Too Little or Too Much
Racism, hate speech and news during the pandemic in India
THE COMMONWEALTH HUMAN RIGHTS INITIATIVE

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) is an independent, non-governmental, non-profit organisation headquartered in New Delhi, with offices in London, United Kingdom, and Accra, Ghana. Since 1987, it has worked for the practical realization of human rights through strategic advocacy and engagement as well as mobilization around these issues in Commonwealth countries. CHRI’s specialisation in the areas of Access to Justice (ATJ) and Access to Information (ATI) are widely known. The ATJ programme has focussed on Police and Prison Reforms, to reduce arbitrariness and ensure transparency while holding duty bearers to account. CHRI looks at policy interventions, including legal remedies, building civil society coalitions and engaging with stakeholders. The ATI looks at Right to Information (RTI) and Freedom of Information laws across geographies, provides specialised advice, sheds light on challenging issues, processes for widespread use of transparency laws and develops capacity. CHRI reviews pressures on freedom of expression and media rights while a focus on Small States seeks to bring civil society voices to bear on the UN Human Rights Council and the Commonwealth Secretariat. A growing area of work is SDG 8.7 where advocacy, research and mobilization is built on tackling Contemporary Forms of Slavery and human trafficking through the Commonwealth 8.7 Network.

CHRI has special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council and is accredited to the Commonwealth Secretariat. Recognised for its expertise by governments, oversight bodies and civil society, it is registered as a society in India, a limited charity in London and an NGO in Ghana.

Although the Commonwealth, an association of 54 nations, provided member countries the basis of shared common laws, there was little specific focus on human rights issues in member countries. Thus, in 1987, several Commonwealth professional associations founded CHRI.

Through its research, reports, advocacy, engagement, mobilisation and periodic investigations, CHRI draws attention to the progress and setbacks on rights issues. It addresses the Commonwealth Secretariat, the United Nations Human Rights Council members, media and civil society. It works on and collaborates around public education programmes, policy dialogues, comparative research, advocacy and networking on the issues of Access to Information and Access to Justice.

CHRI’s seeks to promote adherence to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Commonwealth Harare Principles and other internationally recognised human rights instruments, as well as domestic instruments supporting human rights.

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Sanjoy Hazarika, International Director

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TOO LITTLE OR TOO MUCH

Racism, hate speech and news during the pandemic in India

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“Emergency declarations based on the COVID-19 outbreak should not be used as a basis to target particular groups, minorities, or individuals. It should not function as a cover for repressive action under the guise of protecting health... and should not be used simply to quash dissent.”

- Group of Human Rights Experts, March 16, 2020¹.

The Global pandemic of coronavirus officially known as COVID-19 has impacted not only our physical but also our mental health. It has also left us grappling with the social impact of an infodemic - an abundance of information available online or offline. In context of the pandemic, this infodemic has witnessed deliberate attempts to spread misinformation, disinformation and fake news to undermine the public health response to the crisis. Minority rights are at the centre of this infodemic. Racism and hate speech against the Muslim community have been two major issues brought into spotlight because of the pandemic.

Coronavirus racism spread worldwide just as rapidly as the virus itself. It impacted Asian Americans in the United States of America, British Asians in the United Kingdom and Indians from the North East here. Abusers linked the place of origin of the virus (China) to individuals with same appearance and features as the Chinese, alleging they were infected with the virus and thus were a threat. Appearance and looks cuts across ethnicities, geographies, identities and citizens to group people from the eight states in India’s North East region under the basket label ‘Northeast’.

During this period there was also a documented rise in cases of hate speech and discrimination against Muslims in India. The aftermath of the Tablighi Jamaat congregation, an international religious gathering of 4500-9000 missionaries at the Nizamuddin Markaz mosque in New Delhi, turned into a show of villainization, hunting down and blaming this Islamic sect for the surge in India’s coronavirus numbers. Attendees of this congregation were vilified by the media and hunted by the police. The Supreme Court of India had even sought a clarification on the blacklisting order issued for international attendees by the government.

This research study analyses larger trends and practices of discrimination in Indian media's coverage and the Indian Government’s response to the novel coronavirus. This report examines the scope of the social and human rights impact of the novel coronavirus pandemic which in India has transpired into racism and hate speech.

Coronavirus has reinforced racism against Indians from the North East according to interviewees. Scholar D. McDuie-R in his book *Debating Race in Contemporary India* (2015) has argued that, for ‘mainstream’ India, physical structure and markers are used to relate to those its ‘Northeast,’ that has led to the formation of stereotypes about the ‘racial other’ who are distinct from the internally diverse population of the rest of India. “Race debates concerning Northeast

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communities have been driven by their treatment in metropolitan India, far from the intricate dynamics of localized linguistic, ethnic and tribal identities,” says McDuie-Ra. The Rights at Risks Analysis group recorded 22 cases of coronavirus racism in India faced by persons from the North East between February to March 2020.⁶

At times, members from this group also show solidarity with India. In one case, an organization from the region took out a brief, small protest condemning China’s recent moves on the Line of Actual Control.⁷ The eight states of North East India – Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, share 90 per cent of its boundary with the neighbouring countries of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar⁸.

At the advent of the pandemic, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director general of the World Health Organization had remarked, “The greatest enemy we face is not the coronavirus itself - it is the stigma that turns us against each other.” While cases of racism became more visible at the arrival of the novel coronavirus, hate speech and discrimination was already at large against the Muslim community in India. The latter only grew in the month of protests preceding the pandemic.

In December 2019, the Indian Government passed the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) which provides citizenship status to non-Muslim refugees (six religious groups) from the predominantly Muslim countries of Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan⁹. UN General Secretary Antonio Guterres expressed concern about religious minorities and their future in India after the passage of the CAA¹⁰. The office of the UN High Commissioner of Human rights has also described the law as “fundamentally discriminatory.”¹¹

Moreover, in August 2019, the National Register of Citizens (NRC), a unique register of verified Indian citizens in Assam, was published which left out the names of over 1.9 million people – a sizeable number of whom were Muslims¹². Following the passage of the amended citizenship law Assam witnessed fierce opposition to the CAA as protesters argued that it violated the Assam Accord of 1985¹³.

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⁹ Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Parsis, Buddhists and Jains from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan are allowed to become Indian citizens under the CAA. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-how-to-be-a-citizen-of-india-earlier-now-6165960/
¹¹ UN Human Rights, Twitter, December 13, 2019, https://twitter.com/UNHumanRights/status/1205451656495861761
¹² First created in 1951, updating the NRC was one of the agreements between the Government of India and the state of Assam as part of the Assam Accord of 1985. The Accord set March 24, 1971 as the cut off Indian citizenship, which was also adopted by the NRC exercise. Under the CAA, the cut off is December 41, 2014.
Similar protests, largely peaceful, took place across the country the against the discriminatory treatment to Muslims in the law. Violence erupted in northeast Delhi mainly targeting Indian Muslims. Within this context, the Tablighi Jamaat congregation aftermath amplified the vilification and demonization of India’s Muslim community - one that was already suffering the aftermath of the northeast Delhi riots. Foreign media too covered this issue extensively\(^1\).

During the period of the project, the Bombay High Court, in August 2020, quashed police complaints against foreign attendees of the congregation saying that they were made “scapegoats” of the problem\(^15\). The Court noted the “propaganda in print media and electronic media” against the attendees and recognised the “virtual persecution against these foreigners.” Further, it also placed on record targeting of Muslims persons. “Similar action was not taken against other foreigners belonging to other religions,” it said.

“This action indirectly gave the warning to Indian Muslims that action in any form and for anything can be taken against Muslims,” it added.

French philosopher Michel Foucault’s concept of biopower is seen manifesting in India’s current bio-political struggle for citizenship and fundamental health rights during the coronavirus pandemic\(^16\). Foucault’s concept of biopower is primarily understood as examining the self-regulation of a State’s power over its citizen population. The power of the state appears more dangerous when it comes to abandonment of a certain population whose lives are of less value to the State.

The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres called for an end to pandemic induced Hate Speech around the globe. He said that the Coronavirus pandemic unleashed “a tsunami of hate and xenophobia, scapegoating and scare-mongering”. \(^17\) This was seen in cases reviewed here where news media used sensational reporting\(^18\) of the aftermath of the Tablighi Jamaat congregation while comparatively neglecting the racial discrimination faced by the Northeast Indians.

This research study examines this contrast in news reporting of both issues and minority communities in detail, including the response of the government. The priorities of the media and government are highlighted through the dualities in the contrasting news coverage of these issues.

\(^15\) Arrest of Tablighis indirectly gave warning to Indian Muslims that action in any form and for anything can be taken against them: Bombay HC, Bar and Bench, https://www.barandbench.com/news/litigation/bombay-hc-quashes-firs-against-tablighi-jammat-attendees-slams-govt-for-making-them-scapegoats
\(^18\) Sensational reporting is a type of editorial tactic in journalism which is used to excite more number of readers or viewers by the selection wording of stories. It mainly responds to consumers’ appetite for sensational news, which is news that deviates from the normal.
The aim of the research is to document the responses of the Indian Media and its Government to the issues of Racism faced by Indians from North East India and hate and discrimination faced by the Muslim community during the pandemic. The time period for the study is January 1, 2020 to May 31, 2020.
At the peak of India’s information pandemic (infodemic), India witnessed extensive news coverage of racial discrimination faced by ethnic minorities from the North Eastern region and specific targeting of Muslims following the Tablighi Jamaat congregation in New Delhi. Digital news media and broadcast news media were chosen for the study as they are preferred platforms for news today. In 2019, a survey by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism found that only 16 per cent persons under the age of 35 identified print media are their source of news, while for individuals over 35, this figure stood at 27 per cent\(^1\). Digital media including social media, news platforms, video streaming etc is the source of news for 56 per cent under the age of 35.

‘Content analysis’ was chosen as the main research method to conduct this qualitative media study. It is a qualitative research technique “for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages\(^2\).” Natural language communication bases, mostly written text formulated into content categories, are analysed in this technique. Content Analysis is a widely used research method used to study socio-political changes in newspaper content, counter-culture content in the media, editorial practices, social issues etc. This method will help analyse the extent, degree and meaning of the media and government’s response to discern the impact on the fundamental rights of ethnic and religious minorities in India.

- What were the stories of racial discrimination and hate speech faced by ethnic minorities from India’s North-East states, both online and offline, that posed difficulties to their health and wellbeing?
- How was the Muslim community specifically targeted by the Islamophobia spread by media after the Tablighi Jamaat congregation in Delhi; what were there their related struggles in accessing medical aid and treatment during the pandemic?
- How did the Indian media respond to these issues of Coronavirus Racism and COVID Islamophobia in the country?
- How did the Government of India respond to these issues of Coronavirus Racism and COVID Islamophobia in the country?

These research questions sought to establish the “explicit linkages” of qualitative symbol usage in communication, by the digital and broadcast media in India, and link it to quantitative data.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Reuters Institute India Digital News Report, https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-03/India_DNR_FINAL.pdf


\(^3\) ibid.
Selected Sources

The news coverage data was collected from two Hindi TV News channels, one English TV channel, as well as three Hindi digital news media and two English digital news media platforms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
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<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
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<td>10.3M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>India TV</td>
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<td>20.8M</td>
<td>13,879,053</td>
<td>1.2M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Republic TV</td>
<td>3576k</td>
<td>4.63M</td>
<td>2.1M</td>
<td>1.3M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: TV News Channels National TRP and Social Media Popularity

These platforms have been selected as per the Television Rating Point (TRP) and following on social media. TRP rating listed by the Broadcast Audience Research Council India in June 2020 was referred to select Hindi TV news channels: Aaj Tak and India TV, and English news channel, Republic TV.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
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<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dainik Jagran</td>
<td>14M</td>
<td>1.2M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Navbharat Times</td>
<td>4.5k</td>
<td>995k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Zee News Hindi</td>
<td>335k</td>
<td>3.9M</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Times of India</td>
<td>11M</td>
<td>12.9M</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>NDTV</td>
<td>8.2M</td>
<td>13.4M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Online News Media Social Media Popularity

The selection of the online news media was based on the total readership results of Quarter 4 ending March 2020 of the Indian Readership Survey 2019, and social media following. Dainik Jagran is the largest newspaper in the country in terms of readership, followed by the Times of India (ToI) in the ninth spot nationally and the largest English daily. Both their digital news platforms (jagran.com, and timesofindia.indiatimes.com respectively) have extensive readership as well. The Navbharat Times is the fifth most read newspaper in the state of Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state in India, and has a growing digital presence. The digital platforms of legacy news channels New Delhi Television (NDTV) and Zee News Hindi were chosen based on their social media following.

In addition to this, four persons who have faced racism and were victims of hate speech against Muslim were interviewed to record lived experiences. Interactions over emails, chats and phone calls were held with others having similar experiences through the course of the project.

The results of content analysis were validated against the interviews. The Interviews were conducted either in Hindi or English, and with consent. The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative provided no remuneration or other inducement to the interviewees.

**Data Analysis: creating content categories**

News articles and Videos were the two forms of media coverage to be collected for the research study. This news coverage was collected from the online news platforms and social media accounts of the news media listed in the sources section.

The data sample size was further collected using the following keywords in multiple combinations on advanced Google search, online news platforms, social media platforms and YouTube Channels:

1. “Racism” + “Name of Online News Media or Name of TV News Channel” + “northeast”
2. “Name of Online News Media or Name of TV News Channel” + “northeast”
3. “नस्लवाद” + “Name of Online News Media or Name of TV News Channel”
4. “नारे का इंडिया नस्लवाद” + “Name of Online News Media or Name of TV News Channel”
5. “नासाले खेमाव” + “Name of Online News Media or Name of TV News Channel”
6. “Tablighi Jamaat” + “Name of Online News Media or Name of TV News Channel”
7. “Corona Jihad” + “Name of Online News Media or Name of TV News Channel”
8. “Markaz” + “Name of Online News Media or Name of TV News Channel”
9. “Tablighi New Delhi” + “Name of Online News Media or Name of TV News Channel”

Data on the Government response was sampled via the Government of India’s Press Information Bureau official website. The total sample size documented was 144 press releases from January 1 to May 31, 2020.

Data collected on Media Responses is stated in the Findings section.

To analyse media and government response during the pandemic, the data bases or natural language communication sets on racial discrimination and hate speech by selected media platforms are transformed into systematic codes or content categories. These categories were analysed and studied to measure the characteristics of communications, and the latent and manifest meaning in the messaging.

**Coding of Articles and Videos**

In the first round of coding, URLs, dates, bylines, headlines/titles, descriptors used to describe racism/Islamophobia/Tablighi Jamaat, quotes, anchor commentary/prime time debate key points were identified for code creating.
For the second round of coding, all articles and videos from coverage of incidents impacting people from the North-East were chosen as sample size, while five articles and videos from the Tablighi Jamaat news coverage by each TV news channel and digital news platform were chosen as sample size i.e. a total of 35 news articles and videos. By analysis the following categories were extracted and answered manually:
Information on Racism;

Information on anti-racism;

Reporting on culprits;

Use of descriptors for accused;

Mention of law, Police Intervention, Government Intervention;

Number of follow-up reports;

Type of Follow-up Reports;

Key Message of the news articles and videos.
The findings of the study have been categorized and analysed under two broad categories: Media Response and Government Response. Descriptors used to describe the survivors and perpetrators and reportage on the subject matter, including the number of news reports, follow-ups, focus of the story among other aspects were analysed to assess the media coverage on incidents of racism and hate speech against Muslims.
During the course of this study, we also spoke to four women belonging to the North East who faced racial discrimination during the pandemic, and Muslims who were impacted by the sensational media coverage of the Tablighi Jamaat congregation in New Delhi.

Their testimonials run through the course of this section in capturing the harrowing impact of racism and hate speech, mostly psychological, has had on them during an unprecedented emergency. It sets the context for the data, allowing them to be heard in the experiences of survivors of discrimination, hate speech and abuse.

**Part A: Media Response**

--- **DESCRIPTORS:**

Across the sampled Hindi and English language TV Channels and Online news media the descriptors used to describe racism faced by persons from North Indians and the aftermath of Tablighi Jamaat congregation vary. Sharp rhetoric is used in language and messaging in the Tablighi Jamaat coverage *vis a vis* coverage on racial attacks on persons from North East.

These keywords or descriptors, besides highlighting language in the messaging, ascertain the level of importance, degree of understanding and the sense of responsibility that the media denotes to both the issues. Below is a word cloud showcasing words and phrases used in the coverage of racial attacks, abuses and discrimination. Word clouds or tag clouds display the frequency of a specific word or phrase used in the textual data. More a specified word or phrase is used, the bigger it appears in the word cloud.

*Image: Descriptors used in Online and Television Hindi-English News Word Cloud*
In Hindi News media and TV Channels, it was found that very rarely is racism referred to as racism i.e नस्लवाद (nasalvad) as it is known in Hindi. Ten out of 27 news reports on the attacks and abuses on persons from the North East do not state them as ‘incidents of nasalvad or racism’. This highlights the lack of awareness, intellectual understanding, and motivation to attain better editorial standards within the Hindi news media. It also reveals a failure on the media’s part in fulfilling its responsibility to raise awareness on India’s not so new racism problem, amplify ill practices and protect rights of ethnic minorities.

The descriptors used instead of racism were: चिढ़ाया (teased), चाइनीस (Chinese), शरारती तत्व (unsocial elements), कॉमेंट बाज़ी (commenting), stereotyping, harassing, casual racism. According to Ms. Chelsea Kikon Kaur, a woman from Nagaland now running a restaurant in Punjab, being referred to as “foreigner, Chinky, Momo, and being asked ‘how much will you charge’ (a reference to assuming that women from the region are involved in prostitution)” is routine and has existed much before the coronavirus pandemic hit India. However, these racial abuses and slurs increased after the epidemic broke out in Wuhan, China.

“People going on the bike would call us corona and drive by. The auto drivers initially would refuse to stop and offer services. All this was during the beginning and not even in the midst of the pandemic; it was when it all started in the beginning in March,” she said. Ms Chelsea says there are deep psychological impacts as a result of experiencing such treatment, and not just during the pandemic. The lack of awareness and education among the police, lawmakers and citizens about the demographic diversity and geographic vastness of India often does not acknowledge the existence of the eight North Eastern states - its people, culture, languages and ethnicities, she added.

“It completely diminishes the confidence of a person. Somebody keeps on pointing out about our facial features, our language, the way we eat - all of which we are proud of. This keeps dampening your spirit and then you intend to believe that maybe something is wrong with you and not with them. I have lived in Delhi for six years and in London for eight years but then if my Hindi is not perfect, I start to believe that the problem is with me and not with them. When a strong willed and confident person like me feels this way, imagine how this affects those young adults who have just graduated from high school. Many people tend to go back to the North East because of this harassment,” said Ms Chelsea.

In the case of the Tablighi Jamaat congregation, some of the words and phrases used in Hindi and English publications and TV channels in their coverage are दुर्व्यवहार (misbehaviour), आरोपियों (accused), संक्रमित (infected), अतांकियों (terrorist) among others.
Those who attended the Tablighi Jamaat congregation were accused of being terrorists and for using bio-terrorism to further an “agenda.” On Republic TV’s Prime time debate, a lawmaker went on record to refer to Tablighi attendees as Taliban members using the virus as a weapon: “... at least the Taliban is the terrorist, they have a visible weapon but here we have some people who are with invisible weapons....” One union minister has also said that the Tablighi Jamaat committed a “Talibani crime,” while another lawmaker told the Dainik Jagran that “the education provided in madrasas is meant to ‘puncture,’ Tablighi Jamaat includes terrorists.”

The descriptors used by the Indian news media to describe the Tablighi Jamaat have spread hate against an entire community nationwide. They have also been used during prime time debates in the form of hashtags or tickers on screen such as “Markaz ‘Super Spreader’” to create a sense of panic filled with sensationalised hate. In analysing the smear campaign furthered by certain media outlets, ‘Responsible for the spread’ was found to be the most used descriptor for the Tablighi Jamaat.

**Arnab Goswami on Republic TV said:**

The Tablighi Jamaat has become the biggest coronavirus super spreader but still the organisers are unrepented. They have broken every law of this country. They have been spreading hate against the lockdown and they have told their followers to do everything possible to defy and defeat the national lockdown. Broke the lockdown. Islamic sect, Muslim clerics repeatedly.
Phrases such as ‘super spreader’ highlight the sensational coverage by a leading news anchor of a highly watched news channel in the country, which actively participates in the vilification of a minority community.

Rohit Sardana’s prime time debate on Aaj Tak shows use of another descriptor: “Who is responsible for the Corona Jamaat?” This format of blame-game was found across most of the reportage on this issue.

Most news media have also deployed different meanings of the term “accused” in their reportage. In the case of the Northeast Indians facing racist attacks and slurs, the culprit was described as an “aaropi” (accused), even though attendees of the Tablighi Jamaat were described as “guilty” for spreading the virus.

“At the national level we are blessed to have people like Arnab Goswami who should be raising the issue of racism but, instead he has become a mockery in the society. As one of the leading known figures from the North East, he should at least educate people; he should call up all his friends in the Hindi news channels and tell them about this discrimination. But, no one gives any heed to this issue, people think it is useless. International news has covered racism and discrimination, and not Indian media,” said Ms. Chelsea.

News coverage on racism is also found to be filled with information that most often does not provide any details of the case or present the gravity of the crime. On Zee News Hindi, the accused in a racist attack is described as being “a married man with 2 children” as a certain certificate to his character. The original sentence reads:

आरोपी से पुलिस ने पूछताछ की तो पता चला की उसकी शादी हो चुकी है और वो दो बच्चों का पिता है (Upon questioning the accused, the police found that he was a married man with two children).

How is this information relevant to the issue? It only amplifies the socially accepted belief system of those identified as “good people.” That racist people are also family persons does not find a place in the description of the incident.

---- REPORTAGE:

This section gives an insight into the analysis of content collected from the sampled Indian media news publications and channels which are: Aaj Tak, India TV, Republic TV, Dainik Jagran, Zee News Hindi, Times of India and NDTV. These are some of the most popular and widely read news platforms and television channels. Yet, the way they report on issues is very different, with contrastingly different stands. Perhaps, the only unifying aspect then remains what they report on in the first place.
“The media has played a major role in fomenting hatred and violence against Muslims in India,” said Ms. Ayesha, a Delhi University student, who was interviewed as part of this project. She suggested that the larger themes and trends in the media’s coverage of racism and the Tablighi Jamaat congregation aftermath are telling of the degree to which these issues are exploited or ignored, she explained.

“They blew the Tablighi Jamaat incident out of proportion deliberately. Please note that the same has not been done with other religious gatherings. Even during the pandemic, Muslims were denied basic health facilities. Media wanted people to be more fearful of Muslims than corona and that’s exactly what their stereotypical coverage did,” she added.

Yet, in the same country, sharing the same news media, Delhi University student Ms Sakpui from Manipur holds Indian media responsible for ignoring problems faced by her community, let alone acknowledging their existence. “The media is one clear example of how the North East has always been sidelined,” she said, noting that the other North East Indian states have been marginalised and ignored for as long as she can remember. It appears then that in this case, select minority communities are ignored - absent from news and public memory.

She recalled that during her higher secondary education in Manipur, her classmates hardly knew the national anthem. “Our national anthem says ‘Punjab, Sindh, Gujarat, Maratha but there is no mention of even a single fraction of the North East. Even before one can begin to mingle with the rest of India, persons from our region are already exposed to this sense of difference; this sense of boundary,” she said.

**Number of News Reports**

The count of the number of news reports published during the period of the study gives us an idea about the importance the media has shown to incidents of racial discrimination and the Tablighi Jamaat congregation on the basis of their coverage, which includes the reporting resources and editorial capacity focused on them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
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<th>Tablighi Jamaat Coverage</th>
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<tr>
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<td>India TV</td>
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<td>Republic TV</td>
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<td>Total No.</td>
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Table 3: Television News Channel Coverage Documented

Table 4: Online News Media Coverage Documented

News coverage of the racism faced by North East Indians is quite negligible. In Hindi and English language, online and television news media combined, only 14 percent, which is 48 out of 327 news reports covered racist incidents during the pandemic, while 53 TV debates/shows (in around 150 days) alone on the Tablighi Jamaat found airtime during the period of the analysis. Poor coverage of racists attacks and abuses in India during the pandemic vis a vis the extensive protests over the Black Lives Matter movement in the US, and increasing support for it here, is telling of peculiar contradictions in India. Many incidents of racism, including those against Dalits, continue to go reported or unheard due to lack of media attention.

Ms Sakpui recalls one such episode with her when she was in an auto rickshaw, waiting to share transport with few other passengers. “Just before two men could get inside the vehicle, they saw me sitting. There was a grim look on their faces upon seeing me. Suddenly, they remarked that they will not take this rickshaw as ‘corona’ is already seated inside; he said it so loud and clearly. They were not willing to sit next to me because they thought that I was carrying the virus,” she said.

“The pandemic has created a tense situation for us. Our ethnicity; just because we look like ‘Chinese,’ just because of our Mongolian features, we are being humiliated with insults, and are subjected to discrimination,” Ms Sakpui said.

When the news about the Tablighi Jamaat congregation broke on March 31, 2020, the number of news stories about the Tablighi Jamaat that very day were higher than the coverage on racism through the months of February and March combined. The story was ensnared in a media deluge. Out of total 227 news stories on the Tablighi Jamaat 61 were published on March 31, 2020. This issue singlehandedly swept under the rug all other stories in the forthcoming weeks, including most coverage on racism. At 113, Times of India was found to have published the maximum number of stories on this issue.

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Dainik Jagran, one of the most widely read Hindi news dailies, published 28 out of 43 news stories on the Tablighi Jamaat on March 31, 2020 alone. During February and March, there were no reports published on racism faced by persons from North East India in Dainik Jagran.

It is important to note that even social media influencers, including journalists, politicians, sportspersons etc., took to social media to condemn the Tablighi Jamaat congregation, thereby further amplifying the news.

Follow-up News Reports

The number of follow-up reports for news stories covering racism faced by the North East Indians was 5 out of 48, the total number of news stories sampled. The follow-up reports mostly consisted of Government, Police or Law intervention in the case.

Focus of the story

In the coverage of racism faced by the northeast Indians, most news stories covering the incidents went viral after being uploaded on social media. These news stories got more follow-ups as well. Sixteen news articles and videos out of 48 have been about incidents that first went viral on social media. Out of these 16 incidents the most reported story was the racist attack faced by a woman in Delhi where she was spat at by a man on a motorcycle.

“The media articles you see on the issue of racism are jammed up all over the place. Sometimes the English media covers the matter like it is its responsibility to inform and educate people. While, the Hindi media, news channels make it a sensational thing but they will never educate the people. They should, along with informing, educate the people,” emphasised Ms Chelsea.

A majority of the news stories on the Tablighi Jamaat congregation were broken on March 31, 2020. These stories drew up a timeline linking the increase in COVID19 spikes in certain cities and states across the country with members of the markaz belonging to these locations. Through content analysis it was found that most news stories and prime time debates carried Headlines and Video titles on YouTube and social media, around a similar template: ‘Yogi
Adityanth Blames Tablighi Markaz for Coronavirus Cases Spike,’ ‘How ‘Tablighi Jamaat’ event surged and Coronavirus spread in the country?’ ‘400 COVID-19 cases with linkage to Tablighi Jamaat found: Health Ministry,’ ‘Six deaths from Telangana linked to Tablighi Jamaat meet in Delhi: Govt’ to list a few.

Linking of the increase or spike in COVID-19 cases with the Tablighi Jamaat congregation, a call for the nationwide search for the attendees, criminalisation of the religious gathering, referring to the Jamaat’s religious leaders and attendees as terrorists formed recurrent Headlines and Video titles. Below are screen grabs from prime time debates such as on Republic TV that sensationalized the religious gathering by linking it to the increase in cases of COVID-19 across India.

Some media coverage also portrayed the Tablighi Jamaat congregation in New Delhi as a threat to India’s national security. For instance, during another prime time debate on Republic TV anchor Arnab Goswami accused the Tablighi Jamaat of endangering the Indian army by occupying mosques in Cantonment areas. Whereas, on further examination it was found that most military areas around the country were already functioning as quarantine zones when the virus entered India.

An earlier release by the Press Information Bureau on March 12, 2020 debunks the disinformation spread by Republic TV:

“Ministry of Defence has mobilised all necessary resources to support the national effort towards the management of COVID-19 cases. At present, the military is running two medical facilities at Hindon, Ghaziabad and Manesar, Haryana and a total of 265 civilians are under military supervision at these two facilities. As per DG AFMS, a batch of 124 cases have completed their 14 days of isolation at Manesar facility, have tested negative and are ready to leave the facility. More facilities at Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Suratgarh, Gorakhpur, Jhansi & Kolkata are geared up to absorb any more citizens that are likely to arrive in India over the next few days.”
The open and free spread of disinformation, misinformation and fake news targeting the Muslim community has increased over the past few years, especially with increasing digitalisation of news and our lives. According to the results of the India Readership Survey Quarter 4, which ended March 2020, internet usage is surging in India, especially in urban areas. Yet, the surge in accessing the internet in rural areas is growing more rapidly now than urban.

Ms Sheeba, a journalist based in New Delhi, recalled instances where she was subjected to text message forwards in WhatsApp groups that specifically targeted her community. “There were lots of messages saying ‘India is for Hindus’ at the time of the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protests, though it had been going on even before. When the Tablighi Jamaat episode happened, the same people were so blatant in expressing their views. Though not many people were responding, some react with a thumbs up or a plus one,” she said.

“The main sentiment was ‘these people’ are a burden on the country. They are doing things to make the situation worse. They are like human bombs and are willing to harm themselves to harm this Hindu nation. Even when they are themselves at the receiving end, ‘these people’ just want to multiply problems for the Hindu rashtra,” Ms Sheeba added.

There are also other degrees of blame attributed to the congregation of the Markaz like its due role in the “international spread” of the virus.

During a primetime debate on India TV, anchor Rajat Sharma opened the debate with:

“आज की बड़ी खबर यह है कि ताबलिगी जमात की लापरवाही के कारण देश में कोरोना के मरीजों की संख्या में एक ही दिन में जबरदस्त इजाफा हुआ है” (Today's big news: the irresponsibility of the Tablighi Jamaat has led to the rise of the COVID19 patients in the country).

By portraying the Tablighi Jamaat in a negative light, TV debates such as these fanned prejudice by pinning the blame on a community. These sentiments were amplified by comments on social media.
Covering Interventions by Police, Law & Government

News media platforms were also found to have extensively featured the role, responsibility and actions taken by the police or the government. State institutions are mandated to deliver public service and be accountable. The analysis of the data extracted content categories revealed that the Tablighi Jamaat congregation was used to targeting the Muslim community by pitting them against the state or its institutions. In all reports there is barely a minimum reference to or explanation of laws and the clauses for punishment for any laws which are broken.

According to a news report carried by the Dainik Jagran, “Operation Clean,” a sanitization project was launched in Muslim colonies of Agra. Text from the report read:

| मुस्लिम बस्तियों में ऑपरेशन क्लीन शुरू करने की आवश्यकता उठी जब वैश्विक वायरस के चलते कोरोना का नजारा दागा। एक बार में कोरोना वायरस के 89 संदिग्ध पाए गए। इनमें 28 लोग बैठे है कि जो निजामुद्दीन से लौटे है (The launch of ‘Operation Clean’ in Muslim localities dropped like a bomb with big impact. At one go, 89 people were found positive for the virus, out of which 28 had returned home after attending the Tablighi Jamaat congregation).

Such reports, while applauding contact tracing efforts of the government, use descriptors such as “संक्रमित” or “infected” by negatively inspiring public imagination about the Muslim community.

Prime time TV and online news media also carried out a series of sensational and dramatic reportage focused on Maulana Saad, an Indian Muslim scholar, who is the grandson of the Tablighi Jamaat founder Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi and also heads one faction of the Tablighi Jamaat congregation. Maulana Saad and the attendees of the Tablighi Jamaat have been since charged under the Epidemic Disease Act, 1897.

The news reportage focused on sensationalising the police and official enquiries into the Tablighi Jamaat leader:
- Tablighi Jamaat case: Maulana Saad को लेकर सीधे Crime Branch ने पूछे 26 सवाल, कब देंगे जवाब? (Tablighi Jamaat case: The Crime Branch asks 26 questions on Maulana Saad, when will they respond?) Aaj Tak;
- मौलाना साद की तलाश में बेटे से पूछताछ, अंजना ओम कश्यप के साथ देखें Special Report (In the search for Maulana Saad, his son questioned, watch the special report with Anjana Om Kashyap) Aaj Tak;
- जानिए: कौन है Maulana Saad, और क्या है तब्लीगी जमात का इतिहास? (Get to know: who is Maulana Saad, what is the history of Tablighi Jamaat?) Aaj Tak.

A recurring observation in all these reports is the term “Maulana Saad,” where ‘Maulana’ means Muslim scholar, that has remained unchanged just as the term “Tablighi Jamaat.” The repeated use of these two terms seeks to identify one religious group with the religious gathering under question.
The effects of these linkages were far reaching. Ms Ayesha, the Delhi University student, expressed her shock and disdain over when she received hateful anti-Muslim content in the form of message forwards on social media from her school teacher. “It was already dangerous to be a Muslim in India. Then came the coronavirus,” she said.

The Tablighi Jamaat congregation has also been accused by the media for ruining the Indian Government’s efforts to curb the spread of COVID19. A report in the Dainik Jagran read:

Besides, there were numerous news stories on the irresponsibility and indecency displayed by attendees of the congregation. India TV aired an interview with a nurse who narrated what happened with her:

Earlier I used to think that perhaps that ‘they’ are shown in a bad light and that they are human, but ‘they’ can’t be human. Whatever ‘they’ have done, one cannot trust them. I definitely can’t trust them. ‘They’ tried to grab me, ‘they’ took me by my neck and bent me over, ‘they’ wanted my face washed in... I just ran away somehow.

Highlighted such reports vis a vis other cases of misbehaviour and indecency with frontline workers such as doctors and nurses are necessary. However, in the context of this analysis, seen in perspective of the overall targeted and sensational coverage of the religious gathering, it character assassinates an entire community.

Several news reports are especially concerning as reference to the law in the reportage is minimal; it does not provide adequate information or the full picture. For example, the law is briefly mentioned in one Navbharat Times article: “पुलिस ने आईपीसी की धारा 509 के तहत केस दर्ज किया“ (The police has lodged a case under IPC Section 509). IPC section 509 punishes acts aimed at harming the modesty of a woman. However, the same IPC Section 509 is also used when a woman experiences a racist attack. In most other news stories on coronavirus racism, there is no reference to the Indian penal code as there is law punishing these acts. Amendments to the IPC Section 153C and 509A, aimed at punishing racism by upto five years of imprisonment and recommended by the Bezbaruah Committee, are still pending.

In fact, even in the absence of law, interventions by the police and government in cases of racism are shown in a positive light. For instance, one Aaj Tak report says,
North East are facing ill comments from a long time. On many occasions Delhi Police investigated the matter. But it is clear that it is not enough).

In another case on Republic TV, police are shown examining the situation by “talking to neighbours.” One police officer says, “एक महिला के सड़क पे आवारा घूमने की सूचना मिलती (We got the information of a woman roaming carefree on the streets).” “This woman had come to visit her sister when the neighbours objected she got a coronavirus test done and was told to quarantine for 14 days as a precautionary measure,” according to the report by Republic TV.

In her testimony, Ms Chelsea narrated her experience approaching the police in the case of her experience with racism in the midst of the pandemic. She said, “I had to go to the police station because of some work and also register a complaint. There I met the SHO, who said they went to the house of the accused, but they didn’t find anything. They just wanted to make us appear as liars. I was talking and he was not even listening, he just slept on the table. They don’t respect us. They only paid attention to me when I told them that I am the advisor of the Northeast Student Union and am part of the legal cell. That’s the state of the police in our country.”

Testimonies like that of Chelsea’s are in complete contrast with the recorded and analysed media reports that show the police and government of India as helping out, exuding an almost step-motherly treatment to Northeast Indians.

Ten out of 48 reports on racism carry quotes from members of the Government of India, even though several lacked correct use of descriptors and mention of legal provisions available to provide justice to the survivors. A report on India TV featured former Lok Sabha MP Ninong Ering “urging the Prime Minister to condemn incidents of racial discrimination.” On Republic TV, BJP MP Tapir Gao also appealed to the government:

*Double coronavirus hai, har Pradesh mein advisory dein. Hostel and rented house se khali karaya jaa raha hai. Racial discrimination paeda karne ka saazish hai. (There is double coronavirus, give advisory in every state. People are being evicted out from hostels and rented houses. There is a conspiracy to create racial discrimination.)*

However, the Indian government did not officially and directly address the racism faced by the Northeast Indians until March 23, 2020. Navbharat Times reported on March 25, 2020:

*उधर, प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने बुधवार को वाराणसी के लोगों को संबोधित करते हुए कहा कि कोरोना के नाम पर कोई भेदभाव को बर्दाश्त नहीं करेगा। उन्होंने कहा कि नए कोरोना के नाम पर आतंक को बढ़ावा नहीं दिया जा सकता, जो सबके साथ आतंक को बढ़ावा देने वाले हैं।* (Prime Minister Narendra Modi while addressing the people of Varanasi on Wednesday said that discrimination against anyone in the name of Corona will not be tolerated. He said frontline workers against the virus like doctors, nurses, cleaners' doctors, nurses, sweepers etc. doing duty are discriminated against, then they will not be spared.)
Nevertheless, some news reports on police intervention in cases of racism do discourage racism even if they do not use the specific term “racism” or नस्लवाद. “Police filed FIR when two north east students allege racial discrimination at supermarket,” Times of India; “DCW issues notice to DU registrar for forcing female students from NE to vacate hostel,” Times of India, are examples of some news reports published.

**Lack of balanced reportage**

Times of India and NDTV have carried out a more balanced reportage when it came to the coverage of covering issues of racism and aftermath of the Tablighi Jamaat congregation. Although there was a huge discrepancy with the number of stories on each of the two issues, the numbers for Times of India and NDTV was relatively higher than all the other TV channels and online news media publications combined.

On further examination, it was found that Times of India and NDTV balanced their reportage on the news coverage of the Tablighi Jamaat aftermath by covering both sides of the debate. For instance, random sampling of some stories highlight this findings:

**Story 1:** Six deaths from Telangana linked to Tablighi Jamaat meet in Delhi: Govt, TOI

**Story 2:** Disaster at Delhi’s Nizamuddin: How Covid-19 spread from here, TOI

**Story 3:** 10 Tablighi Jamaat members who recovered from COVID-19 donate their plasma, many others volunteer, TOI

**Story 4:** Chennai Bakery Owner Arrested for Advertising Discriminating Muslims, NDTV

**Story 5:** Yogi Adityanath Blames Islamic Sect Tablighi Jamaat For Spread Of Coronavirus, NDTV

**Story 6:** Coronavirus Tablighi Jamaat: Quarantined Islamic Sect Members Suspected Of Throwing Urine, Case Filed
Part B: Government Responses

This section tracks the response of the Indian government towards the racial discrimination of North East Indians and the challenges faced by Muslims in the aftermath of the Tablighi Jamaat congregation. The data analysed was collected from the Press Information Bureau (PIB) of India since it was found to be the most effective platform with respect to the Indian government's policies and launch announcements.

January: As can be seen on the coronavirus timeline in India, the very first press release by the Indian government went out on January 17, 2020. The press release was a travel advisory for Indians visiting China during this period. The press release quotes the World Health Organization’s risk assessment which stated the global spread risk was low.

The only other mention of the North East in the Press Information Bureau Press Releases was about new state sponsored developments in the Northeast such as “Ministry of Tourism announces webinar promoting ‘North East India- Experience the Exclusive Villages.”

On January 30, 2020 the Press Information Bureau announced the very first positive case in India. The first Novel Coronavirus patient turned out to be in Kerala, a student who was studying in Wuhan University, China. From this date onward the Indian government began to focus more on ways to curb and contain the novel Coronavirus in India.

February: The government of India is seen actively creating and updating travel advisories for International travellers.

This is also the month where many reports of racism towards northeast Indians are highlighted.

March: For the first time since the coronavirus outbreak the Prime Minister Modi tweets saying that “there is no need to panic” as “ministries and states are working together” to screen people.

Image: First tweet by the Prime Minister of India on COVID-19
On March 13, 2020 the officials of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India announced that “coronavirus is not a health emergency and that there is no need to panic.”

On March 19, 2020 the Prime Minister announced the “Janata Curfew” - a 14-hour voluntary lockdown on Sunday March 22, 2020. However, essential services like the media, medical services, police and ration shops continued to operation during the curfew. At 5pm on the day of the curfew, the Prime Minister also urged citizens to express gratitude for five minutes by clapping, ringing bells or beating pots for the many frontline workers. On March 23 at 8 pm, the Prime Minister made a national broadcast where he announced that a nationwide lockdown would go into effect from midnight for 21 days starting March 25, 2020.

The government did not directly respond to the racist attacks against Northeast Indians in the month of February. Only government officials from the region responded to this onslaught of racism during the pandemic.
On March 21, 2020 that the Ministry of Home Affairs issued an advisory to states to prevent harassment of people from the North-east.

**Press Releases:**

1. MHA writes to States/UTs to prevent harassment of people from North East by linking them to COVID-19 outbreak in India, March 21, 2020.
2. Union Ministry for Home Affairs (MHA) has written to all States/UTs to ensure sensitization of law enforcement agencies to take action against harassment of people from North East, including athletes and sportspersons, by linking them to COVID-19 outbreak in India, March 23, 2020.
On March 31, 2020 the Government of India issued the following press releases:

1. Government committed to identify, isolate and quarantine COVID-19 positive Tablighi Jamaat (TJ) workers in India post their congregation in Nizamuddin, Delhi.
2. MHA shared details of TJ workers in India with all States on March 21, 2020 after COVID-19 positive cases surfaced in Telangana.
3. So far, 1339 Tablighi Jamaat workers have been shifted to Narela, Sultanpuri and Bakkarwala quarantine facilities as well as to hospitals.
4. State Police to examine visas of all these foreign TJ workers and take further action in case of violation of visa conditions.

April: In the month of April the Ministry of Home Affairs blacklisted 960 foreigners for their involvement in Tablighi Jamaat. The Ministry also directed Delhi Police to take legal action against the “violators” for their involvement in the Jamaat.

The PIB quoted, President Shri Ram Nath Kovind in a press release, “The president has expressed concern over two incidents, the gathering of migrant workers in Anand Vihar and the congregation of Tablighi Jamaat in Nizamuddin, both in Delhi, that caused a setback to the efforts.”

On April 19, Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted saying that COVID-19 did not discriminate on grounds of religion, colour or nationality. These remarks on discrimination were originally part of a longer blog on LinkedIn, from the same day, highlighting essential ingredients for a “new business and work culture” during the pandemic. The Prime Minister urged India to adopt “universalism” so that the country can “emerge as the global nerve centre of complex modern multinational supply chains in the post COVID-19 world.”

On April 4, 2020, the government first linked the increase in COVID-19 cases in India with the Tablighi Jamaat congregation. Key messages in press releases by the PIB:

“The Joint Secretary informed that Tablighi Jamaat-related cases have been reported from 17 states, out of which 1,023 positive cases have been found. In this way, 30%

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of cases reported in India so far have been linked to one place, he further informed, highlighting the need for universal compliance with government’s guidelines.”

“Around 22,000 workers and their contacts related with Tablighi Jamaat meeting have been quarantined as on date, as the result of a massive effort, she further informed.”

On April 7, 2020 another press release by the PIB titled ‘Tablighi Jamaat episode an avoidable slip’ quoted Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu on the Tablighi Jamaat congregation:

“Amidst our collective efforts against the virus showing signals of success in arresting the spread of Coronavirus, came the Tablighi Jamaat congregation which had altered the nature of the curve with most of the new infected cases emanating from this meet. The extent of participation in this congregation and its multiplier effect has upset our expectations. This avoidable episode highlighted the consequences of any slip by way of violating the rules of social and physical distancing to contain the spread of virus. In that sense, this avoidable aberration should only be seen as an eye opener to all others.”

In a series of statements on April 13, 16 and 21, 2020, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, the Union Minister of Minority Affairs, gave statements on Ramdan, a holy month for Muslims:

“Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi appeals Indian Muslims to strictly follow the guidelines of lockdown and social distancing during the holy month of Ramadan in view of challenges of Corona pandemic.”

“Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi directs senior officials of more than 30 state waqf boards to ensure strict and honest implementation of lockdown, curfew and social distancing during the holy month of Ramadan in view of Corona pandemic: We should also demolish rumours and misinformation being spread about quarantine and isolation centres by creating awareness among the people that such centres are only meant to protect the people, their families and the society from the Corona pandemic.”

“Secularism and Harmony’ is not ‘political fashion’ but it is ‘perfect passion’ for India and Indians - Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi: Shri Naqvi said that we should remain cautious of any type of fake news and conspiracies aimed at creating misinformation. The authorities have been working for safety and well-being of all citizens of the country. Such type of rumours and conspiracies are nefarious design to weaken the fight against Corona. We should work united to win this fight against Corona by defeating any type of rumour, misinformation and conspiracy.”

Press Information Bureau Fact Check: In December of 2019, the government launched a Press Information Bureau Fact Checker to curb the spread of fake news and misinformation in the country. A news report by Newslaundry questioned the legitimacy and process of the
fact checking⁷, saying that there have been multiple instances where news reported by independent media have been declared as fake news by the ‘PIB Fact Checker’. Newslaundry alleged that PIB Fact Checker does not meet the first principle of the Internet Fact Checking Network: “a commitment to non-partisanship and fairness.”

The PIB fact checker mostly used social media handles to declare news as fake in order to curb the spread of misinformation. During the coronavirus pandemic the PIB Fact Checker worked on stopping the spread of misinformation ranging from how to beat coronavirus hacks to lockdown announcements before the official announcement.

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²⁷ The embarrassment that is PIB Fact Check: Who fact-checks this ‘fact checker’?, Newslaundry, May 26, 2020, https://www.newslaundry.com/2020/05/26/the-embarrassment-that-is-pib-fact-check-who-fact-checks-this-fact-checker
CONCLUSION

This report provides empirical evidence for discriminatory reporting in the media during the pandemic. It analyses the documented responses of the Indian government and news media.
Our study shows that the news coverage on Racism against Northeast Indians was grossly underrepresented in the Indian media as compared to the Tablighi Jamaat congregation aftermath.

The analysis of news reports on racism faced by persons from North East India revealed that high readership Indian media houses lack the interest and motivation to divert editorial resources on these incidents. Moreover, the incidents of racism that end up being featured is the result of mounting social media pressure. Most reported incidents of racism during the pandemic first went viral on social media. Secondly, the news reporting lacks in making a strong stand for the North East Indians, who lack legal laws to protect them and punish racism, since there are hardly any follow-up news reports on the incidents reported.

News coverage also does not use the correct terminology as is in the case of the popular Hindi news dailies and TV channels. There is a lack of information or awareness on racism, and instead hate speech is encouraged. The media provides no information on recognising or dealing with racism to its viewers.

The selected news platforms had also failed to grasp the psychological impacts of racism, while lacking the will to editorially innovate ways to discourage their readers from being racist. The same effect is witnessed in the coverage of Tablighi Jamaat congregation and spread of Islamophobia following it. In the latter case, rather than editorially innovate ways to discourage readers from being participating in the spread of hatred and hate speech, news platforms are innovating ways and deploying resources to encourage certain behaviour, practices and beliefs.

Indian news media needs to do much more than get merely quote people from the North East to narrate their experiences with racism. It needs to make an active effort to report about the issue of racism responsibly by building legal literacy and awareness on the issue instead of just portraying it in simplistic terms.

The mainstream media and government responses analysed in this report for the time frame of the study underline details of extensive criticism of the Tablighi Jamaat. The Bombay High Court in its judgement delivered on August 22, 2020 has taken special note of the backdrop of the CAA-NRC protests in Delhi, where several Muslims had participated, against which the complaints were registered28.

We hope this report will serve as a preliminary step towards actionable solutions to fill the gaps in minority rights reporting by mainstream media.

28 Arrest of Tablighis indirectly gave warning to Indian Muslims that action in any form and for anything can be taken against them: Bombay HC, Bar and Bench, https://www.barandbench.com/news/litigation/bombay-hc-quashes-firs-against-tablighi-jammat-attendees-slams-govt-for-making-them-scapegoats
CHRI PROGRAMMES

CHRI seeks to hold the Commonwealth and its member countries to high of human rights, transparent democracies and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). CHRI specifically works on strategic initiatives and advocacy on human rights, Access to Justice and Access to Information. Its research, publications, workshops, analysis, mobilisation, dissemination and advocacy, informs the following principal programmes:

1. **Access to Justice (ATJ)***

* **Police Reforms:** In too many countries the police are seen as an oppressive instrument of state rather than as protectors of citizens’ rights, leading to widespread rights violations and denial of justice. CHRI promotes systemic reform so that the police act as upholders of the rule of law rather than as enforcers of a regime. CHRI’s programme in India and South Asia aims at mobilising public support for police reforms and works to strengthen civil society engagement on the issues. In Tanzania and Ghana, CHRI examines police accountability and its connect to citizenry.

* **Prison Reforms:** CHRI’s work in prisons looks at increasing transparency of a traditionally closed system and exposing malpractices. Apart from highlighting systematic failures that result in overcrowding and unacceptably long pre-trial detention and prison overstays, it engages in interventions and advocacy for legal aid. Changes in these areas can spark improvements in the administration of prisons and conditions of justice.

2. **Access to Information**

* **Right to Information:** CHRI’s expertise on the promotion of Access to Information is widely acknowledged. It encourages countries to pass and implement effective Right to Information (RTI) laws. It routinely assists in the development of legislation and has been particularly successful in promoting Right to Information laws and practices in India, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Ghana and Kenya. In Ghana, CHRI as the Secretariat for the RTI civil society coalition, mobilised the efforts to pass the law; success came in 2019 after a long struggle. CHRI regularly critiques new legislation and intervene to bring best practices into governments and civil society knowledge both at a time when laws are being drafted and when they are first being implemented. It has experience of working in hostile environments as well as culturally varied jurisdictions, enabling CHRI bring valuable insights into countries seeking to evolve new RTI laws.
*Freedom of Expression and Opinion -- South Asia Media Defenders Network (SAMDEN):*

CHRI has developed a regional network of media professionals to address the issue of increasing attacks on media workers and pressure on freedom of speech and expression in South Asia. This network, the South Asia Media Defenders Network (SAMDEN) recognises that such freedoms are indivisible and know no political boundaries. Anchored by a core group of media professionals who have experienced discrimination and intimidation, SAMDEN has developed approaches to highlight pressures on media, issues of shrinking media space and press freedom. It is also working to mobilise media so that strength grows through collaboration and numbers. A key area of synergy lies in linking SAMDEN with RTI movements and activists.

3. International Advocacy and Programming

Through its flagship Report, Easier Said Than Done, CHRI monitors the compliance of Commonwealth member states with human rights obligations. It advocates around human rights challenges and strategically engages with regional and international bodies including the UNHRC, Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group and the African Commission for Human and People’s Rights. Ongoing strategic initiatives include advocating for SDG 16 goals, SDG 8.7 (see below), monitoring and holding the Commonwealth members to account and the Universal Periodic Review. We advocate and mobilise for the protection of human rights defenders and civil society spaces.

4. SDG 8.7: Contemporary Forms of Slavery

Since 2016, CHRI has pressed the Commonwealth to commit itself towards achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 8.7, to ‘take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.’ In July 2019 CHRI launched the Commonwealth 8.7 Network, which facilitates partnerships between grassroots NGOs that share a common vision to eradicate contemporary forms of slavery in Commonwealth countries. With a membership of approximately 60 NGOs from all five regions, the network serves as a knowledge-sharing platform for country-specific and thematic issues and good practice, and to strengthen collective advocacy.
This project is funded by the European Union’s EuropeAid/155232/DH/ACT/Multi project, and by the QZA-0825 QZA-18/0410 Protecting the Rights of Religious Minorities funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD).