

# Project Annual Report

Year-1

(January 2021- December 2021)

Project Name: Journalism Skill in Media and Academia

Prepared by



13 January 2022

## Context:

In recent days false news and misinformation is one of the main concerns for the social and democratic values of our country. Its spread has grown geometrically with the growth of the number of internet and social media users. Though the problem is very alarming there are significantly low numbers of such organization dealing with fact checking. The mainstreaming mass media are not focusing on the issues of fact checking and fact checker in the newsroom is also not very commonly seen in every newsroom. On the other hand, journalism in Bangladesh is yet very traditional in reporting new dynamics of issues in the field of business and economy including financial frauds. The project contributing by addressing these two problems through building capacity of university faculties and including fact checking and countering misinformation in the existing university curriculum and enhancing skills of journalists on in-depth business and economics reporting.

## Goal of the project:

To make media newsroom compatible with the economic shift and counter misinformation

## Objectives

- Support university journalism departments to teach fact checking and countering misinformation
- Strengthen newsrooms on contemporary business and economics journalism

## Reporting period

January 2021- December 2021

## Activity Update

**1. Approval from NGOAB:** As per government rule, the project was submitted to NGO Affairs Bureau based on their prescribed format and got approval of implementation. The first revised budget was submitted to NGO Affairs Bureau and got approval on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2020, the second one was approved on 12 April 2021.

**2. Base set-up and Inception Meeting:** At the beginning of the year, MRDI deputed its officials to the project. Then the project team sat with the officials of The Asia Foundation to discuss the project implementation strategy and plan.

**3. ToT on fact checking and misinformation:** A Training of Trainers (ToT) on fact checking and misinformation was held from 14 March to 16 March 2021 at the CCDB Hope Center. Eleven faculty members of journalism department from Rajshahi University, Chittagong University, Daffodil International University and Independent University, Bangladesh



(IUB) participated in the training.

Lecture, group discussion, practical exercise and interactive sessions were conducted in the training which includes the need of integrating fact checking in the university curriculum, how it can promote accountability in journalism and what are the different techniques of fact checking.



An interaction session was held between the academic and the newsroom on what news market wants from the graduates. The session facilitated the academics to understand the demand

of the newsroom and need for inclusion of fact checking in the curriculum.

**4. Gatekeeper engagement meeting:** To enhance capacity of journalists and increase number of in-depth and investigative reports on business and economy in the media a meeting was organized with Media Gatekeepers at MRDI conference room on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2021. Business editors and newsroom heads from 16 print, TV & online media were present in the meeting. Executive Director and Head of Programme & Communications of MRDI facilitated the overall discussion.



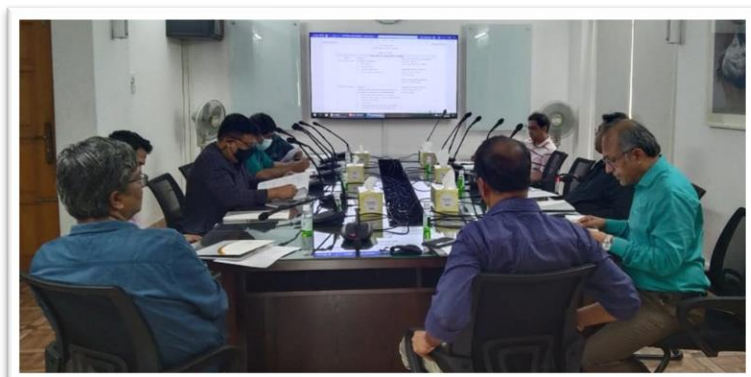
A short synopsis and project highlights were presented in the meeting that helped the business editors and newsroom chiefs to integrate their goals with MRDI's project objective. Business editors agreed that

there is a lack of skills and capacity in the newsroom to fulfill the requirement of quality reporting on business and economy. They appreciated MRDI's initiative to work with a group of young reporters through a methodological process of capacity building.

Through the meeting, media gatekeepers committed to nominate trainees from their business desk for a training and fellowship procedure and help to develop training content for the planned training.

## 5. Content Finalization Meeting for the Foundation Training on Business and Economics Reporting:

A gatekeeper meeting with eight business newsroom editors was held on 27th May 2021 with an objective to finalize a four-day long foundation training content on business and economic fundamentals. Two experts Miraj Ahmed Chowdhury, Editor GIJN Bangla and Shawkat Hossain Masum, Special News Editor, Prothom Alo presented the draft content. MRDI Executive Director and the project Team Leader facilitated the discussion session.



In the meeting discussion, gatekeepers appreciated the draft content and expressed their opinion and expectations from the foundation training. Gatekeepers proposed to extend the length of lecture periods on design thinking, money laundering, introduction to business reporting, and the way to better access to the government database.

## 6. Foundation Training on Business and Economics Journalism Fundamentals:

With an aim to scale up journalists' skills and capacity in business and economics reporting, MRDI organized a residential foundation training on "Business and Economics Journalism Fundamentals" from 13-16 June 2021 at the CCDB Hope Center, Savar, Dhaka. The Training contents were developed in consultation with business editors and 15 participants were nominated from TV, online, and newspapers. The training



focused on journalist's capacity to produce quality in-depth stories on economic issues over media which will promote accuracy and accountability, particularly in the public sector.

The 4 day-long training had 13 lecture sessions, 3 group work sessions and 3 discussion sessions along with an opening and closing ceremony. Within the training intervention, participants received extensive learning on history and evolution of business and economics journalism in Bangladesh, public finance, project development & procurement process, auditorial irregularities, fundamentals of banking, bad loans, formation of banks & companies, money laundering & its impact, trade-based money laundering, report writing techniques, data visualization & graphical presentations and reporting ethics & etiquettes.

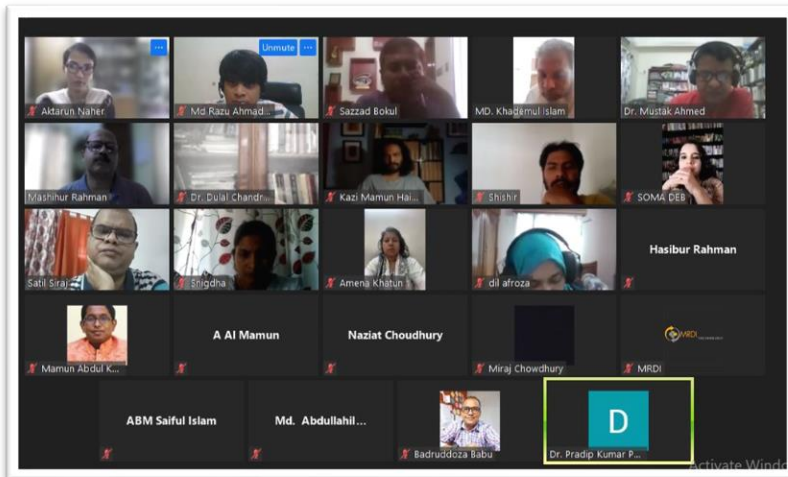
Issue-based sessions facilitated by 7 experts from government officials including the Ministry of Public Administration, Bangladesh Bank, Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIBM), Customs Intelligence & Investigation Directorate, CAG Office, and 2 from Prothom Alo and the Business Standard. Miraj Ahmed Chowdhury, Editor, GIJN Bangla facilitated the training along with his lecture sessions.



At the end of the training Hasibur Rahman, Executive Director, MRDI handed over the training certificates to all participants for their successful completion of the foundation training and welcomed them to the upcoming two-month fellowship programme in advance. Participants appreciated the training contents and thanked MRDI for such interactive training on contemporary business and economic issues.



**7. Virtual Interaction Meeting with Rajshahi University on designing courses/sessions on fact-checking and including it in the curriculum:** Considering the recommendation of the



ToT on fact-checking and misinformation, MRDI initiated a virtual interaction meeting with the faculty members of the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Rajshahi University on 7th July 2021. 16 faculty members of the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism MCJ, Rajshahi University actively participated in the meeting along with two fact-checking experts and six MRDI officials. Professor, Dr. Mustak Ahmed, chair of the Mass

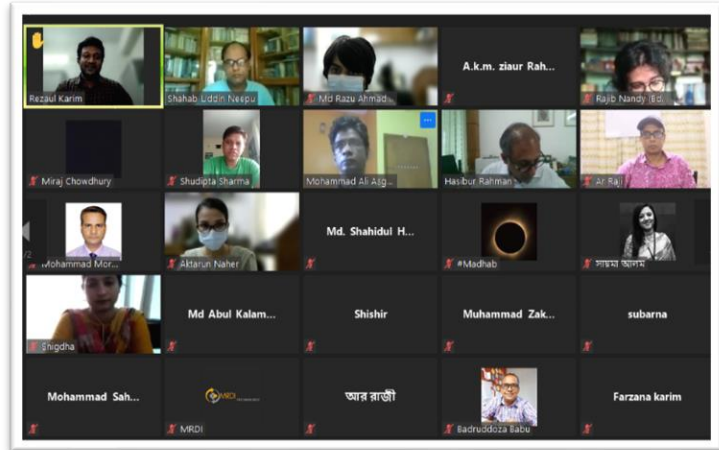
Communication and Journalism Department, Rajshahi University facilitated the meeting.

In this virtual meeting, faculty members acknowledged the importance of incorporating fact-checking and countering misinformation in the academic curriculum and recommended taking necessary steps to the head of the department and academic committee members of the department. The chair of department promised to take necessary steps to include the issue in the existing syllabus and will take it to the academic committee meeting for developing a separate course for the next academic curriculum that will be effective from 2023. Besides, the Department of MCJ, RU requested MRDI to organize a virtual workshop on fact-checking and countering misinformation for their students and MRDI agreed to organize the workshop.

**8. Virtual Interaction Meeting with Chittagong University on designing courses/sessions on fact-checking and including it in the curriculum:** With a similar objective of the interaction meeting with Rajshahi University, MRDI organized a separate interactive lobby meeting with the faculty members of the Department of Communication and Journalism, Chittagong University on 17th July 2021. 17 faculty members of the DCJ, CU actively participated in the meeting along with two fact-checking experts and six MRDI officials.

MRDI Executive Director Hasibur Rahman facilitated the meeting. All faculty members agreed with the issue of integrating fact checking and countering missinformation into the academic

curriculum. Considering the faculty members' recommendation and fact-checking experts' analysis, the chair of the Department of Communication and Journalism, Chittagong University pledged to take this issue to the academic committee meeting and would discuss it further with the syllabus development committee of DCJ, CU. Similarly, the DCJ, CU requested MRDI to organize a virtual workshop on fact-checking and countering misinformation for their students and MRDI agreed to organize the workshop



**9. In-Person Lobby meeting for inclusion of curriculum with the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Rajshahi University (DMCJ, RU):** Following the outcomes of 7th July's interaction meeting with the DMCJ, RU, MRDI organized an in-person lobby meeting for including fact-checking and countering misinformation in the academic curricula with the faculty members and academic committee members of DMCCJ, RU on 24th August 2021.

In this meeting, MRDI proposed a draft course outline titled 'Misinformation, Fact checking and Online verification' for considering the inclusion process and it was reviewed by 10 faculty members including Professor, Dr. Mustak Ahmed, Chair of the department. Qadaruddin Shishir Factcheck Editor, AFP Bangladesh presented the draft outline, and it was accepted by the faculty members and academic committee members of the DMCJ, RU. The outline has been shared with the faculty members by the Chair of the department of DMCJ, RU for adopting specific topics within their existing course curricula.

**10. In-Person Lobby meeting for inclusion of curriculum with the Department of Communication and Journalism, Chittagong University (DCJ, CU):** Considering the outcome of the virtual interaction meeting between MRDI and the Department of Communication and Journalism, Chittagong University (DCJ, CU) on 17th July 2021, MRDI organized an in-person lobby meeting with the faculty members of the DCJ, CU under the project on 06 September 2021.

The meeting aimed to design courses/sessions on fact-checking and including it in the curricula



of DCJ, CU where MRDI proposed a draft content to be included in the academic course/ curriculum at the fundamental and advanced stages. Professor, Md. Shahidul Haque, Chair of the

Communication and Journalism Department, Chittagong University and Hasibur Rahman, Executive Director, MRDI

were present in the meeting. Qadaruddin Shishir Factcheck Editor, AFP Bangladesh participated in the meeting as a fact-checking expert along with 13 faculty members and three MRDI officials.

In the discussion session, a draft course/session plan was shared with the concerned faculty members on Misinformation, Fact-checking and Online verification and proposed to include it in their curriculum. The draft course/session plan was appreciated by all faculty members who participated in the meeting and agreed to include some topics within the existing course curricula of the DCJ, CU. Remaining topics will be considered for designing a separate course and it will be discussed in DCJ's academic committee meeting. The Chair of the department shared the draft with all faculty members and requested them to provide their opinion/comments. He also, requested faculty members to propose specific topics from the draft outline which can be considered under specific courses taught by DCJ, CU.

### **11. Module development team meeting on designing courses/sessions on misinformation, fact-checking and online verification with the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Rajshahi University:**

In continuation of the success of virtual and in-person lobby meetings with the DMCJ, RU, a module development team was formed headed by Professor Dr. Md. Golam Rahman.

Other six team members are from DMCJ, RU, and Qadaruddin Shishir, Factcheck Editor, AFP Bangladesh. MRDI organized the first team meeting on 19th September 2021 to design a course/session on misinformation, fact-checking and online verification.



In this meeting, MRDI shared the compiled information of proposed issues that will be taught under different courses where faculty members of DMCJ, RU requested to organize 10 workshops/sessions for their current students as part of those learnings. Faculty members agreed to add assignment-based tasks for their students based on those topics taught under mentioned workshop/sessions and those assignments will be considered in the marking /evaluation process of students' academic examination. The module development team also agreed to design a separate course for the 2nd year students who will be admitted in the next academic session, and they are planning to sit together on this issue by the last week of September 2021.

**12. Award fellowship on business reporting after the foundation training:** After completion of the foundation training on business and economic reporting fundamentals, 15 journalists from print, electronic and online media houses were awarded a two-month fellowship from 01 July 2021 to 31 August 2021. A total of 15 reports have been published by the reporters. Among 15 fellows, two fellows received the best report award 2021 by Dhaka Reporters Unity- the largest reporters' association of Bangladesh.



**14. Advanced training content development meeting:** One training content development meeting organized on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2021 at MRDI conference room to develop content of advanced training for the similar group of journalists who participated in foundation training and fellowship programme.



Nine media gatekeepers including executive editor, head of News, business editor and chief report participated in the meeting and provide necessary feedback in the training content. They also proposed name of resource persons for the training sessions.

Shawkat Hossain Masum, Special News Editor, Prothom Alo presented the draft content in the meeting. MRDI Executive Director and the project Team Leader facilitated the discussion session.

**15. Draft courses/sessions finalization meeting on fact-checking and online verification of the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Rajshahi University (DMCJ, RU)/ Department of Communication and Journalism, Chittagong University (DCJ, CU):**

A team of faculty members of Rajshahi University was assigned to develop a draft course/session working closely with Qadaruddin Shishir Factcheck Editor, AFP Bangladesh. Based on the proposed outline the draft course session has been developed and agreed by the experts. The experts are reviewing the course session and to finalize it a meeting will be held next month with the faculty members of the DMCJ of Rajshahi University. For the busy schedule of the faculty members the date of the meeting has not been finalized yet.

Due to admission test and other academic examination the course sessions have not developed yet for the Department of Communication and Journalism, Chittagong University DCJ, CU.