

Time to rethink media transformation



BLOWIN’ IN THE WIND

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I started my career as a cub journalist for a long-deceased daily. I worked there for three months without an appointment letter, or any pay, only to hear the editor one day telling a district correspondent to use his ID and collect wheat from the local DC instead of payment. The next day, I showed up at this daily’s office. With S.M. Ali as its editor at the time, seasoned journalists with international experience, experienced sub-editors, and a fresh bunch of talented graduates, the place was vibrant with professional enthusiasm. Early in my career, I became aware of two types of journalism divided by their personal and public interests.

Every day, I learnt something new while typing on manual typewriters. I learnt the use of “reportedly” and “allegedly” as safeguards. I learnt the need for presenting both sides of the story to give balanced news and restrict myself from views. In the 1990s, “bothsideism” was still considered a principled journalistic norm. I started my career after the fall of an autocratic regime, when the media literally took up the role of the fourth estate. There was a renewed urgency to investigate, interrogate, and inform. Unfortunately, while the situation at present is somewhat similar, the mainstream media is now on the verge of being irrelevant in a political climate that thrives on distrust.

Media today has transformed into a spectacular performance focused on visibility. Instead of news, we have diluted and digitised versions of views. In the so-called post-truth era, a significant segment of the media no longer prioritises presenting the truth to power. Most media outlets are in survival mode. Truth is filtered through algorithms, while dissent is punished through digital mobs or official or unofficial sanctions on ads (with stories of such sanctions becoming common during Awami League’s tenure). A large number of media outlets have been reduced to factories of

consent. One contributing factor of such a change is the “digital transformation” of media and the emergence of new media. With the decline of print subscriptions and increasing disengagement of young readers from newspapers, media houses are all trying to stay afloat by chasing online clicks. Their platform performance comes at the expense of public trust.

Most mainstream media use aggressive PR machinery to inflate their algorithms to seek advertisements. Newspapers, like any other business house, pursue search engine optimisation (SEO), thumbnail attractiveness, and emotionally charged photo cards. The goal is no longer to give both sides of the story so the reader can come to their own intelligent conclusion. Instead, complex issues are chopped into bite-size testers and teasers. The trend has become to simplify, sensationalise, and provoke. The audience is given infographics, explainer videos, and amplified opinions. Clickbait is the new malaise that is conditioned by the desire to be viral. Contexts are often ignored, and facts conveniently trimmed. In the process, the core journalistic ethic of telling all sides of a story is compromised.

During the previous regime, surveillance, censorship, and even oppression were used to turn newsrooms into ideologically gated communities. Still, there were avenues to express dissent. But in a changed political milieu, one would have expected real reform that does not shy away from truth. But once again, we are seeing a return to the “either with us or against us” mentality. When the main exponents of the July uprising criticised binary thinking shortly after the political changeover, it gave us reasons to be optimistic. But as time rolls on, the motto “Either you’re with us, or you’re part of the problem” is striking firm ground. The sociopolitical polarisation is further deepened by the complicity of some media

outlets. Voices of dissent are touted as agents of sabotage.

Any attempt to hold the dominant power or pressure groups accountable is considered a sacrilege. “Where have you been in the last 15 years?” is used to defuse any hint of criticism. The fear factors unleashed by some instances of ransacking media offices and withdrawal of press accreditation cards have tamed the watchdogs. Most media outlets function as

obedience has replaced editorial autonomy as newspapers now prioritise counting likes and angry reactions on social media. This fear of anonymous bot networks can drive any individual to their emotional nadir. The fear is more than an arrest under the cyber law. It involves social annihilation. Every digital footprint is monitored and vulnerable. As a coping mechanism, many of us resort to self-censorship. Every time I type something,

alternative voices, enjoying considerable trust among younger audiences. Then again, this citizen journalism can be vulnerable and dangerous without proper training, institutional backing, legal protection, and the editorial support that traditional media provides.

So when we talk about reform as part of the July protocol, we must rethink the media’s transformation. The reform needs

to be approached with courage and open-mindedness. For journalism to be the fourth estate of our democracy, media houses must recommit to truth over traffic. Claiming that we live in a post-truth era can only offer confusion. Media houses must unite to defend editorial autonomy over political compliance. Journalists need protection from all types of threats—physical and cyber. Instead of direct interventions, the transitional government must act through independent regulatory bodies, transparent ad policies, and genuine protection laws to spare the audience and the state from misinformation and disinformation. We have gone beyond the stage of performative declarations. Now is the time for change.



VISUAL: COLLECTED

Let’s not forget the silent emergencies of the world



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Today, the world is preoccupied with loud emergencies: Israel-Palestine war, Iran-Israel conflict, and Russia-Ukraine war. Political and diplomatic efforts are focused on these hotspots of global crisis. Attention is also being paid to the plight of refugees—120 million people have been uprooted from their homes due to war, conflict, violence, and the breakdown of law and order. On World Refugee Day, observed on June 20, the world expressed its solidarity with refugees and made pledges to move “beyond words, into action.” These efforts are commendable.

But there is another emergency, silent yet deadly, knocking on the door of 13 global hotspots. Hunger and the looming threat of famine remain below the radar of global attention.

Currently, around 155 million people face the risk of acute food insecurity in 13 crisis-affected regions: Burkina Faso, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Gaza Strip, Haiti, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen.

A few points are worth noting. First, eight of these 13 hunger hotspots are located in

Africa. Second, in several of these African countries—Burkina Faso, Chad, the DRC, Somalia, and Sudan—hunger has been a chronic issue stretching far into the past, with occasional famines. Third, more than half of the 155 million at risk are concentrated in just three countries: Nigeria (31 million), the DRC (28 million), and Sudan (25 million). Fourth, the severity of food insecurity varies not only between countries but also across regions within them—from moderately acute to severely acute conditions, even bordering on famine. Finally, this food insecurity leads to nutritional insecurity, particularly among children.

Multiple factors trigger food insecurity. Armed conflict is the primary driver in 12 of the 13 hotspots. In all areas of highest concern, widespread and escalating violence is causing dramatic deterioration in food security. In some countries, such as Sudan, ongoing conflict combined with the approaching lean season may lead to famine-like conditions.

In Gaza, the risk of famine is increasing due to protracted military operations. Humanitarian efforts are constrained both by inadequate relief materials and inaccessibility to the most

affected areas. In South Sudan, floods and macroeconomic challenges, combined with political tensions and subnational violence, are compounding the food crisis. Currency depreciation and macroeconomic instability have driven staple food prices five times higher than last year, eroding household purchasing power.

In Haiti, unprecedented levels of gang violence and mass displacement are

grown, resulting in high inflation that limits both food availability and access. In Palestine, soaring food prices and exhausted livelihoods are accelerating the collapse of household purchasing power.

In addition to conflict and economic turmoil, climate extremes and increasing variability are worsening the situation. While neutral El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) conditions are forecast from June to October

2025, weather anomalies—floods, droughts, cyclones, and erratic rainfall—are expected to persist. In South Sudan, above-average rainfall raises flood risks, while in Haiti, an intense Atlantic hurricane season threatens food production and livelihoods.

Meanwhile, funding for food, emergency agriculture, and nutrition assistance has fallen critically short. The outlook for the remainder of 2025 is deeply constrained. The United Nations recently announced a drastic scaling back of its global humanitarian assistance plan. Last December, the UN appealed for \$44

billion; that amount has now been slashed to \$29 billion. With half the year gone, only \$6 billion—just 13 percent of the original request—has been received.

The initial plan aimed to assist nearly 190 million people in over 70 countries. These unprecedented funding cuts have been driven in large part by massive reductions in foreign aid by the US, severely affecting the global humanitarian sector.

These shortfalls, compounded by severe access constraints, risk drastically reducing the delivery of food and nutrition support. Millions could be left without aid, worsening already dire conditions. Going forward, food assistance will have to be prioritised for the most urgent cases—directed quickly and effectively to where it is needed most.

Without immediate humanitarian action and coordinated international efforts to address access challenges and advocate for conflict de-escalation, starvation and death will continue across vulnerable regions. At the same time, investment in anticipatory action must continue. Proactive intervention saves lives, reduces food gaps, and protects livelihoods at significantly lower costs than delayed responses.

Brutal funding cuts are leaving policymakers with brutal choices. But humanitarian assistance must not be reduced. On the contrary, urgent support must be scaled up to boost emergency food production and ensure access across all hunger hotspots.

The world is being forced into a triage of human survival. But amid our obsession with loud emergencies, let us not forget the silent ones.

Global economic fragility, rising debt burdens, geopolitical volatility, and trade disruptions are all deepening food insecurity in several of these hotspots. Conflicts in various parts of the world have further destabilised global food supply chains. In Sudan, the risk of partial economic collapse by 2025 has grown, resulting in high inflation that limits both food availability and access. In Palestine, soaring food prices and exhausted livelihoods are accelerating the collapse of household purchasing power.

obstructing humanitarian operations and exacerbating food insecurity, particularly in the capital. In Mali, ongoing conflict and limited humanitarian access in the north and central regions continue to disrupt food systems and hinder aid delivery.

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- ACROSS
1 Feral
7 Miles off
11 Driven out
12 Moreno of movies
13 Tot
14 Sketched
15 Yard surroundings
17 Headed out
20 Fidgety
23 “— Blue?”
24 Symbol of solidity
26 Golf goal
27 Chart model
28 Oklahoma city
29 Maggie and Lisa, e.g.
31 Black goo
32 Rocker John
33 Addition column
34 Kremlin setting
37 Captain of fiction
39 Baltimore player
43 Raw numbers
44 Bamboo eaters
45 Not natural, in a way
46 Sacks out

- DOWN
- 1 Put in stitches
2 Cut dramatically
3 Compete
4 In the air
5 Heredity unit
6 Unspoiled spot
7 Passionate
8 Top-notch
9 Stopped fasting
10 Unrefined
16 Sweet treats
17 Small error
18 Some messages
19 Captain’s aide
21 Car type
22 Decade divisions
24 Some tourneys
25 Ventilate
30 “What a shame!”
33 Binding need
35 Perp pursuers
36 Vaccine type
37 Throw in
38 Cow chow
40 Exalted work
41 Pet perch
42 Slalom section

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WEDNESDAY’S ANSWERS

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