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**Rural Press In Bangladesh :
A Case Study Of Daily Teesta**

By

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Rural Press in Bangladesh: A case study of Daily Teesta

— Mizanur Rahman*

Before I go into details of the rural press situation, I want to describe the region Dinajpur, where the Daily Teesta, the newspaper is published.

Dinajpur with a population of 190,000 at the foothills of the Himalaya is a flood-plain region located at the north of Bangladesh. Dinajpur is one of the 64 administrative districts and (414 km) 248 miles from the capital Dhaka, which is connected only by road and railway. With 2535 square miles, Dinajpur is primarily an agricultural area and dubbed as the rice bowl of Bangladesh which produces the finest quality of rice. Fruits, sugarcane and jute is also grown. The majority of population are Bangla (national language) speaking Muslims but there are some Hindus population too. Santal tribes also resides in the region but their population is only few percent. The most important human development index literacy is very low.

Coming back to rural press with special focus on Daily Teesta, we observe that regional or community newspaper has gained from uneven infrastructure development. Communication specially road link is still in deplorable condition. The national newspaper from the capital Dhaka takes almost 24 hours to reach the hands of the readers and by the time its reaches, the news content becomes quite stale which does not appeal.

The regional newspapers are comparatively cheaper and marketed at the crack of the dawn which has gradually added more and more new readers every day. The population on the north are mostly illiterate and poor who earn their food from their sweat of their brow forms the principal readership of the regional newspapers.

Readership class has been made possible only because of publication of regional newspapers and this factor has to be taken into

Page- two

consideration. There exists economic reasons too. For example, normally a reader has to incur Taka 20 to 30 (US Dollar 1= Taka 35) for subscribing any national newspaper every week. In addition these newspaper reach almost after a day at the hand of the readers. The cost of a regional daily, on the contrary is only Taka 7 only. If the price, time and catering of local news satisfies a local reader than why will the reader spent more cash and wait a day.

The regional newspaper demands are increasing, though slowly but on the other hand the national dailies are fast losing their circulation in the districts. Electronic media is also a blow for the national newspapers sales in the districts, as the readers interested in international events, government news and sports reaches more quicker to them. The only thing left which does not reach them are the local events and happenings, which of course are being dished by the regional newspapers.

If the regional newspapers could have been published in tabloid sizes, it would have been cheaper in production but as the readers are accustomed with 20 by 30 inch size newspapers, the regional newspapers has no other alternative but to publish a bigger size.

Giving here is an example of a low cost production which is economical and pays back the investment. If a 4-page newspaper circulation is 10,000 that it requires 10,000 pieces (20 reams) of newsprint paper (which is locally produced). The cost of newsprint paper will be Taka 3,800 (Taka 190 per ream). If the price of a newspaper sells at Taka 1 then it is Taka 10,000. After deduction of 40 per cent commission to the newspaper seller the cash money received is Taka 6,000. After paying back the cost of paper you have Taka 2,200 cash in hand. With the cash money in hand and meeting other incidental expenses you can publish a regional newspaper. The income from advertisement revenues has not been shown here.

Advertisement is the principal source of revenue of the local

Page- three

newspapers. Compared to the national dailies, the regional papers in proportion get a very negligible advertisements. As a result it is not only impossible for Daily Teesta to publish every morning but it is an herculean task too. The crux of getting less revenue from advertisements is because most of the advertisement distribution are controlled by the government. Getting little more advertisements for publication is a favour. Though press censorship in black and white does not exists but throttling of advertisements for any newspapers trying to be smart are often practised. This practice of disfavour which adversely affects the smooth publication of the regional newspapers has been brought to the notices of the government in various forums demanding immediate withdrawal of such practices but nothing tangible has taken place.

Due to financial constraints, the regional dailies cannot afford to maintain the minimum strength of journalists and employees. As a result, they have to run the newspapers with bare staff strength. A journalists employed in a regional newspapers have to perform all activities of a newsmen and on the other hand is under paid and overworked.

The speciality of Daily Teesta is, it is printed in letterpress system and printing of photographs are made in zinc blocks. This system is being still practiced when national newspapers are printed in modern technology and have entered into computerized era. Almost all the regional newspapers are published in yesterday technology. As the owners of the most of the regional newspapers will not be able to procure finance for procuring modern systems because financial banks won't dare to disburse loans.

Finally, Daily Teesta exceeds others in circulation and credibility because of its style and uninterrupted publication, excellent local news coverage and early morning publication. The Daily Teesta to increase its sales had to create newspaper sellers in the town as well as in rural bazars. The newspaper published since 1982 have taken extra care for publication in lucid and simple Bangla with a paid up circulation of 4,000 copies.

Page- four

Apart from news and views on local incidents and events, Daily Teesta gives special importance to environment and development issues of the region. The major environmental concern of the regional are wanton deforestation and lowering of ground water table turning the area into semi-arid. The Daily Teesta has strongly picked up the advocacy to plant more fast growing trees, controlling of deep tubewell water pumps used for irrigation purpose and digging ponds and canals for creating catchment for monsoon rain. Coupled with the environmental problems, low literacy rates, absence of health care, safe drinking water, high child mortality rates and poverty are the major hurdles of human development in the region. Every day Daily Teesta religiously focuses the need for human development, to improve the quality of life of the people in the region.

I want to suggest possible steps for smooth publication of regional newspaper in Bangladesh:

- a) Increase in the flow of advertisements;
- b) Steps to ensure long term loan to the dailies for modernization of the printing facilities;
- c) Ensure uninterrupted electrical power supply;
- d) Arrangement of training facilities to the local journalists to increase their efficiency by local and foreign institutes;
- e) Government should spell out a media policy for the regional newspaper.

Thank you all for your patience and your interest to hear the struggle for survival of the rural newspapers in Bangladesh. I thank you once again.

*The author is the editor and publisher of the Daily Teesta published from Dinajpur, Bangladesh.