Selling Crime, Criminals and Commercializing Social Panic: Three Case Studies in Bangladesh

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Abstract

This study investigates how three major criminal incidents that occur in Bangladesh are presented in the Daily Star (DS) — a mainstream English language print newspaper with the highest circulation in the country. By examining front page news reports, editorials and photographs portraying these three incidents, this study demonstrates that in cases where both the power elite and their collaborators are involved in criminal activities, the former receives a favorable coverage while the later working as aides to the elites, receives a 'criminal' image. In addition, by using the concept of media framing, this study provides evidence that the DS commercializes crime and criminals. In conclusion, this study also observes that this newspaper is not in a position to provide accurate information to their readers at all times due to suppression by the government that interrupts the journalistic practice of providing accurate information.

Keywords: Crime, Newspaper, Elite Agenda, Social Discourse, Bangladesh.

Introduction

This study aims to examine crime-related incidents appearing in the *Daily Star (DS)* — a mainstream and highly- circulated English language print daily newspaper published in Bangladesh. It especially demonstrates how this newspaper preserves the elite interest even though the members of the power elite are involved in the criminal incidents. In news media coverage we see a huge emphasis placed on crime and crime-related news reporting—for example, reporting on homicide, brutal assault, kidnappings, sexual violence, and corruption. Crime reporting dominates news media and it is popular among readers (Altheide, 2009, p. 10; Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002, p. 82; Graber, 1988). Media have produced crime news for many years and for many reasons—for example, commercialization of the event (Altheid, 2009: 2008); constructing a discourse of fear (Altheide, 2009a; Breen, 2007; Cohen, 2002: xvii); entertaining people (Snow, 1978)

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through sensational aspects of crime; and serving the elite ideology (Kort–Butler, 2011: 36). By drawing upon three major criminal incidents— the bribery scandal surrounding a Cabinet Minister, Suronjit Sengupta (2012), the Rana Plaza incident (2013) which killed more than eleven hundred people, and the murder of seven people in Narayanganj (2014)—which all appeared in the *Daily Star* (*DS*). This study discusses how crime news coverage is linked to commercialization, and how elite interests are preserved in the coverage.It argues that despite both the power elite and their collaborators being involved in similar 'criminal' activities, the former receives a good image in the media while the latter receives a 'criminal' image. There is significant scholarly contribution available on media and criminal issues across the world. For example, Altheide (2009) and Kellner (2007) show that the September 11, 2001 attack has a political use for the elite political agenda to show the world that Muslims are involved in criminal activities. Dorfman (2001) argues that social members construct the 'criminal world' through the way mass media depict the criminal activity and the media interest of crime and criminal is not just a recent history; rather the interest can be identified since 17th century (Marsh and Melville, 2014, p. 2). Surprisingly, there has been no scholarly attention given to crime news in the Bangladeshi media. Therefore, this study is conducted in an effort to reduce the gap in the literature.

Three Incidents

The first incident that is examined concerns the then Railway Minister of Bangladesh, Mr. Suranjit Sengupta. On the night of April 11, 2012, the car of the Minister's Assistant Private Secretary (APS) containing four persons—the driver of the car, two high officials of the Bangladesh Railway Department, and the Minister's APS, headed from the Minister's office to the Minister's residence in Dhaka. The driver then suddenly drove the car into the head office of the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) in Dhaka and started shouting that the car contained a large amount of corruption money. Some BGB officials then quickly appeared on the scene. They checked the car and found cash which amounted to approximately one hundred thousand US dollars (equivalent to about 7m Taka). It was also reported that the driver and other people involved in the incident had alleged that the actual amount was more than what was reported.

This money came from people trying to get jobs at the Bangladesh Railway. The Railway targeted 7500 people to recruit and each candidate had to pay US1500 to US7500 as a corrupt bribe to get the job (Staff Correspondent, 2012). The minister did resign after a long delay. However, within hours of the Minister's resignation, the Government provided Mr Suranjit with a post— 'Minister without a portfolio'.

The second story that is investigated is the Rana Plaza incident which occurred on April 22, 2013. The incident claimed the lives of more than 1100 garment workers. This incident is not a criminal one per se, as the deaths occurred due to the collapse of the Plaza, a nine-storey building, which was only supposed to be a six-storey building. The owner, Mr. Sohel Rana, had built the extra three stories without legal permission. The building was identified as faulty and at risk of collapsing at any moment but the owner forced the workers to continue working there. Mr Rana is a member of the Jubo League— a collaborative wing of the ruling government party, Bangladesh Awami League (BAL). Soon after the collapse of the building, one of the country's Cabinet Ministers, M. K. Alamgir, commented that the incident was an outcome of the conspiracy of an

opposition political party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). However, he provided no evidence in relation to his claim. It also needs to be noted that at least "one-10th of the MPs own clothing factories" in Bangladesh (Guardian, 2014).

The third incident that is analyzed is the abduction and killing of seven people in Narayanganj, a town close to the Bangladesh capital city of Dhaka, which happened on April 27, 2014. These people were identified as the political rivals of Shameem Osman, a political leader of the ruling party (i.e. BAL) (Bergman, 2014) and a Member of Parliament (MP). It is widely believed that Mr. Osman was the mastermind of the killings. Initially there was no trace of the victims but their decomposed bodies were later found floating in a river. It was alleged that the MP, his political aides and some members of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) were involved in the killings. Initially, the incident involved the MP only but eventually some cabinet Ministers, for example, the Minister for Disaster Management, Mofazzal H. Choudhury Maya, Interior Minister, Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, and the Bangladeshi Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, became actively involved through their comments and activities. For example, soon after the incident, in a statement to the Bangladesh Parliament, the Prime Minister asked the Parliament to preserve the good image of the Osman family. She also personally promised to help the family (Prothom Alo, 2014; BSS, 2014). She made the statement in a context when Osman was suspected to be the mastermind of the killings. Upon observing the involvement of the RAB high officials and the government's inaction in taking steps against them, the Additional Attorney General (AAG), MK Rahman of the Bangladesh High Court, in a ruling ordered the Bangladesh Government to quickly arrest three RAB officials. In response, the Prime Minister fired the AAG without providing a reason. It is believed that the Prime Minister was unhappy with the AAG's ruling. It was reported that about eight hundred thousand US dollars were given to the RAB members to carry out the abductions and killings (Staff Reporter2, 2014).

This study examined only the front-page news coverage and editorials. This is because the front page is the most important page of a newspaper. For example, the front page receives more public attention than any other pages (Entman, 2008, p. 92). Editorials provide the house policy and ideology of media outlets through direct expressions (Achugar, 2004, p. 294; van Dijk, 1996a) and "persuasive" arguments (Lee and Lin, 2006, p. 335). Photographs accompanying these articles were also examined. Many scholars including Benjamin (1931), Sontag (1977), Barthes (1981), Berger (1980), Lester (2003), Barret (2006) and Fahmy (2010) argue that media images such as photographs mask the political and historical realities, and create "sentimentalism" to the audience (Andén-Papadopoulos, 2008, p. 8). Visual image can manipulate the aspects of an issue (Fahmy, 2010) and misguide the readers (Brantner, Lobinger & Wetzstein, 2011, p. 526). Photography may undermine critical and important information (Zelizer, 2006) and reduces discourse "from the wider political implications of the violations" (Andén Papadopoulos, 2008, p. 23). Thus, this study will provide an insight on how the Bangladeshi media mask and manipulate reality and undermine critical aspects while covering a criminal incident.

Media and Crime

Crime has been emphasized in the news ever since the emergence of print media. In analyzing the 'war on terror' issue in the US news media, Altheide (2009, p. 9) argues that by emphasizing crime news, news media construct fear in society and the political elite— US political leaders, for example— uses the rhetoric of 'war on terror" to produce fear inside society for their political interest. The 'fear' may appear in other ways too— for example, showing that a particular group is active against national development. In addition, the fear may appear in the format of commercialized entertainment (Altheide, 2009, p. 10) that produces drama through visual and verbal texts (Snow, 1978). Media need to have the persuasive power to commercialize the issue and that persuasive power depends on the format (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002, p. 88), and "structure" and "presentation" of the problem (Megwa & Brenner, 1988, p. 41). For example, an issue may have human interest appeal which receives readers' attention but the media may not follow up the issue critically or show no interest in an in-depth search. It is also observed that while covering an issue, the media often do not question the power elite (Kort-Butler, 2011). Van Dijk (2003, pp. 114-115), in analyzing the parliamentary speech of the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair on the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, shows that the knowledge the media produce about leaders and events, the way they distribute knowledge, the selective structure of narrative, the evaluation of the issue, the presentation of the 'culprit/s', and the consequences of the events all construct public memory. This memory is also constructed through repeated media texts (i.e. visual and verbal) that legitimate the power elite (Entman, 1993) — for example, showing that the government is active in eliminating crime and is sympathized to the victims. In this way, the power elite appears to be involved in "positive self-representation" (van Dijk, 2007, p. 63) and media perpetuate that image through controlling discourse— for example, by not presenting alternative views.

Media Framing and Agenda Setting

Through the news agenda of the media, the public may not only know the factual information surrounding an issue but they may also have an idea of "how much importance to attach to that issue" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In many cases the construction of newspapers' images perpetuates an elite agenda (Critcher, 2003). In setting the agenda, media may construct an 'Other'— e.g. the 'criminal' (Altheide, 2009, p. 18; Iyengar, 1991). Through agenda-setting the news media do more than informing people only (Althaus, 2002, p. 180; Branston & Stafford, 2005; Critcher, 2003; Hall et al., 1978, p. 53). The analysis of media texts (e.g. Altheide, 2009; Chiricos, Eschholz & Gertz, 1997; Hall et al, 1978; Gerbner & Gross, 1976) shows that there is interplay between media and crime. Media may construct a culture of fear to set the elite agenda (Brunton-Smith & Sturgis, 2011, p. 332; Chiricos, Eschholz & Gertz, 1997; Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Liska & Baccaglini, 1990). Media may also control information flow (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Altheid, 2009a) which legitimates elite authority over society in an effort to set the agenda (van Dijk, 2006a). Thus, how the readers see the world depends on the framing of an issue of media outlets (Becker, 1980, p. 530). However, while constructing the world, media preserve the interests of the elite in such a way that the readers do not question the elite (van Dijk, 1993; 2006a, p. 261; Kabir & Hamid, 2015).

In framing reality, media shape the "pictures [of the world] in our heads" (Lippmann, 1922) that not only tell us what to think but also how to think about an issue (Cohen, 1963, p. 62; Cohen, 2002; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In framing the image, media rarely question the system in which the elites abuse social power and claim their authority. In addition, media may construct an innocent image of the elite through mediated information (Entman, 1993; 2006).

Media, Discourse and Society

We may recognize discourse that is socially produced and interchanged— for example, any visual and verbal images that are shared, debated or aim to be debated, that can be printed, talked about and represented to share within society. Media as social institutions may produce and reduce discourses. Media discourses do not occur in a vacuum; rather they are the product of the social system in which a particular media outlet works (Thetela, 2001, p. 348). Media also reduce discourses by framing an event from a particular angle. Political elites also try to control the context to present the social issues in their favor (van Dijk, 2006b, pp. 166-167) and media come to perpetuate the intention of the elite (McChesney, 2008; Hallmark, 2006, p. 167; Cammaerts, 2011, p. 46). The self-representation of an innocent image—for example, the Prime Minister of a nation promising that a criminal will be brought to justice— gives a positive image of the elite. Media may reproduce the positive image of the elite for public consumption and memory to perpetuate elite agenda— for example, showing that the Prime Minister sympathizes with the victim—and thus manipulating discourse (van Dijk, 2006a). Thus, we see abuse of power and domination through manipulation (van Dijk, 2006a, p. 361) in media texts such as news and photographs (van Dijk, 2006a, p. 360; Fahmi, 2010) that omit "critical voice" (van Dijk, 2006a, p. 375). In producing, reproducing and shaping the positive image of the elite, media engage themselves in "cognitive mechanisms of manipulations" (van Dijk, 2006a, p. 370). For example, they produce emotional events for public consumption such as human-interest stories. Journalists not only select the events to be reported, they structure the news to construct reality (Heartly, 1982; Thetela, 2001, p. 350). To structure the reality, media impose metaphors, select language, and provide photographs for public consumption and attention (Iyengar, 1991; Breen, 2007, p. 6) through which one may understand the ideological leaning of the author—for example, the writer of the editorial (van Dijk, 1996; Kress, 1985/2002).

Media produce drama (Bennett, 2002; Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Entman and Rojecki, 2000; Graber, 2001; Putnam, 2002) by interpreting the events being reported. The readers construct their opinion on the basis of the dramatic "information and interpretations" (Knecht & Weatherford, 2006, p. 706). The selection of issues and the "crafting" of information by the media reduce discourse (Schaffner & Sellers, 2010, p. 1). The craftsmanship comes in the form of omitting information, presenting one adventure after another, and reducing discourses in a bid to preserve elite interests. Media construct social concerns by framing the event, but downplaying some important issues (Davis, 2007, p. 36). In this study it will be argued that media frames can be viewed in many ways— they keep silent about an issue, they glorify individuals, and they fabricate or overshadow information. Under this process, media, parallel to the power elite, may engage in a process of exclusion of a particular group or individual.

Methodology

This study incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to identify the coverage of three selected crime-related incidents appearing in a Bangladeshi mainstream print newspaper— the *Daily Star.* The stories are selected based on significant events that are newsworthy and involve a focus on the three major criminal incidents described above— the bribery scandal surrounding the Railway Minister Suranjit Sengupta, the Rana Plaza incident and the murder of seven people in Narayanganj. All three incidents involve the general public, government officials, cabinet ministers and the Prime Minister. All issues of the newspaper (i.e. *DS*) within the time frame were collected and all news, editorials and photographs that clearly marked the incidents were selected for examination. Data were collected from the *DS* website.

The quantitative analysis is undertaken at a nominal level of describing the aggregation of data frequencies— for example, to understand the number of stories covered in a particular incident. The qualitative analysis— framing analysis, for example— is the main focus of the study that provides greater details of the issues. The qualitative analysis, reflecting the story narratives, lexical choices and the selection of the images in the *DS*, serves to identify the power of media texts— e.g. how the media texts serve the political elite. This study aims to identify the newspaper's representation of criminal incidents— whether the *DS* served the elite interest through the ways the incidents are framed. Media frame may come to serve the elite agenda (McComb & Shaw, 1972) through selecting, repeating and emphasizing a particular aspect of the event (Scheufele, 2004; Entman, 1993: 2004) but media also overshadow other aspects (Kabir & Hamid, 2015; Kabir & Bourk, 2012) that favor the power elites. Therefore, framing analysis is employed for this study to understand whether this newspaper overshadowed important information for the readers; and whether the elite were boosted up through dehumanizing others. In relation to this, foregrounding and back-grounding aspects were also considered as many scholars (Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Fowler, 1991; van Leeuwen, 2008) state that messages or information that is back-grounded or even omitted say as much about a text and its values as messages which are explicitly fore-grounded. They also maintain that foregrounding and back-grounding are closely related concepts as they refer to the perspective from which the writer wants to present the content of the text and what viewpoints the writer aims to emphasize or de-emphasize.

Findings and Discussion

The three incidents analyzed in this study resulted in 165 news stories, 24 editorials and 139 photographs that were produced in the *DS*. The statistical findings are presented in Table 1. The Table 1 provides the frequencies of the coverage for each of the three incidents. For example, the Suranjit bribery incident produced 35 news stories, three editorials and 19 photographs; the Rana Plaza incident produced 79 news stories, 15 editorials and 61 photographs; and the Narayanganj killings incident produced 51 news stories, six editorials and 59 photographs. Statistically, it can be argued that the Suranjit scandal received less attention though it directly involved a cabinet minister— a member of the elite segment in Bangladesh. The other two issues, on the other hand, received greater coverage in the *DS*. At this stage, this study will provide a qualitative discussion. In all cases, the study will discuss the news coverage first followed by the editorials.

Table 1: Coverage of Criminal Incidents in the *DS*
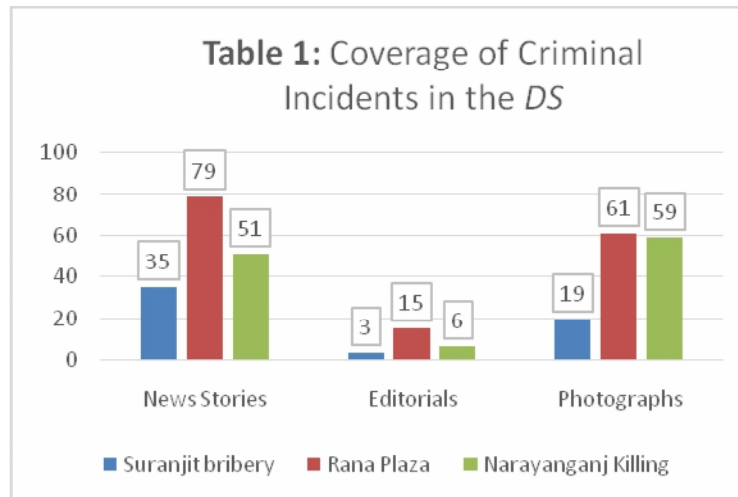
Case 1: The Suranjit Bribe Incident

The first case that is analyzed for this study is the Suranjit bribery incident. In covering this incident, the *DS* reduces discourses through omission of information. For example, the news stories [e.g. *Suranjit comes under fire* (April 12, 2012); *Corruption conundrum* (April 13, 2012)] continue to provide information such as "[the money] was collected from jobseekers in the railway east zone". It is also alleged that "in order to take the job the applicants paid bribes to the officials from Tk 2.5 lakh to Tk 6 lakh [US$4,500 to 11,000]"(*Suranjit comes under fire*: April 12, 2015) depending on the level of the job.

These reports never questioned the involvement of the Minister. The *DS* accepts that the whole amount of money was "[a] part of the bribe money collected through the recruitment trade" (*ACC, BB start investigation*: April 14, 2012) but it never raised questions about the whole amount of the bribe. Rather, the *DS* news reports went back to engaging in efforts to favor the ruling elites — "the incident has embarrassed not just Suranjit but also the government and the party" (*Let him decide*: April 14, 2012). Now the issue is seen as embarrassing for the Minister and his party that produces an innocent image of the elite and does not assign any responsibility to the elites.

Later, while the Minister rejects the allegation of corruption, calling it instead, "a conspiracy to ruin his political image" (*I will quit, if graft proved*: April 13, 2012), the *DS* reports appear to approve this position: "He, however, clearly said he would resign if his involvement in the incident could be proved" (*I will quit, if graft proved*: April 13, 2012). The statement reduces the responsibility of the actor. The sanitization appears in other ways— he has no problem with resigning from his position but, for this to happen, the allegation needs to be proved. The report also provides information including his devotion towards being a clean politician— the Minister tried to improve the Railway Ministry. The image-building effort in favor of the elite becomes clear when it repeatedly maintains: Mr. Suranjit is "one of the best parliamentarians" in Bangladesh (*Suranjit shown the door* [April 17, 2012]).

Government officials, the ruling elite and the media may work together for the benefit of their mutual interests, in which both parties save each other from criticism or attack (Buckler, Griffin, and Travis, 2008, p. 6). The mutual understanding, however, repeatedly constructs a safe position for the power elite through quoting the Government, ruling

party members and their aides without citing their names (e.g. *Let him decide* [April 14, 2012]). This is a repeated argument that this newspaper's reports and editorials provided— citing no names of the members of the elite class and the aides. These kinds of statements in many cases appear without a reliable source. For example, they say: 'Party insiders said'; 'some of his cabinet colleagues'; 'a number of policymakers', 'a senior minister said'; 'sources had earlier told', 'a top railway ministry official said', 'asking not to be named' etc. The news report argues that the PM is not satisfied with the Minister's explanation of the issue (*PM hears Suranjit*: April 26, 2012) and the reader comes to anticipate that an action will be taken because the PM "summoned him [Sengupta]" to her office. Furthermore, Sengupta had to resign from the Railway Ministry. However, he was given a position, in return— 'Minister without a ministry'—about four hours after his resignation.

The readers once again receive an image-building message centered on the Minister's long contribution to the party and to the nation, in particular his various achievements, for example: "The seven-time elected lawmaker, who became Minister for the first time, was considered by many as one of the best parliamentarians in the country, and a constitution expert" (*Long sail, steep fall*: April 17, 2012). Statements such as these appear to reinforce readers' sympathies and support towards the elite— even a high profile politician is punished.

This newspaper's report— for example, *Corruption conundrum* (April 13, 2012)— then turns to the wealth of the collaborators involved in this issue that dehumanizes the 'culprits'. In doing so they never disclose whether the 'criminals' earned their wealth through legal means—for example, via an inheritance. They repeatedly focus upon and emphasized the wealth of aides of the elite, identifying these aides as the main 'criminals'. For example, news reports such as *Corruption conundrum* (April 13, 2012) focus upon the personal property of the Assistant Personal Secretary (APS), Omar Farouk, with a photograph of his house. The coverage of the home seemed to imply that the APS is corrupt and the house is seen as a symbol of corruption. In contrast, there was no news report in the *DS* that show interest towards the wealth or properties owned by the Minister Mr. Sengupta.

The *DS* consistently fails to focus attention on the rights of the less privileged who are often subjected to dehumanization in the coverage. For example, the driver of the APS is focused upon as a criminal: "He [the driver] did so [i.e. drove the car into the BGB office and helped the BGB members to catch the people and money] as he was reportedly not paid Tk five lakh [as his share from the corruption money]" (*Recast probe body makes no difference*: April 13, 2012). In addition, by repeatedly failing to provide its readers with information about the driver, this newspaper constructs his life as being worthless. In one report the driver becomes the main focus of coverage— *Who's driver? Where's he* (April 17, 2012).The report says: "The whereabouts of the driver of Suranjit Sengupta's assistant personal secretary remains a mystery". The reporter, however, did not feel the need to contact the BGB office— the office where the driver was arrested along with the other people in the car— to unearth the "mystery". Since the incident, the driver has gone missing. Concerns such as what happened to him, why and how the three people were released (but not the driver) after the Minister's order, and, more importantly, the security of the driver, do not seem to be of interest to the news report. The readers hear nothing

about the fate of the driver. In contrast, how the issue has embarrassed the image of the elite and their organization (the party i.e. BAL) was repeated.

This newspaper, however, was not supportive of the elite at all times. For example, in the context of the resignation of Sengupta, one news report—*Suranjit should go on his own* (April 16, 2012)— argues: "Suranjit should have resigned, on plain moral and ethical grounds, within minutes of the scandal coming to light". Another report—*He 'resigned', stayed minister* (April 20, 2012)— says that the PM Sheikh Hasina criticized media coverage of the issue. For example, she stated that the media, including the *DS*, failed to understand that resignation from the post is a right of the Minister but whether it would be accepted or not is up to the Prime Minister and this, she claims, is constitutionally correct. In countering this, the *DS* report— *Acceptance of resignation & our constitution* (April 22, 2012)— has this to say: According to jurists, "Their [Ministers] resignation takes effect the moment they submit it to the Prime Minister", This kind of statement provides the impression that the *DS* sometimes take a stand against the elite interests. However, after this report, the *DS* once again went back to its position of not challenging the elite.

Editorials

The first editorial (*The curious case of the money-laden car*; April 12, 2012) appearing in the *DS* on the Suranjit issue maintains omission of information that favor the power elite. For example, the editorial focuses upon the fact that there was "a vehicle containing 70 lakh taka in cash". However, it does not question why this huge amount was heading to the home of a Minister at midnight. It also does not question the Minister that phoned the BGB to release the 'culprits' immediately and does not challenge the BGB on the legal basis of releasing these people. However, the editorial argues for a new probe committee so that "the credibility of the government in the eyes of the people" will not be damaged (*The curious case of the money-laden car*; April 12, 2012 [editorial]). It says that as the issue is already highlighted by the media it will "affect" the image of the Government and the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL) party, if left unresolved. It seems that, if the issue had not been focused upon or if there was no question of damaging BAL's image, there would have been no problem with the existing committee. However, it is noted that not all the editorials supported the elite. The last editorial— *Minister reinstated, scandal gapes* (April 19, 2012)— questions the "seriousness" and "sincerity" in dealing with the issue. The editorial argues: "So far, the government has not addressed the issue with the seriousness it clearly merits, which raises questions about its sincerity". However, after this particular editorial was published the *DS* suddenly stopped writing anything critical that challenged the elites.

Case 2: The Rana Plaza Incident

With regard to the Rana Plaza incident, the *DS* appears to present mainly a human-interest angle. The very first story (*9-storey Building Caves in: Rescue races against time*: April 25, 2013) is a human- interest story that appears with a photograph of a killed garment worker's bare foot. This serious issue, which involves killing through corruption, is sold through human- interest appeal. It needs to be noted that the *DS* publishes 79 news stories on the Rana Plaza incident. Of them 71 news stories were based on human interest stories.

In other words, the news stories provide human- interest appealing texts— photographs and news— but rarely question the cause of the human-made disaster. For example, the opening narratives of the story say:

> Rana Plaza is now a mountain of jumbled concrete debris. Concrete pillars of every shape dangle precariously, ready to snap and crash down. Close to the top just under a bundle of cloth lies the half-buried body of a woman. A huge pillar lies across her. Her blood-spattered hair has grown stiff (*9-storey Building Caves in: Rescue races against time*: April 25, 2013).

The caption provides more human appealing ingredients with a photograph[i]. Again, in covering visual text such as photographs human interest appeal were emphasized prominently and repeatedly. For example, the *DS* on this issue published 61 photographs including five graphics. Out of 61 images, 51 photographs were based on human interest appeal. The photo-caption of the first news story narrates:

> DEATH OF A DREAM … She put on her anklets and showed up for work yesterday, probably still unsure whether to get in after the scare on Tuesday when a rumble was heard coursing through the building, leaving cracks behind. Assured that everything was okay, she went in, not knowing the day would be her last, that her world would come crashing down. Her anklets do not make music anymore. The unmoving foot speaks of a life forever stilled.

The daily coverage of the incident provided updated information about casualties but rarely focused upon the persons responsible for the incident. It regularly presented the hardship of the workers' lives and the news narratives prefer a human -interest focus which appeals to readers' fleeting attention. The newspaper appears to avoid presenting the news in a straightforward way through a straight-jacket form of news that would indicate the seriousness of the issue.

The supportive position towards the elite by the *DS* can be understood when it says nothing about the responsible persons— the owner, the management and the government. Later, in a hard news story, the *DS* appears with a headline—*Murder, not accident* (April 25, 2013)— but it simply adds a sentence about the owner: "Ignoring the warning, the authorities, including the building owner, Sohel Rana, decided to keep the building open for business […]". After this point, the report became a human -interest story again. The elites are kept out of the scrutiny as the report does not question them.

The highest authority of the elite— the Prime Minister— is supported with the coverage: "Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday vowed to punish those who are responsible for the collapse of Rana Plaza in Savar" (*None will be spared*: April 26, 2013). The headline of the story also proposes a strong position against 'criminals'. The sub-headline of the story— *Pledges PM in JS*— also emphasizes the issues that the PM promised in her parliamentary speech. The PM's promise, however, comes in the context of an attack by "angry" garment workers on some buildings (*Garment units attacked*: April 26, 2013). The workers actually were showing their dissatisfaction at the inaction of those in authority. The government did not express a promise to punish the responsible parties and the newspaper did not report on this until they saw the workers' 'anger'. The reports

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did not clarify why the authorities were silent before this incident. Instead, the "lawlessness", the "outburst of the workers", the "vandalizing of street vehicles" for example, were focused upon prominently— e.g. with photographs and prominent headlines (e.g. *RMG workers go berserk* (April 27, 2013); *Garment workers remain restive* (April 28, 2013). The coverage of this issue explains how the industry faced financial collapse due to the 'unruly' workers. The headline, *Garment units attacked* (April 26, 2013), provides sensationalism through generalization. It suggests that the whole industry is under attack. However, the reality is that five garment units were attacked. At a glance, however, the fore-grounded information promotes the perception that these people are doing something that goes against national growth. The elites are given the right to take action against the 'lawlessness'.

Later, as with the PM, this newspaper's report argues for the arrest of the owner, Mr. Sohel Rana. This came at a particular moment when the PM confirmed that Mr. Rana was "never" a member of her party. The later news provided another focus— Mr. Rana and his father are both alcoholics and drug addicts (*No permission taken for upper floor*: May 3, 2013). The dehumanization of the 'criminals' appears to serve the elite.

Editorials

The editorials, too, provoke human interest appeal; yet at the same time, they never question the ruling elites. They show their concern about the incident: "The Prime Minister having ordered the arrest of those responsible for the tragedy in Savar, we hope to see some effective action in arresting them" (*Errant RMG owners going free*: April 28, 2013 [Editorial]). On one occasion, for example, the *DS* shows its sympathy towards the victims: "We are hugely jolted by utter shock and grief at the tragedy" (*Massive building collapse in Savar*: April 25, 2013). This kind of sympathy is not repeated though. Rather, the way the garment sector will suffer and the financial losses of the industry were repeatedly focused upon (See the stories, for example: *Body-blow to garment sector* (April 27, 2013 [Editorial]); and All RMG unit shut for 2 days (April 27, 2013 [News report]). The lives of the unfortunate workers become only a part of selling the issue instead.

The editorial, *None will be spared* (April 26, 2013), thanked the PM for her stand. This announcement of appreciation appeared to marginalize non-elite people. For example, one editorial states: "We thank her [the PM] for it [i.e. her promise of bringing the 'culprits' under justice] and point out that if this action was taken earlier at least Friday's outburst of the workers — we can in no way be sympathetic to the lawlessness — may have been averted" (*Streamline the building sector*: April 27, 2013). The readers repeatedly hear about the "angry workers" and now they receive the image of the workers as "lawless". Similar to the news report (mentioned before), the editorials failed to clarify the reason behind the 'lawlessness' of the 'angry' workers. Another editorial appears to provide ointment on the burnt bodies of the workers— the PM promised to increase garments workers' salaries (*Salary increase for garment workers* [May 14, 2013])—a clear way of glorifying the power elite. In fact, the contextual discourse (van Dijk, 2007: 64)— who says what with what intentions— is suppressed in media narrative.

To glorify the elites, *DS* editorials failed to search for and uphold some important questions—for example, the responsibility of the elite in the mass murder. Rather, the editorials applauded the PM's decision—that is, increasing workers' salaries. The decision

actually appeared to calm the 'anger' of the workers. The elite interests are preserved through glorifying them—showing that the PM is serious about taking action and her promises to increase the salary of workers in the garment industry.

Case 3: The Seven-Murder Incident

The third incident— the abduction and killing of seven people in Narayangonj— starts with a news report— *N'ganj enraged* (May 3, 2014)— that Bangladesh has recently been suffering from a spate of abductions and killings. The newspaper's report repeatedly blamed Nur Hossain— one of the aides of a local MP Shameem Osman,— and focused upon him frequently with photographs that provide the perception that the local people burnt Hissain's offices and properties. The newspaper's report provides the information that '[The victims'] family members pointed the finger at ward councilor Nur Hossain' but nothing is mentioned about Osman (*N'ganj enraged*: May 3, 2014 [Photo-caption]). Through news narratives and photographs, the *DS* provided an image of how Hossain achieved wealth and properties through criminal activities— taking other people's lands, drug dealing, killing etc (see the news reports, for example, *Nur 'controlled' drug business* (May 10, 2014); *So easy to be rich* (May 4, 2014); *Main accused still not tracked* (May 7, 2014).

Instead of emphasizing the context in which the Prime Minister is widely-viewed as a contributor in a destabilizing environment, the narrative stressed the immoral actions of Hossain and highlighted his low social status— "uneducated" "truck helper" (*So easy to be rich* [May 4, 2014)]. The information can be misinterpreted by readers. For example, it may suggest that the angry people are destroying Hossain's property because Hossain is the only 'culprit'. In their statements, many local people, including the local Mayor, argue that Hossain 'grew up' under the shelter of the Osman brothers (*Narayanganj restive for Osman brothers*, May 5, 2014). However, the newspaper's reports rarely question Osman. The reports cover Osman once in the context of a press conference organized by Osman in order to inform people that he has no responsibility for this issue and Hossain is nobody to him. In the conference Osman also confirmed that Hossain is the "culprit" (*Yes, they are the culprits*: May 5, 2014). The same report once tried to question the position of Osman— "Awami League lawmaker Shamim Osman, feared by locals as the crime lord of Narayangonj […]". It, however, quickly changed track and said: "he categorically named Nur Hossain, Iqbal Hossain and Hasmat Ali Hashu, and said he is cent [sic] percent sure about their complicity". In covering Government actions against the 'criminals', the *DS* informs that the Interior Ministry imposed a 'red-alert' against Hossain (*83 N'Gonj cops transferred*: May 9, 2014). According to the report, the Interior Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said, "We sent a list of the accused to all the agencies and departments engaged in the country's land, water and air boundaries" [original quotation mark]. He also added, "the list also include names of some persons suspected to be involved in the abduction and killing" (*83 N'Gonj cops transferred*: May 9, 2014). According to the news report, Nur Hossain was supposed to be unable to cross the border. However, Hossain did manage to cross the border. On his passport, Nur Hossain only had a visa to India. The newspapers failed to question the Interior Minister on how Hossain was successful in doing so. It did not go back to the Interior Minister for his comment on the issue of the 'red-alert' that had been initiated to catch Hossain. It frequently focused upon Hossain but the main perpetrator was left in the shadows— the elite is given a safe position by not questioning them.

Fahmy (2010) discusses how media texts, particularly photographs, appear to misguide and manipulate readers' perceptions. The instrumental use of photographs (Rice, 2011) legitimates the power elite through sanitizing images. The sanitization of the power elite through visual image can be seen in the *DS*. For example, the *DS* covers the news of the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina with two prominent photographs (*Arrest, right away*: May 12, 2014) in which she was crying and showing sympathy towards the victims' families. The support the PM provided towards Osman is downplayed when readers see an image of her crying with the victims' families. However, the collaborators of the political elite — Hossain, for example—are identified as the main and definite criminals and were the main focus in the news reports and photographs. For example, Nur Hossain and his belongings appeared 19 times in the photo coverage. In addition, all news reports covered him— the collaborators of the elite become scapegoats to save the image of the elite. In contrast, the power elite remain unquestioned. This newspaper's report says that Dipu Choudhury, the son of the Navigation Minister Mofazzal H. Choudhury Maya, was closely linked to the planning of the abduction and killings. For example, he mediated the plan with RAB and local perpetrators. Later, it was also known that one of the high ranking RAB officials was the son-in-law of the Navigation Minister. Due to the involvements of the political elites and their relatives, the government was inactive in taking any action against the perpetrators. These issues received almost no importance in the coverage. Rather, Hossain was repeatedly and prominently portrayed as the main criminal, which clearly overshadowed the activities of the power elites.

Editorials

With regard to the *DS* editorials on the seven- killing incident, initially a critical stance against the ruling class was taken, as in the editorial — *Incidence of abduction* (May 3, 2014), for example:

> No government worth the salt can allow such a situation to continue. To our horror the PM indulged in her old habit of blaming the opposition, in her May Day speech on Thursday. The BNP chief returned the favour. Such blame game will not wash with the public. The government cannot shrug its responsibility (*Incidence of abduction* (May 3, 2014).

A later editorial— *The state of our media* (May 4, 2014)— informed readers that there was a ban imposed against the *DS* journalists from the government. They were not being invited to any government events, such as the PM's meetings, but readers did not know the reason behind it. Another editorial— *No dissent?* (May 5, 2014)— appears to criticize the bureaucrats but not the government per se. The editorials that appear later blame Hossain as the main 'criminal' and also blame law enforcement bodies for not arresting him—e.g. "There have been a lot of speculations about the role of the police and RAB, particularly because of new accusations made by the families of the victims" (*Seven murder investigation*: May 6, 2014). The power elite, for example, the Minister, is absent in the narratives.

In the context of arresting three RAB officials, the *DS* produced two editorials— *Narayanganj killings* (May 9, 2014) and *Narayananj case investigation* (May 19, 2014). The narratives of the editorials informed readers that three RAB members were arrested and

the editorial accused the RAB in general for their involvement in the incident. It criticized police for the delay in catching the perpetrators, forgetting that it is not possible to take any action in a context where Bangladesh's highest authority blamed a certain political party (i.e. BNP) for the incident and rejected any involvement of the leaders and activists of her political party.

In addition, it does not question the persons behind the scene, for example, the local MP and the son of the cabinet Minister. Hossain is constructed as the main villain instead and becomes the scapegoat to preserve the interests of the elite. It is thus, apparent that the *DS* chooses to remain silent with regard to the role of the power elite in criminal activities.

Conclusion

Through the analysis presented above, it is clearly demonstrated that the *DS* consistently framed the three criminal incidents discussed above in a way that engaged in image-building of the elite and preserving the interests of the ruling elites. The *DS* can also be seen as engaging in efforts that omitted, manipulated, and overshadowed information to suppress readers' knowledge in order to provide support towards the ruling class. Such support becomes a serious concern in a context when media become part of crime and corruption, either voluntarily or by force. This fact will encourage corruption and bad politics, and goes against the development of a nation, which is a serious violation of the promise of a media outlet and casts questions on the ethical practice of journalists as part of a social institution. While claiming that freedom of the press and freedom of expression is important for citizens and media alike, the media also need to uphold the rights regarding citizens' safety, as the fair practice of the media will be questioned if this is not upheld. The *DS* fails to protect the right of freedom of expression and the right of the public to access accurate information. The *DS* also plays a supportive role for the ruling class and becomes a close part of this group in a context when it fails to question the power elite.

The media can construct a discourse of fear within society in a context when social members will see that the involvement of the power elite in a particular criminal incident is overshadowed or receives no importance while it is expected that a media outlet will save the weak by scrutinizing the power abuses within society. The *DS* is involved in commercializing crime and promoting emotion when investigative, in-depth, and hard news is more important in covering a story. This study demonstrates how the elite members of the ruling class are sanitized in coverage and the aides are represented as 'the villain'. Nonetheless, on at least one occasion, this study finds that the ruling class imposed a ban on journalists. This can be an issue that prevents a newspaper's ability to publish information in depth. We also know how the ruling elite try to suppress the right to information as well as suppress journalists in many nations. Engaging in nation-building efforts, — for example, in developing people's rights and awareness about their rights, requires a free and fair media organization. In addition, to claim a nation as democratic, freedom of the press is recognized as one of the main demands to establish a democracy. This helps the citizens to know and practice their rights— for example, the right to know and the right to be informed. In many nations all over the world, we see a so-called democracy that does not allow its citizens the right to know and freedom of the press. This can be a case in Bangladesh too. Thus, this study would suggest further studies in

relation to the Bangladeshi media and the ruling elite, which will unearth how media outlets, working in a so-called democratic society, are suppressed and barred from providing accurate information. The inaction of a nation's government against the political aides, collaborators and members of the ruling elites, and the restriction and suppression of the right to inform and be informed in a context of political nepotism, can also encourage groups involved in destabilizing national development— be it politicians or others - that brings nothing but uncountable human-made abuses and calamity within society. This also discourages and restricts social institutions to serve citizens with accurate information. Thus, the restriction or censorship imposed by the government can also be a cause for not providing follow-up stories and in-depth investigations on many issues. Instead the paper is often seen jumping from one issue to another and providing unnecessary and overwhelmingly human- interest appealing news. However, for quality journalism, from a 'quality' newspaper, readers would prefer that they be informed accurately. Otherwise media need to explain why they cannot cover whatever issues that arise properly and thoroughly. Thus, this study also argues for further studies of how Bangladeshi media outlets are undergoing a process of silent censorship.

Acknowledgements

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