elderly, and women headed households. Hope, community radios presence on air represent poor, voice less and can make all the differences inclusive. Thus together we help the people and the country to fight this crisis and fear.

Dr. Dilara Begum  
Associate professor and Chairperson  
Department of Information Studies and Library Management  
East West University

'Information' which is a predominant criterion for the overall development of the society has gained more importance ever before in this COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The urge for knowing the information regarding COVID-19 people are depending on the news. Journalists are working dawn to dusk for providing updates on different issues related to the situation. 'Yellow journalism' is also active among the Social Networking Sites (SNSs) which are spreading fake information, misinformation, and disinformation regarding COVID-19. Since a lot of people are there in the SNSs it is becoming a challenge to combat this infodemic of misinformation and cybercrime in the Covid-19 crisis.

The media and journalists are responding to this crisis not only by providing facts and authentic information but also they are creating awareness among the general people to learn the critical thinking skills to evaluate the credibility of the information. In this process, the media and journalists can work together with the information professionals. The information professionals can provide a guideline or framework for making people media and information literate because indeed individual awareness is more important. More and more awareness-building campaigns are also being designed in the form of news, write-ups, videos through which people can know about fake and misinformation and also learn
the ways for determining the credibility or authenticity of information regarding this pandemic. In this regard, the media and journalists can provide a list of the most reliable sources to consult with for specific information regarding the pandemic. They also need to list the major fake online sources that are continuously spreading rumors without having any specialized skills or prior knowledge related to COVID-19. However, the whole country are appreciating the courageous efforts of the media personnel for providing correct facts, news, and information in this critical situation.

Mr. Hasibur Rahman
Executive Director
Management and Resources Development Initiative (MRDI)

World Press Freedom Day 2020 has appeared before us at a critical time when the whole world is facing an unprecedented crisis that has affected not only people’s health and life, but also the global economy, geo-politics and human relations as a whole. It is inspiring to note that UNESCO Dhaka Office hastaken initiative to celebrate the Day even in this crisis keeping in mind the urgency of journalist’s role in fighting fake news and presenting fact checked information.

The Covid-19 pandemic brings along with a wave of misinformation, rumours, myths and conspiracy theories. Lack of information on the virus itself, and no known treatment of the disease, have made this "infodemic," spread almost over all corners of the world, affecting health and lives of many in different ways. At the initial stage of the outbreak, when the disease was confined within China, rumors were rather harmless or less harmful. Those did not directly affect people, but hindered their preparation to face the upcoming hazard. As the virus started spreading, misinformation got into the second wave. This, again is passing through stages. First case identified made changes in the dimension of rumour. Misinformation on treatment including medical, spiritual, herbal etc. started spreading. At the second stage rumours got stronger when fake circulars using official logo were issued through social media. Now, as experts say, we are passing through the third stage of second wave of misinformation. Audio clips with medical and behavioral advices are getting viral over social media. People are initially believing those without going for any fact check. It is difficult to refrain people from believing what they hear.

Bangladesh is not an exception. From false medications to racism, political propaganda to fake scientific breakthroughs - misinformation during covid is affecting the society more than ever before. However, there is little attempt from mainstream Bangladeshi media so far, to combat this infodemic. In an MRDI webinar, experts mentioned, other than few media outlets, almost all have published fake news on coronavirus in their online edition. Fact-checking organizations are trying to debunk the myths with their limited capacity, but those seldom could reach a wider audience. It has become an important responsibility for mainstream media outlets in Bangladesh to fact check covid rumours, to save people from falsehood. MRDI is contributing to that cause by building capacity of media houses on fact checking misinformation.

My best wishes to all journalists in Bangladesh and around the globe for their safety and good health.
Mr. Mahfuj Faruque
Senior Station Manager
Radio Sarabela 98.8 FM

In fact, we are overcoming a difficult period. There is a great difference among the ordinary journalism, the wartime journalism and the epidemic journalism at present. At this moment, to cover correct information, broadcast incessantly and manifestation is a great challenge. Due to present situation, the earning source of mass media is reducing. Thus, the career and livelihood of media concerned people aer in puzzle. On the other hand, there is a hazard to collect information and news also. Already Bangladeshi journalist has been died to cover covid 19 news. In this circumstances, state, mass media and journalist should be more aware.

To cover correct news, different institution, volunteering organization and general people of news related area may be used as a source without depending any individual institution or person. Through this process, verifiability of information will be easy. On the other way, this process would be able to help us to reach statistical information. On the contrary, in Bangladesh, there is a fear to make gossiped. In that case, to reduce it, instantaneous broadcast may play vital role. But it will be more effective if the social media is used besides capital stock. Moreover, if the health protection of journalist and necessary earning source of mass media is closed, nothing of these activities be effective.

As a community radio, the entrepreneur of radio sarabela 98.8fm, SKS foundation has assured accommodation and livelihood of It's broadcasters in the radio office. Thus we are covering news by the use of mobile phone, Internet and social media. We go out in limited range. As a result, still now we are fearless to broadcast effectively. Another mass media may use this process, I think.

Mr. Mahmood Menon Khan
Senior Journalist

Minimum journalism is the word I would like to use for the tasks journalists could accomplish during Covid-19 pandemic. This tiny virus has taught us many things in the field of journalism. The phenomenon of work from home and remote work has come to the fore. Less or least coverage from the spot caused quality shortage in the stories. More reliance on secondary data and less availability of firsthand information affected the journalistic works. Still they struggled like few other frontline fighters and took us in a surge of news and views on the pandemic in the media across the world and in Bangladesh as well. Content production and publication by the sources themselves was yet another major threat for journalism. Taking the blessings of web and internet the sources themselves published or broadcasted the contents at their own platforms and attract huge audience and readership in the virtual arena. Media had little to do with the information that has already been published or broadcasted.
As we saw, the IEDCR’s daily briefing of Covid-19 updates in social media gained more viewer than any media outlet in the country. Moreover, journalism had to massively fight against disinformation, fakes and manipulation of facts. We have experienced bars in finding or getting information from the hospitals or authorities concern directly. Fake News Factories were cruelly active to harming journalism. Despite all these, media people had an opportunity to enrich their critical thinking during this pandemic, I firmly believe. Finding the news inside the news, producing content out of content all these methods have come in practice. Effective reporting the correct information had been the major challenge, but as we noticed, journalists and media could carry it out with fewer failures across the world and in Bangladesh as well.

Mr. Md. Azizur Rahman  
Programme Manager and In-Charge Community Radio Project  
Community Empowerment Programme, BRAC  

“JOURNALISM WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOR”

Since its inception by the UN General Assembly in 1993, World Press Freedom Day has been celebrated on May 3 every year with various events. But this year the day has celebrated exceptionally. Because the world is living in an unknown panic, that is, living in the terror of the corona virus called or in Covid-19. This epidemic pandemic has been declared a catastrophe by the World Health Organization. For which World Press Freedom Day is being celebrated this year amidst various restrictions such as lockdowns, social distances etc.

Radio Pollikontha a Community Radio operated by Community Empowerment Programme, BRAC has dedicated itself to raise awareness and to disseminate information related COVID-19 since its outbreak into world and is continuously airing different myth bluster regarding COVID-19, so that, people can more aware and preventive rather than haul in fear of it. Till to day Pollikontho has far reached out to 7433 phones, 9155 messages and more than 64,000 Facebook pages for direct exchange of views, advice and information. Also is collaborating with Bangladesh Government, with local administrations and also with different INGOs to raise awareness about COVID-19. Besides “On- Air” activities it is also working into “Off- air’ and distributing COVID-19 related awareness leaflets and stickers to the local people.

Although, Pollikontho is engaged in COVID-19 awareness but it has not forget the importance of a fear and favor less journalism. And within its COVID19 activities Pollikontho is also upholding this theme and into its activity it is maintaining safety of its staffs and ensuring that Community Radio is out of any political or commercial influence. Also ensuring a safe workplace for its staffs by maintaining social distancing and by practicing hygiene within their workplace. Pollikontho and BRAC defend gender equality and during this COVID19 time reinforcing gender equality even more.

Therefore, we hope that this year, keeping in view the theme of World Press Freedom Day, we will play our role in overcoming the tragedy of the lives and livelihoods of all the people of the country and the world, including the local people, without fear or favor.
Mr. Mohammad Moniruzzaman, PhD  
National Information Officer  
United Nations Information Centre Dhaka

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human rights. Therefore, prerequisite of democracy and human rights are ‘journalism without fear and favour’ which is also a theme of this year’s World Press Freedom Day. Access to freedom in journalism in the all sectors can play a crucial role for overall development of a country. Even access to expression without fear ensures justice for all communities.

During the time of world pandemic, climate change and other big challenges the media deliver truth before the general public which also help respective government to take the right decision and formulate appropriate policy. The media outlets have been taking important steps by publishing right information, articles, columns, features and infographics to educate and aware the people during COVID-19 pandemic. The journalists are facing various challenges in covering the coronavirus news, in doing so significant number of journalists have been infected with the virus, as a result they are treated as front line fighters. There is no substitute of freedom of press, only free media can bring welfare to the society. It is a joint responsibility of government, political parties, human rights organizations and concerned groups to give a sustainable space to free media and journalism and government is the lead entity here.

In this connection, I quote UN Secretary-General's message on World Press Freedom Day 2020 - "And we call on governments to protect media workers, and to strengthen and maintain press freedom, which is essential for a future of peace, justice and human rights for all".

Mr. Mohammed Shahriar Bin Mukhles  
Director & CEO  
SBMSS Radio Boral

We are discussing on Journalism without Fear and Favor at the moment, when in Bangladesh already one senior journalist has faced death caused by Corona Virus Covid-19 and 53 others are currently fighting it clinically. This challenge is a little bigger when it comes to community journalism and especially for community radios of Bangladesh, as we work in a field where ‘awareness’ is just a “seed” planted among the rural population not long ago. Bangladesh is a country where the emotions of people are often triggered by rumors or word of mouth, that literally makes it a potential threat for journalists working in field at any crucial moment. Nowadays, the broadcasting media (both audio & visual) have been playing a significant role in controlling and correcting the sentiments of this emotion-triggered population.

In this case, community media have the competitive advantage of reaching the grassroot level people, as the people of those areas feel a sense of ownership towards the local media, which operates and performs with the contribution of different age groups and communities of the transmission area, which they like to call "our radio". In this period of COVID-19, the people of Bangladesh, especially those in
rural areas, however those in urban areas as well, that is to say different communities, are having their own various understanding of this pandemic, the danger and the other related events and situation.

Community media are playing vital roles in conveying the messages from WHO, the government authorities, researchers and references from authentic stories across the globe regarding this issue. In other words, the complicated concepts are being broken down into simpler vocabulary to be understood by the mass population, when conducting programs in some local dialects. These media, especially the community journalists putting themselves in danger, are arduously working to collect the facts and figures and to convey the awareness in order to enable people in understanding the gravity of the situation as well as to convince and instruct them to safely remain in quarantine and social distancing for as long as this pandemic may persist.

At this crisis period, when Community Radio Boral voluntarily, out of its social responsibility, has increased 6 hours of its regular broadcasting time daily on COVID–19 issues despite of its limited manpower and financial constraints, it was quite a big challenge to celebrate the “World Press Freedom Day 2020”, yet it has broadcasted Talk-Shows, Documentary & Short Story/Talk on WPFD. Because of restricted movements and controlled communication of mobility in this lockdown period, it was hard for the Broadcasters to mobilize their target resource persons and to ensure their presence in the scheduled program.

To overcome their possible barriers, the Station In-Charge, produced and broadcasted the programs fully on-line basis. In these radio-talks Speakers have attended on-line and lauded the significant roles of Community Radio Boral about the prevention of COVID-19 pandemic in its broadcasting area. The programs created an opportunity for the broadcasters of Radio Boral to raise their demands and challenges towards their local government authorities along with other development partners through radio talks when local UNO, UP Chairman and a Human Right Activist & TV Journalist of NEWS 24 was attending the show. All things considered, it is my strongest belief that journalists & other media personnel truly are, therefore, working tirelessly “without fear and favour”, in order to ensure safety of the endangered population, as much as it is in their control.

Ms. Sangita Ghose
Project Coordinator
Alliance for Cooperation and Legal Aid Bangladesh (ACLAB)

Role of media and journalists to report the correct information and to promote critical thinking, during COVID-19:
Journalists of all electronic and print media including community radio are one of the front-liners who are doing their professional duties in this disaster. Beyond love towards any work, it is just impossible to take the life risk in every moment; this is more than a professional duty.

Now a day, information call aid and in every moment by assuring this flow of information who are safeguarding thousand and millions of lives to stay safe in none other than a group of dedicated journalists.
Journalists see the present based on the past and the future. Journalists search the truth, observe, know, understand and present the fact with a background. Journalists see this truth by overpass their knowledge, understanding, emotion and all.

The whole journalism is now emphasizing the verification of the information. Present the correct information without any mistake or by revising the mistake is one of the mottos of journalists. Journalists try to present the humanitarian part of the crisis, the energy of the human’s about-turn; they consider justice and their creativity. Only the story of any sufferer spreads fear rather data and information of the whole situation analyze the crisis with its background also. Journalists have to be fair in the topic selection and the truth presentation. In this time they are expected not to be stopped. On this WPFD my wish to them is lets the showing of them connect human beings and help them to do the right.

Mr. Shahiduzzaman
Editor and Chief Executive Officer
News Network

Absence of Media the World is a Dark Zone:
Let Journalists Work Without Fear for the Wellbeing of the People

Freedom of press is the major instrument to achieve sustainable development and peace in a society. But still we have to walk a long way to established it in most countries. Since decades after decades we are observing around the world the consequence of power straggle, conflicts and aggression. Also getting experiences that how the states machineries are crudely controlling the media. In fact, they are always afraid of media. Because, media always play due role to raise mass people voice and build opinion for enjoying their rights, and expose corruptions and illicit activities for greater audience.

Freedom of press is invariably needed in each nation to promote democracy, human rights, dignity and gender equality, good governance, access to justice and information and healthcare, and to combat against inequalities and violence etc.

Ongoing global fight against Coronavirus Pandemic, media as the frontline defender, once again has proved their commitment and effectiveness for saving life by disseminating accurate information. Besides, following those, forgetting the conflicts and race, leaders of all nations have come forward and put their hands together to protect their citizen and the world. It has created unprecedented impact and great learnings as well. It means without media the world is a dark zone and very much ineffective. So, let the journalists work without fear for the wellbeing and empowerment of people. Enhance your support to defend journalists’ rights, safety and security, and resist fake news vigorously.
We know that people need information as much as they do need water, food, medicine or shelter, especially when a disaster or pandemic strikes in any region, information is critical to save lives and properties. In absence of information, communities face more damages and casualties rise rapidly. It also creates space for spreading rumours and misinformation which causes more harm creating fear and tension among the citizens.

Media has always been played a key role in such humanitarian crisis situation by disseminating authentic information. When populations struggle for basic information and services to survive in emergencies, media inform them what to do and where to go. The whole world is being jerked in fear of an invisible Virus, Covid-19 today. The whole world is almost falling apart. Places that were once teeming with hustle and bustle of daily life have become ghost towns. Massive restriction put on our lives-from lock downs and school closures to travel restriction and bans on mass gathering. In Bangladesh perspective, it is very challenging to cover news during this terrific situation. Because, journalists do not get cooperation from the authorities who are more likely to conceal information. Further, they put mainstream media under surveillance instead of social media which has been battered with rumours due to lack of information. It is main stream media which can play a vital role to debunk rumours by providing accurate information. government surveillance in stead of social media.

However, media in Bangladesh is working on within limitations to make people understanding of what is happening around, what helps are available, and how they can better take care of their families with the help of reliable and relevant information. As a journalist, I am hopeful that if we can provide news smoothly people could survive and take protective measures.

Since the spreading of COVID-19 beside other media Community Radio is fighting in different ways against COVID-19 as broadcast special awareness programs, campaigning in social media, community campaigning through BCC materials, loudspeaker miking etc. Bangladesh Community Radio Association (BCRA) and the owners of the radios are doing a great job by giving support to radio staff and volunteers in their safety and security measures.
When the whole world is locked down media are playing their role as front liners and taking risks of their life. With the whole media particularly community Radios are right now covering approximately 1 croc of listeners in different parts of the country. The community journalists, producers, technicians, other radio staffs including volunteers are doing their duties on this disaster situation. They are regularly maintaining coordination with local stakeholders like local government, administration, law and enforcement, Bangladesh Betar, different NGOs and INGOs, local people etc. In this situation, they need more support in their safety security and freedom of expression.