

Case 1: Disinformation regarding State owned bank giving financial incentives for common people, 2020

Theme: Socio-economic

On 8 December 2020, a post circulated through different Facebook groups and profiles claims that Sonali Bank (a state-owned leading public commercial bank in Bangladesh) has declared financial incentives of Tk 1600 for common people marking the National Victory Day. The Facebook post states: "Today a senior sister of mine told me about the Sonali Bank's gift of 1600 taka as part of celebrating the glorious victory day of Bangladesh." A link to a website was also provided for registration.¹ BD FactCheck (a Bangladeshi independent fact-checking initiative) clicked that website link to check what it says only to be ended with a notice 'Website not found' in the URL. They also searched for such news reports in online media and recent print newspapers but found nothing on it. The Sonali Bank website has no mention of such initiatives. No government offices have announced anything related to this. It is to be mentioned, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina provided with cash aids of Tk 2500 for 50 lakh families hit by the Covid-19 pandemic in May 2020. No declaration of a nationwide financial aid program other than this was made so far from the government or from any other institution.



Photo: A part of the Facebook post states: "Today a senior sister of mine told me about the Sonali Bank's gift of 1600 taka as part of celebrating the glorious victory day of Bangladesh. I could not believe it at first." I believed it when I got the money. A link to a website was also provided for registration.

According to the Facebook post given by BD FactCheck, no such gift has been announced by Bangladesh government or Sonali Bank. There is no such information on the bank's website.

¹ <https://www.tbsnews.net/thoughts/busting-top-3-fake-news-week-173236>

Besides, there was no news about them in any media. It is unusual for a bank to take such a massive initiative without an official announcement. Rather, in most cases, such organizations promote such activities by advertising in the media. Moreover, no such announcement was received from the government as a state bank.

It may be noted that the Prime Minister announced to give 50 lakh families 2500 rupees as cash assistance during the outbreak of coronavirus. However, no announcement has been made about BDT 1600 as incentive.²

Actor	Behaviour	Content	Degree	Effect
<i>Prime Actor:</i> A social media account	<i>Intent:</i> Suggests aspersion behaviour	<i>"Today a senior sister of mine told me about the Sonali Bank's gift of 1600 taka as part of celebrating the glorious victory day of Bangladesh."</i> Harm: The content misinformed people about incentive given by a state-owned bank. <i>Truthfulness:</i> The content was fake and deceptive. <i>Narrative(s):</i> The content is aligned with the disinformation narrative.	<i>Audience:</i> People in general in Bangladesh <i>Platform:</i> Facebook	Human rights: Right to information.

ABCDE Framework Analysis:

Actor:

It was a Facebook account named 'Bd Ansar' that posted about Sonali Bank giving 1600 BDT incentive to common people to celebrate national victory day.

² <https://www.facebook.com/bdfactcheck/posts/1223861178014875>

Behaviour:

The Facebook post about the incentive was proved to be false and fabricated by BD FactCheck which is a fact checking organization in Bangladesh. Hence, the behaviour suggests aspersive intent to mislead and deceive people.

Content:

The content misleads people in general about government incentives. The content published was verified by BD FactCheck to be fake and deceptive.

Degree:

The target audience was people in General in Bangladesh specifically people vulnerable to believing such false content. Facebook was used to disseminate the content on a wide scale without any verification to its truth.

Effect:

The contents threaten people's right to information.

Diagnosis:

The Case has been identified as incident of disinformation because the content shows evidence of deliberately deceptive behaviour through creation of false news about government incentives on Facebook to deceive people and cause economic confusion among people.

Conclusion:

Facebook and other social media can be misused to capture attention of vulnerable community especially the poor population by fabricating news about government incentives- economic and others. Fact checking knowledge is important to identify disinformation from truth. In a country like Bangladesh, national estimate of the country's new poor remains high in May 2022 due to inflation and slower-than-expected economic recovery from the Covid-19 shock among the vulnerable non-poor. The national estimate of the "new poor" remains high at 18.54 per cent in May 2022.³ Hence online disinformation about economic issues could have a wide scale adverse impact on the general population in Bangladesh.

³ <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/national/new-poor-in-bangladesh-remains-high-in-may-says-survey-1654432968#:~:text=National%20estimate%20of%20the%20country's,in%20May%202022%2C%20it%20reveals.>