

Indian Media Fuels Communal Disinformation About Bangladesh

Sunday 25 August 2024, by [Prothom Alo](#) (Date first published: 19 August 2024).

Rumor Scanner revealed that 72% of the accounts spreading fake and misleading information about communal violence in Bangladesh claimed to be based in India, with over 154 million views across 50 accounts.

Some mainstream media of India and responsible persons are also spreading rumors on communal attacks in Bangladesh, reveals a report of Rumor Scanner, a fact checking website based in Bangladesh.

Rumor Scanner's Investigation Unit has identified 50 accounts on X that have been actively spreading communal narratives by sharing images, videos, and information related to recent events in Bangladesh.

At least one post from each of these accounts has been found to promote communal misinformation and disinformation, reports Rumor Scanner in a study titled 'Surge of Communal Misinformation on X During Bangladesh's Political Crisis'.

From 5 to 13 August, posts shared by those 50 accounts were viewed over 154 million times. Rumor Scanner revealed that 72% of the accounts spreading fake and misleading information claimed to be based in India. Among the account holders are several responsible individuals, and even mainstream media outlets in India that have propagated some of this false information.

A video was posted on 9 August from an X handle named Deepak Sharma which claims Jihadists have killed hundreds of women by exploding bombs at a camp of Hindu women and children. Checking the video, Rumor Scanner finds it to be one from the death of five people in electrocution during Jagannath Dev's Rath Yatra on 7 July.

A video falsely claiming to show a Hindu man demanding the whereabouts of his missing son was shared by at least three mainstream Indian media outlets on their X handle, Asian News International (ANI), NDTV, and Mirror Now.

However, Rumor Scanner found that the man in question is Muslim named Babul Howlader, who has been seeking information about his missing son since 2013 and participated in a protest for this cause.

Rumor Scanner also found that several other Indian media outlets and individuals associated with them were involved in spreading similar communal misinformation. This list includes X accounts from Zee News Madhya Pradesh and News 24.

The Rumor Scanner investigation unit also found that OpIndia's editor-in-chief Nupur J Sharma routinely spread fake news from her X handle. After one of her posts was identified as false and flagged by a Rumor Scanner team member on 11 August, she responded by blocking that particular

member on X.

Rumor Scanner asked Indian fact-checker Ankita Deshkar why there has been an increase in communal propaganda in India recently. Ankita explained, “These accounts receive significant engagement from their followers when they post communal misinformation. Many are sharing this misinformation on X to boost their engagement or retweet numbers.”

Spreading of communal misinformation is just not limited to India, responsible individuals from various other countries also joined the fray.

Former Pakistani cricketer Danish Kaneria shared a video on his X account falsely claiming that cricketer Liton Das’s house had been set on fire. In reality, the footage was from an arson attack on Mashrafe’s house, and no such incident occurred at Liton’s residence.

Salwan Momika, an Iraqi-born man who has repeatedly caused controversy by publicly burning the Quran, has been found to regularly spread communal misinformation involving Bangladesh through his X account.

Of the 50 accounts examined in this research of Rumor Scanner, 13 posts contained similar instances where unrelated events were given a communal twist. The most prevalent form of misinformation involved misrepresenting Muslim individuals as Hindus.

Other forms of misinformation included repurposing old videos from unrelated incidents, falsely attributing attacks on Muslim establishments to Hindu establishments, misrepresenting arson attacks on different sites as attacks on Hindu properties, distorting political slogans, fabricating statements, creating fake Telegram accounts in the name of the BNP, and making false claims about the number of Hindu casualties.

In 80% of the cases (40 posts), video footage was used to spread misinformation. In 16% of cases, images and screenshots were used, while the remaining 4% consisted of text-only posts.

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