

Joint Statement on Attacks on Freedom of Expression and Democratic Participation in Bangladesh

December 22, 2025

We, the undersigned, strongly condemn the violent attacks on December 18, 2025 on the [offices of Prothom Alo and The Daily Star](#), two of South Asia's oldest and most reputed media institutions, and the vandalism of Chhayanaut, one of Bangladesh's most respected cultural and educational institutions. These apparently coordinated acts of violence represent a grave escalation in attacks against independent media, journalists, activists, and cultural spaces in Bangladesh. We are also deeply alarmed at the credible reports of public beating to [death and burning of Dipu Chandra Das](#) in Mymensingh's Bhaluka Upazila on the same night, following allegations that he made "derogatory remarks" on religion.

These incidents followed the death of Sharif Osman Hadi, a political activist and leading figure of Bangladesh's 2024 July Uprising, who was [shot in broad daylight](#) in the country's capital on December 12 and died on December 18, 2025. The targeting of politicians, activists, leading media houses, and cultural institutions, particularly at a time of heightened political sensitivity ahead of the 2026 national election, raises serious concerns about erosion of the rule of law and the shrinking space for free expression, civic discourse, and democratic participation.

We are particularly alarmed by verified reports indicating that journalists and staff were trapped inside the burning premises of the two news outlets, facing imminent risks to their lives. Any failure to respond promptly and effectively in such circumstances engages the state's fundamental duty to protect life. Moreover, the forced temporary suspension of both print and online editions of the newspapers marks an unprecedented disruption to Bangladesh's media landscape and underscores the severity of the threat faced by independent journalism, while the harassment and physical intimidation of journalists present at the scene reflects the growing boldness of those who seek to undermine media freedom in the absence of effective state protection.

The attack on Chhayanaut also signals a broader pattern of hostility toward cultural institutions and practitioners, revealing an increasingly unsafe environment for artistic expression and diversity of opinion. These developments point to a dangerous convergence of online and offline violence, coupled with long-standing patterns of coordinated harassment and state-sanctioned surveillance that have fostered a culture of impunity. There has been a documented pattern of attacks on freedom of thought and expression through abuse of the legal system, and intimidation and attacks of *bauls*, journalists, media workers, and artists throughout this year.

A number of these attacks appear to have been fueled by hate speech and explicit calls to violence online apparently posted by some prominent personalities with large followings on social media platforms, and further amplified by their followers and affiliated networks. The continued circulation of such hate content highlights the technology sector's failure to meet their human rights responsibilities, and their chronic underinvestment in user safety in the Global Majority.

These incidents further illustrate a failure of the state to respond promptly and effectively to online hate and incitement, despite well-documented and recurring patterns of hate speech and violent mobilization. While the interim government has promoted extensive cyber law reforms—proposals that have drawn criticism from civil society groups for lacking substance, practicality, and adequate consultation—the persistent spread of incitement to violence online exposes a profound enforcement failure and raises serious concerns about the efficacy of this government’s commitments to online safety.

Bangladesh has binding obligations under international human rights law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), as well as constitutional guarantees that protect freedom of expression, media freedom, cultural life, political and civic participation, and personal security. These obligations require the state to do everything they reasonably can to prevent, protect against, investigate, hold accountable those responsible, and remedy violations committed by both state and non-state actors.

These failures must be understood in the context of the recent developments in Bangladesh. In July and August 2024, the state authorities responded to mass protests with excessive force, sweeping crackdowns, and extrajudicial killings, demonstrating readiness to justify overreach in the name of national security and public order. Today, by contrast, the interim government appears unwilling or unable to act decisively in the face of targeted violence, hate mobilization, and credible threats to life. Both extremes—repression on the one hand, and inertia on the other—are incompatible with Bangladesh’s obligations under its domestic constitution and international human rights law. The state’s duty is neither to silence dissent nor to abdicate responsibility, but to act lawfully, proportionately, and effectively to protect lives, rights, and democratic space, in line with the mandate it assumed and the commitments it pledged to uphold. The failure to do so risks entrenching impunity and undermining public confidence in democratic institutions, both under the present administration and for those that follow.

We, the undersigned, call on the interim government of Bangladesh to:

1. **Ensure immediate and effective protection** for journalists, media workers, media houses, cultural and intellectual institutions, and their practitioners across the country, including through the deployment of adequate security measures where credible threats exist.
2. **Conduct swift, independent, and transparent investigations** into the attacks on *Prothom Alo*, *The Daily Star*, and Chhayanaut, as well as other journalists, media workers, and artists, and ensure that all perpetrators, planners, and instigators are held accountable through due process of law and victims or next-of-kin have access to effective remedies.
3. **Engage technology companies and social media platforms to implement proactive, proportionate and timely interventions against hate speech and incitement to violence**, and which are responsive to emerging crises, and work with civil society and human rights groups to put in place safeguards that protect user safety and free expression during the election.
4. **Publicly and unequivocally condemn** all acts of violence, intimidation, and harassment against journalists, media outlets, and cultural and intellectual institutions, and reaffirm the state’s commitment to protecting freedom of expression and cultural life.
5. **Guarantee a safe and enabling environment** for journalism, cultural expression, and civic participation—both offline and online—particularly in the lead-up to the 2026 national election.



6. **Align national laws, policies, and practices** with Bangladesh’s constitutional guarantees and its international human rights obligations, including under the ICCPR, to safeguard freedom of expression, media freedom, and personal security.

We stand in solidarity with Bangladesh’s journalists, media workers, artists, and diverse communities, and reiterate our commitment to defending freedom of expression, accountability, and the rights of communities to participate safely and freely in civic and cultural life—both offline and online.

In solidarity:

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Human Rights Watch (HRW)

International Truth and Justice Project (ITJP)

Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka (JDS)

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