

Politics of news and legitimacy of news source

MUBASHAR HASAN

THE importance of media in a democracy is well-known. The media in a democracy seeks to play the role of a fourth estate by informing and educating people about various aspects of state, including the functions of a government.

Therefore, historically, whenever a government comes into power without the mandate of the people who it is supposed to govern, the activities of the media, including newspapers, comes under greater scrutiny from the establishment.

During the depressing time of Latin American dictatorship in the late 80s and 90s, many journalists came under staunch pressure from the establishment, as they discouraged them from writing news or articles criticising dictatorial regimes in Argentina, Chile and so forth. Similarly, in many Middle-Eastern authoritarian regimes, the media is neither free nor fair due to multiple pressures from authoritarian establishment.

The legacy of Bangladeshi media, however, has always been one of pride. During the oppressive regime of the Pakistani military in then East Pakistan, Bangali media of the region played a courageous role in defying the authoritarian narrative. Instead, despite the threat of military crackdowns on pro-Bangali newspapers, they promoted the dream of a free country - today's Bangladesh.

While maintaining that terrain of upholding the freedom and spirit of democracy in the post-1971 era, Bangladeshi newspapers came under attack from non-democratic government establishments. The 2006-2008 caretaker government regime in Bangladesh could be termed a sophisticated form of authoritarian government formed by military and technocrats, as those in power had manipulated the media.

The editor of *The Daily Star*, the top English newspaper of the country, Mr. Mahfuz Anam, admitted in a talk show recently to running a series of news item sourced from the DGFI without independently verifying the substance, and since then he has been under fire from certain politicians and some media houses. Mahfuz Anam's courage in publicly admitting his mistakes should be applauded without any sort of reservation.

In my view, the intense nature of debate and discussion about "source of news", derived after Mr. Anam's statement, is important for the future of democracy in the country for two reasons.

First, Mr. Anam has publicly opened up a less explored practice of media ethics in Bangladesh. In a 2013 research article titled "They are Not Different From Others: Ethical Practices and Corruption in Bangladeshi Journalism", published in the London based *Journal of Mass Media Ethics: Exploring Questions of Media Morality*, researcher Manzur

Elahi found that ethical standards in Bangladeshi journalism is poor, and, according to Elahi, "many journalists indulge in corrupt practice." Elahi reached his conclusion after conducting a survey among 333 Dhaka-based journalists. Elahi, however, acknowledged that ignorance of ethical issues in journalism is a key characteristic behind the poor standard of ethical journalism in the country.

The Daily Star's editor Mahfuz Anam is well-known and respected for being a trendsetter in ethical journalism in Bangladesh. His public comment about publishing news which he could not independently verify under the extraordinary political circumstance of 2006 to 2008 emphasises that we should talk more about setting a standard for maintaining ethical journalism in Bangladesh for the sake of protecting public interest.

Secondly, some politicians' unsubstantiated rage against Mahfuz Anam is a warning that the current state of politics in Bangladesh is moving towards intolerance. Such intolerance presents little hope for democracy in the country. Thus, some outside critics could take advantage of this situation and argue that Bangladesh is yet not ready for democracy due to poverty and underdevelopment.

Some supporters of the current regime further argue that an iron-fist government is also needed to check the rising threat of militancy. Due to BNP's alliance with Islamist radicals, some

foolishly argue that bringing back electoral democracy could open up a Pandora's Box, thus giving leeway to the existence and flourishing of radicalisation in Bangladesh. Therefore, these critics of democracy have put forward ideas of "limited democracy" or "managed democracy" in the country.

By contrast, supporters of democracy have argued that the current approach of 'development without democracy' is like building a "house of cards" which would open up the doors to radicalisation, as persistent suppression of the opposition may push opponents of the government towards more extreme measures.

International organisations and various rights organisations mounted their voice of criticism about the nature of this government, which has its own logic and support base to persist ruling. Within this spectrum, the demand of putting another editor (in addition to Mahmudur Rahman, the editor of *Daily Amar Desh*) in jail by certain MPs would not serve the government well. The members of the ruling party should learn some pragmatism from its leader Sheikh Hasina and tone down their restlessness, as their demands seem to be a call to curb the freedom of Bangladeshi media in general and the country's top English newspaper in particular.

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Trumped! Republican disarray and Hillary's wake-up call

ASHFAQUE SWAPAN

THE results of the February 9 New Hampshire primary are in, and the ebullient real estate tycoon Donald Trump is back in the driver's seat in the race for the Republican nomination for the US presidential elections in November.

The Republican establishment had hoped desperately that their favourite, Florida senator Marco Rubio, would build on his third-place showing in the Iowa caucus on February 1 and consolidate his position. That hope now lies in tatters. A gaggle of other candidates, including Ohio Governor John Kasich and former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, who have both done marginally better than Rubio, are certain to continue their campaigns. Firebrand conservative Texas Senator Ted Cruz, who did poorly despite his prior win in Iowa, will also continue as he eyes greener pastures in the friendlier terrain of South Carolina.

The results of the Democratic primary are no less dramatic. Confirming his edge in repeated polls, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders has trounced former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton by over 20 points to a towering victory, undermining the much-ballyhooped inevitability of Clinton, whose formidable fundraising prowess is matched by her near-total backing by the Democratic Party establishment.

Clinton's loss in New Hampshire has a poignant irony. Nearly eight years ago in 2008, she had lost the Democratic primary to a young upstart senator from Illinois, Barack Obama, in Iowa. New Hampshire was the state where she had rebounded then, although she ultimately lost that long-drawn Democratic contest. This time around, it's a self-described socialist senator who nearly caught up with her in Iowa and soundly defeated her in New Hampshire. How times change.

The real action, however, is in the Republican primary race. It's just the beginning of what is shaping up to be an extended battle in a 50-state slog



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(plus the District of Columbia and US territories.) Primary contestants compete for a total of 2,472 delegates allocated by various state primaries and caucuses, so the magic number for a victorious candidate is 1,237 delegates. As a measure of how early in the race it is, the total delegates allocated by Iowa and New Hampshire are just 30 and 23 respectively.

Republican Party elders are eyeing the emerging race with growing alarm. Most consider Trump, with his race-baiting bombast and substance-free theatrics, an impending general election disaster. Another leading candidate, Ted Cruz, revels in bad-mouthing the establishment of his own party. For party elders, the feeling is emphatically mutual, to the extent that many are willing to hold their noses and accept a Trump nomination if that's what it takes to stop Cruz.

The real problem for the Republican Party establishment, however, is there are still too many candidates in the race. This creates two problems. One is

that the moderate (some would say sane) vote is divided up between the likes of Rubio, former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, and Ohio Governor John Kasich. The other problem, in vivid display during the New Hampshire primaries, is these candidates tend to form a circular firing squad using considerable funds at their disposal to sling mud at each other.

Rubio's relatively strong performance in Iowa had raised hopes of changing the dynamics, but this youthful telegenic candidate had a spectacular meltdown at a nationally televised Republican candidates' debate - where he repeated almost verbatim the same talking point several times, even after New Jersey Chris Christie pointed unkindly pointed out that he's just a callow, empty suit with memorised talking points. In the New Hampshire primary, he ended up in fifth place with little over 10 percent of the votes.

In a muddled Republican race, this means that a candidate can win a state primary or caucus with just a plurality

of the vote. Cruz, remember, won the Iowa caucus with just 28 percent of the vote. Trump won in New Hampshire with 35 percent. Republicans are terrified about ending up with a nominee who lacks popular support even within their own party. Even worse, no nominee may win a majority of delegates, and the party could be headed towards a messy brokered convention.

For the Democratic Party, the situation appears less dire. The fact that it's a two-person contest makes it simpler, and for the most part the rivalry has been remarkably civil (although the recent attacks of former US President Bill Clinton and feminist icon Gloria Steinem against the Sanders campaign struck jarring notes.) Notwithstanding Sanders' New Hampshire performance, the hurdles to his path to the Democratic nomination remain daunting. Virtually the entire Democratic Party establishment is behind Hillary, and her support among African Americans and other minorities

is considerable.

Nevertheless, it's remarkable how Sanders has built up a nationwide campaign after being initially written off. With virtually no support from Democratic Party leaders, he has built a formidable grassroots fundraising network and draws massive, adoring crowds in his political rallies.

In both Iowa and New Hampshire, he drew overwhelming support from young millennials, and expanded that support among other demographic groups in New Hampshire.

Sanders' most powerful argument is that the economic and political system of the US is rigged to favour the privileged and requires radical change. Clinton agrees that there is much that is wrong with the system, but change can only be incremental, given the divided state of the U.S. Congress.

What is particularly noteworthy is that in both the Democratic and Republican parties, outsiders like Sanders and Trump (and to an extent Cruz, who portrays himself as anti-establishment) have caught the public imagination. And so it has come to pass that in the current race for president, all the governors with executive experience or a former senator and secretary of state are left by the wayside as a 75-year old Jewish atheist senator from Vermont and a rabble-rousing, even gauche, fast-talking New Yorker without any political experience have managed to strike a chord with the electorate.

As the US economy limps back, there appears to be a profound sense that the economic and political system no longer works for most of the population. What remains to be seen is how far Sanders and Trump, both dismissed off-hand by political pundits early on, can ride on this public disaffection.

We'll have a better idea on February 20, when the Republican Party holds its primary in South Carolina and the Democratic Party holds its caucus in Nevada. Stay tuned.

The writer has been a reporter and editor for over 25 years for *India-West* weekly newspaper, based in California, US. He has won multiple journalism awards from the New York-based South Asia Journalism Association and the San Francisco-based New America media.

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QUOTABLE Quote

J.M. COETZEE
Waiting for the Barbarians

One thought alone preoccupies the submerged mind of Empire: how not to end, how not to die, how to prolong its era. By day it pursues its enemies. It is cunning and ruthless, it sends its bloodhounds everywhere. By night it feeds on images of disaster: the sack of cities, the rape of populations, pyramids of bones, acres of desolation.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- Garden covering
- Witch trial town
- Blazing
- Musical set in Argentina
- Printer need
- Color lightly
- Hacienda house
- Massage target
- Downfall
- Visitor to Oz
- The works
- Turn
- Hunt in the movies
- Bert's buddy
- Whole number
- "East of Eden" brother
- Manipulative sort
- Salon supplies
- Hostels
- Forecast word
- Arbor makeup
- Fills up
- Madrid month
- Unmoving
- Laced with profanity
- Wander off

DOWN

- Small rug
- Sky sighting
- One way into Manhattan
- White shade
- Towel word
- Filming site
- Ace, e.g.
- Cultural site of Manhattan
- Engrave
- Partner
- Pigged out
- Turn
- Noted surrealist
- Lena of "Chocolat"
- Finished
- Be furious
- Small bottle
- Sinuous fish
- Sweet course
- Goof up
- Ferber novel
- Composer Charles
- Ship of 1492
- Tag sale words
- Tofu source
- Pitching stat
- Messy room

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

E	C	H	O	A	S	S	A	Y	S
L	O	N	S	T	E	R	E	O	
S	I	L	L	P	R	E	E	N	S
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K	I	T			L	E	T		
I	D	E	A	L	A	B	Y	S	S
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A	V	E	R	S	E	T	R	O	T

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

ISN'T THIS ROMANTIC, BEETLE? VERY

WOULD IT BE VERY UNROMANTIC IF I ASKED YOU TO TAKE THE OARS ON THE WAY BACK?

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

HAMMIE, TIE YOUR SHOELACE.

SO BABID UENAS WON'T BE TEMPTED TO CHASE IT AND CHEW YOUR LEG OFF.

"BABID UENAS?" GET HIS ATTENTION WITH WORST-CASE SCENARIOS.

"BABID UENAS?" IT'S HAMMIE YOU ONLY!