



# Department of Journalism and Mass Communication

## Aliah University

(A UGC approved autonomous Institution under the Department of Minority Affairs and Madrasah Education, Govt. of West of Bengal)

Park Circus Campus, 17, Gorachand Road, Kolkata- 700014

### Webinar on Covering COVID 19 in South Asia- Panel I Report



Department of Journalism and Mass Communication  
Aliah University, Kolkata



### Webinar Series Covering COVID-19 in South Asia

Session I

17th July, 2020: Friday, 6-8 PM

#### From Ground Zero

Media Coverage of COVID-19 in India



**Riju Basu**  
Anandabazar  
Patrika  
Kolkata



**Parth MN**  
Independent  
Journalist  
Mumbai



**Cyrti Sam**  
Independent  
Journalist  
New Delhi



**Padma Priya**  
Suno India  
Hyderabad



**Priyanka Thirumurthy**  
The News Minute  
Chennai



**Gulam Jeelani**  
Mail Today  
New Delhi  
(MODERATOR)

Session II

18th July, 2020: Saturday, 6-8 PM

#### Covering the Pandemic

Experiences from South Asia



**Noor Gul Shafaq**  
BBC Pashto  
Kabul, Afghanistan



**Sumaira Khan**  
Indus News  
Islamabad, Pakistan



**Phanindra Dahal**  
BBC Nepali  
Kathmandu, Nepal



**Zyma Islam**  
The Daily Star  
Dhaka  
Bangladesh



**Niha Masih**  
Washington Post  
New Delhi, India



**Zinara Rathnayake**  
Independent Journalist  
Colombo, Sri Lanka



**Suvojit Bagchi**  
Independent Journalist  
Kolkata, India  
(MODERATOR)

Chief Patron: Prof Mohammad Ali, Honorable Vice Chancellor, Aliah University

Patron: Prof Amzed Hossain, Registrar, Aliah University

Convener: Dr Mohammad Reyaz, Head (officiating)  
Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Aliah University

Contact: [hod.mjmc@aliah.ac.in](mailto:hod.mjmc@aliah.ac.in) or [mail@reyaz.in](mailto:mail@reyaz.in)

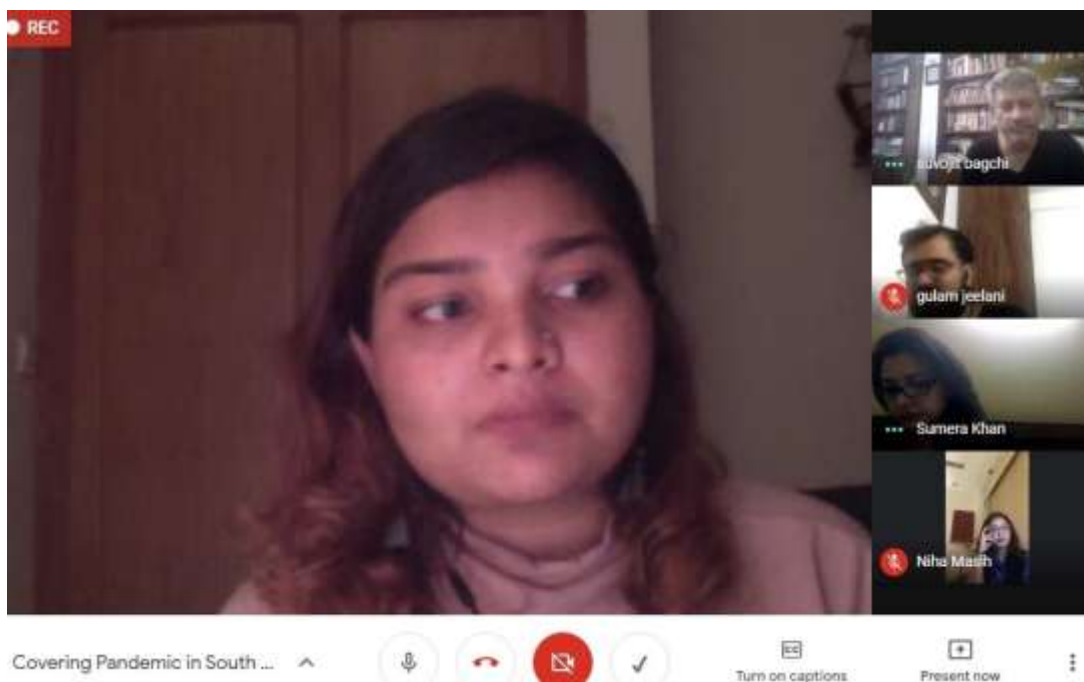
Register here  
[shorturl.at/mpJW4](http://shorturl.at/mpJW4)

to participate in discussions, ask questions and get E-Certificates

'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times'- this famous quote from the 'Tale of Two Cities' is definitely adept in explaining the current pandemic situation across the globe perfectly. While COVID 19 has definitely slowed the world down and caused unparalleled damage to the world economy and health prospects, it has opened a new horizon for the digital era to take the world by the storm. In this world digital is the 'new normal'.



To observe and analyze the 'new normal' and how the South Asian countries are dealing with it, Journalism and Mass Communication Department of Aliah University organized a 2-day long webinar series titled 'Covering COVID 19 in South Asia' held on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> July 2020 from 6 pm onward via Google meet platform. The convenor for this webinar was Dr. Mohammad Reyaz, Head (officiating) of the department, JMC, Aliah University.



The session 1, held on July 17, was titled 'From Ground Zero Media Coverage of COVID 19 in India' and the session probed into the media coverage of COVID 19 situations in different parts of India and highlighted several allied issues in the light of the pandemic as well. Chaired by Mr. Gulam Jeelani, Assistant Editor of Mail Today, this session experienced an introspective discussion from stalwart participants including Padma Priya from Suno India (Hyderabad), Parth MN (Mumbai), Riju Basu from ABO (Kolkata), Priyanka Trimurthy from The News Minute (Chennai) and Cyrill Sam (New Delhi).

Mr. Jeelani opened the session with his experiences of covering COVID 19 situations at New Delhi. He focused on how the AAP Government in Delhi came to power with the promise of adequate health care system and how the same crashed fighting this pandemic. He pointed out that the health care facility shortage was noticed vehemently in Delhi around June. He mentioned the distinct communication gap between the Government and the journalists focusing how very limited number of press conferences (1 or 2) was held by Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi's Chief Minister in the past 4 months. This situation led to insufficiency of data and numbers for journalists who were entitled to report COVID 19 cases and reports could not be prepared in detail. Mr. Jeelani concludes saying that Delhi was in a much stable condition as there were only 50% of the estimated number of COVID cases.

The next speaker Padma Priya, co-founder of Suno India, spoke about the initial difficulties of covering COVID cases. An interesting observation in her experiences would be how she had to struggle to report COVID 19 situation just because of her medium as quoting her, "podcast is not a 'breaking news' kind of medium". Reporting on Telengana had been a challenging job for her too as they also were struggling for data from Government and not a lot of questions were being answered by credible sources. She also pointed out how basic measures such as testing for COVID 19 also required special privileges at a point in time. She interestingly mentioned about the erosion of press freedom in Telengana and how the reports could not be extremely critical of Telengana Government.

The next speaker Parth MN, a reporter based in Mumbai in addition with his experience of covering COVID cases spoke in detail about the migrant crisis generally in India, and particularly in Maharashtra. He urged to think about the sheer cause of migration citing data which shows that the Government fails to provide enough employment to the rural workers which causes a considerable volume of workers to move out of their respective state. The discussion also threw light on the plight of agriculture and the fall of rural economy. He thinks it is important for the people to analyze what makes the rural workers be at the mercy of the urban employers.



Ms. Priyanka Trimurthy spoke about the silence of the Government at the beginning of the COVID outbreak. She also focused upon the human aspects of the situation. Starting from the economy in Chennai to the condition of women in the city was discussed with special focus on domestic violence. She very interestingly highlighted how health issues and struggles are not the only struggles brought forth by this pandemic.

Mr. Riju Basu focused on the challenges that the journalists and other media platforms (including music industry and theatre) during the time of pandemic. The journalists had to overcome the fear of getting infected while going out and reporting these cases. He added the aspect of Amphan, a horrific cyclone that shook West Bengal during the pandemic itself and he spoke about how life at Bengal became all the more difficult fighting both the Pandemic and the cyclone.

Journalist Cyril Sam, who works with online media, spoke about a very important aspect of reporting. He focused on the massive layoff problems faced by the journalists. He discussed that with at least 1000 journalists losing their job during the pandemic, the newsroom diversity was facing a premature death. The specialization in news reporting became blurred during these pandemic times. Even though he spoke about the vacuum for journalism that could be created in the future, he also seemed hopeful about journalists as future entrepreneurs.

The discussions were followed by a question and answer session where the participants asked interesting questions about each of these aspects of media coverage during COVID 19. The webinar ended with a formal vote of thanks and an invitation for session 2 to be held on the next evening.

Webinar Poster: <https://www.facebook.com/journalistreyaz/posts/10159100722664386>

Screenshots of webinar: <https://www.facebook.com/journalistreyaz/posts/10159101495504386>

### **Webinar on Covering COVID 19 in South Asia- Panel II Report**

To observe and analyze the 'new normal' and how the South Asian countries are dealing with it, Journalism and Mass Communication Department of Aliah University organized a 2-day long webinar series titled 'Covering COVID 19 in South Asia' held on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> July from 6pm onward via Google meet platform. The convenor for this webinar was Dr. Mohammad Reyaz, Head (officiating) of the department, JMC, Aliah University.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> session of this webinar was held on July 18 and was titled 'Covering the Pandemic: Experiences from South Asia' and the session was the extension of what was discussed on July 17. Additionally, this session educated us about the situations that people are facing during the COVID 19 outbreak all over South East Asia.

The discussions enlightened us about the challenges that most of the journalists of South East Asia are facing. The session touched upon human interest stories, health aspect, socio-political aspects and other important sides of this pandemic in respect to 6 South East Asian countries. Chaired by Mr. Suvojit Bagchi, this session experienced an introspective discussion from stalwart participants including Mr. Noor Gul Shafaq from Afghanistan, Ms. Sumera Khan from Pakistan, Ms. Niha Massih from India, Mr. Phanindra Dahal from Nepal, Ms. Zyma Islam from Bangladesh and Ms. Zinara Ratnayeke from Sri Lanka.

Mr. Noor Gul Shafaq from Afghanistan opened with his experiences during the pandemic. He said that the people in Afghanistan were religious and depending on God they believed that the pandemic would not be able to affect them. As a result they got careless. Initially a Hoquiam claimed to have a homeopathy drug for Corona and it has opium mixed in it and eventually it got discarded by the authority. However, things have improved since then. Right now new normal activities can be seen there and only schools are closed. Since people in Afghanistan are habituated with big joint families, social distancing tends to become an issue for them.

Ms. Sumera Khan from Pakistan focused on how international relations played an important part in the battle against COVID 19. Pakistan's geographical location close to China and Wuhan city also led to significant problems in the country during this time. At the same time, people denied to believe that COVID is at all a threat. On top of that, Pakistan at the same time faced war threats, locust threats along with the pandemic situation. That proved to be even more difficult. Also, she discussed how the pharmaceuticals mafias took advantage of the situation and wiped out even the ordinary masks from the market just to fish in the troubled water. However, she assured that things are better and under control now.

Ms. Niha Massih from India spoke about how finding correct data from the Government has been a real challenge in India in the times of COVID. This has in fact a reflection of the discussion where the regional journalists of India have mentioned 'lack of data' time and again the previous day. She also focused on how the health infrastructure is really bad in India and no clarity could be achieved through press conferences. Niha also spoke on the issue of migrant workers and how India has experienced mass mobilization on foot during the lockdown.

Mr. Phanindra Dahal from Nepal spoke about the aspect of victim blaming- how COVID patients were being blamed and ill-treated for the situation. He mentioned the Tablighi Jamat case in the context. He also spoke about the mental health issues faced in Nepal due to the lockdown. He also focused on the reduction of pay.

Ms. Zyma Islam from Bangladesh spoke about labour problems faced in Bangladesh. She also focused on the different struggles of Bangladesh during the pandemic situation. She also spoke about crowd sourcing.

Ms. Zinara Ratnayeke spoke about how Sri Lankan Government has been spreading wrong information during the pandemic. She also spoke about the plight of travel journalism as travel stopped during the pandemic. She also focused on how many airline magazines ceased publication during this time. She also spoke about how ethnic tension was constantly being created by putting the blame on the minority.

The discussions were followed by a question and answer session where the participants asked interesting questions about each of these aspects of media coverage during COVID 19. The webinar ended with a formal vote of thanks.

Screenshots: <https://www.facebook.com/journalistreyaz/posts/10159104472434386>

The recorded video of the webinar session 1 is available on :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UdvbuilZXzA&t=22s>

The recorded video of the webinar session 2 is available on :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYf2Xcwgdzg&t=156s>

Organising Committee

Chief Patron

Prof. Mahammad Ali, Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, Aliah University, Kolkata

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Dr Mohammadd Reyaz, Head(Officiating), Department of JMC, AU