

WORLD NEWS DAY

Why real news matters amid the twin pandemics of Covid-19 and fake news



WARREN FERNANDEZ

OVER 120 news-rooms from around the world will come together today to mark World News Day, including journalists from Toronto to Taipei, Spain to Singapore.

This, however, is not an occasion for journalists to pat ourselves on the back for the work we do. Rather, the focus is on how journalists go about reporting on issues that matter to our audiences.

In the face of the Covid-19 outbreak, audiences have been turning to professional journalists like never before.

They want answers on how to stay safe, as well as how to safeguard their jobs. They need to know the facts. They need help separating fact from fiction, amid the pandemic of fake news that has also gone viral. They are looking to people they can trust to help them join the dots, to make sense of these bewildering times.

At a time when so much has been turned on its head, this much has become clear: Real news matters. The truth matters. Objectivity matters. Balance and fairness matter.

In short, quality journalism matters.

These are hallmarks of professional newsrooms. These newsrooms strive to tell the stories that matter to the communities they serve.

Consider these examples. In March, the Brazilian media group 100 Fronteiras told the story of the trauma caused by the sudden closing

of the International Friendship Bridge between the towns of Ciudad del Este in Paraguay and Foz do Iguaçu in Brazil.

“Many families had to split up. People who live in Foz, but have relatives on the other side of the bridge and now only see themselves through the cell phone screen.

“Never before in the history of the world has a hug been so desired. Yes, people really only value it after they can’t. Now we are feeling it in our skin and it hurts.”

On the other side of the earth, a similar story of separation and loss was playing out. In my hometown, Singapore, the land-bridge popularly called the Causeway that many use to cross into Johor Bahru in Malaysia, also had to be shut down to stem the spread of the virus. Families, workers, businesses and communities, that had been intertwined for decades, were suddenly left bereft of each another.

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People reading newspapers on the streets in Dhaka, on December 31, 2018.

PHOTO: INDRANIL MUKHERJEE/AFP

Their stories were told in the pages of *The Straits Times*.

In the face of a global pandemic, our common humanity also rang out in stories of courage and hope which many newsrooms recounted. In a special report in February, titled “On the frontlines of the coronavirus”, we profiled the doctors, nurses and officers in Singapore who were fighting the virus. Likewise, The Canadian Press traced a patient’s harrowing journey from emergency room to Intensive Care Unit and finally to recovery and rehabilitation, highlighting the many people who pitched in to save one man’s life in a feature in April.

Across the planet, newsrooms have been bringing these stories to our

audiences, not only to inform and educate, but also to inspire and uplift communities.

In the process, Covid-19 has reminded us of many things we had taken for granted. It has made plain the importance of good governance, the value of trust in leaders and institutions, and the solace and strength that families and communities provide. It has also highlighted the critical role that a credible and reliable media plays in the health and well-being of our societies.

Ironically, however, the pandemic has also posed an existential threat to many newsrooms. While audiences have surged, revenues and resources have plunged, making it harder for

Bangladesh must be in the premier league of a new apparel industry



RMG NOTES

The research argues that global garment supply chains will undergo profound changes as a result of the pandemic. They say the pandemic will speed up current trends which include an increased focus on technological advancement as well as greater supply chain agility. Their report also suggests that we could see a move towards a “two-tier supply chain,” where large, cash-rich suppliers race ahead with the use of advanced technologies, while the “race-to-the-bottom” suppliers focus on cost-cutting simply in order to stay afloat.

A key point made in the research is that global apparel supply chains will become polarised. The authors say there will likely be a deepening divide between large and professionalised and non-professionalised manufacturers, which will present the industry with two clearly defined diverging paths. On the one hand, some factories are likely to become professionalised and offer more technologically advanced production. As a result, these factories will be able to support increasing demands for transparency, flexibility and agility in production processes and

enhanced social and environmental standards. This development will likely result in closer partnerships between some buyers and manufacturers and possibly in more balanced power dynamics. In other words, manufacturers like this will be better placed to negotiate with buyers.

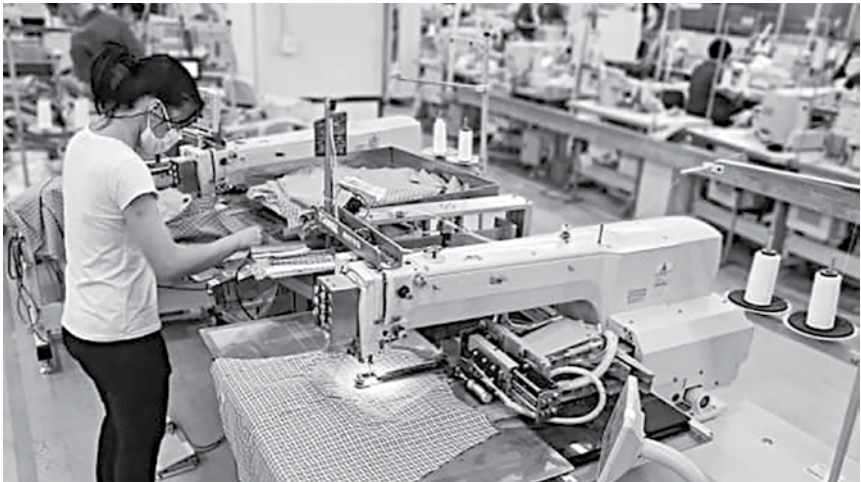
On the other hand, stretched margins will drive some factories and buyers to focus on solely cost advantage at the expense of other considerations. We know about these kinds of suppliers. They are stuck in a race to the bottom which is almost impossible to escape.

Bangladesh, as the second largest garment manufacturing hub in the world, has a decision to make: which side of the fence is it going to be on? Will it be the professional, the leader,

the high tech, high added value side? Or will it re-join the race to the bottom, forever fighting a battle against low wages and feeding off scraps from brands?

The ILO study does suggest that this “two-tier” industry will be seen within countries. So that means that within Bangladesh, we might have laggards and leaders.

While this may be the case, as a country, I believe we have to set out our stall now—our heads of industry have to work with the government to decide how they can ensure that we are all dining at the top table when it comes to apparel manufacture. By that I mean Bangladesh needs to prepare for the new normal by providing brands and retailers with a world class ready-made garment sector, producing



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high quality apparel in sustainable conditions—and paying a fair wage to workers.

I truly believe the decisions our industry takes now will define us for the next two decades. Over the past two decades we have become synonymous with low cost clothing, thousands of manufacturers producing the same staple items.

Thinking in terms of the ILO report above, we now have a chance to change that picture and reimagine our industry as a different animal entirely. Now is the time for our industry to double-down on its investment in technology and sustainability and for our government to ensure we have the right kind of graduates entering the sector—people who can lead us into a bold and bright future, the top-tier of

apparel manufacturers globally.

Is this too much to ask? The ILO report makes clear, in tomorrow’s apparel supply chains we will be seeing a survival of the fittest. There will certainly be an industry cull, and our RMG sector will probably be smaller moving forward. How much smaller, nobody knows at this stage.

But we sit amidst a period of great change and upheaval. Separate to Covid-19 is the steady unravelling of apparel and textile supply chains in China. The United States has just announced that it intends to ban the import of all cotton and apparel which has links with Xinjiang in North Western China due to concerns over forced and prison labour. It is impossible to overstate how huge this is, and it offers further evidence of the huge shifts we are seeing in the industry.

Brands and retailers are looking for new sourcing partners, as many fear huge fines if their shipments are stopped at the US ports because they are found to contain produce from the vast cotton fields of Xinjiang.

China has always been in the top tier of apparel manufacturer but there is a good chance that brands will be giving the country a wide berth beyond 2020.

Bangladesh should take heed of the ILO’s findings about a two-tier industry and decide what type of apparel production hub it wants to be.

More than ever, it’s time to think big.

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QUOTABLE Quote

ERICH FROMM
(1900-1980)
German-born American psychoanalyst and philosopher.
Creativity requires the courage to let go of certainties.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Places last

6 Showy parrot

11 Prelude

12 Make amends

13 Strand unit

14 Smoothing tool

15 Foot features

17 Memo letters

18 Go under

20 Breathe loudly

22 Swearing-in vow

23 Augusta tourney

26 Javelin's kin

28 Gold unit

29 Badges

31 Dude's address

32 Assess

33 Ship's staff

DOWN

1 Pert talk

2 Low digit

3 TV ads

4 Flynn of film

5 Foot feature

6 Travel aid

7 Falcon's home

8 Simple bike features

34 Mineral sources

36 Scarlett's home

38 Comic tribute

40 Confiscates

43 Crooked

44 Basketball's Shaquille

45 Ranch rope

46 Full of flavor

9 Tolstoy heroine

10 Cry

16 Relaxing resort

18 Do clerical work

19 First person

21 Invites

23 Come together

24 Steak choice

25 Hide away

27 School groups

30 Big Apple opera house

33 Origami bird

34 Test type

35 "Brooklyn Nine-Nine" role

37 Whole range

39 Binary base

41 Chow down

42 Devious

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

J	A	C	K	A	S	C	O	T	S
E	L	L	A	S	T	O	R	E	S
S	T	U	N	P	A	R	E	N	T
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C	L	O	N	E	S	E	D	G	E

BETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT