



Committee to Protect Journalists

January 29, 2026

Sent via email

To
Mr. Tarique Rahman
Chairman
Bangladesh Nationalist Party

Subject: Strengthening press freedom and journalist safety in Bangladesh through electoral commitment

Honorable Mr. Rahman,

As Bangladesh prepares for its upcoming national election, the Committee to Protect Journalist, an independent, nonprofit press freedom organization, urges the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) to commit to upholding press freedom and protecting journalists in its electoral platform and public messaging. We also ask that elected representatives from your party continue to fulfill those commitments following the February 12 vote.

A free press is essential to the credibility of any election. Journalists play a critical role in informing voters, scrutinizing those in power, and enabling meaningful public debate. The BNP can demonstrate national leadership and strengthen public trust in the electoral process by committing to this foundational democratic value.

CPJ research indicates that risks to journalists have escalated sharply in the pre-election period. In December, mobs attacked the offices of the country's two largest newspapers, Prothom Alo and The Daily Star, briefly trapping journalists inside the burning premises. Reporters, editors, and commentators have also faced intensified digital harassment, ideological labelling, threats, and coordinated hate campaigns linked to political polarization. This form of abuse was enabled by the previous government to intimidate journalists and remains prevalent, despite a change in administration and promises of media reforms.

Real reform means breaking from the past, not replicating its abuses. All political parties must respect journalists' right to report as the country is set to elect its representatives.

Bangladesh is one of Asia's leading jailers of journalists, with five currently behind bars for murder and national-security offences that appear to be in retaliation for their reporting and perceived political affiliations. At the same time, impunity for journalist murders remains high. Nobody has yet been held

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accountable for the murders of journalists [Hasan Mehedi](#) and [Abu Taher Md Turab](#), who were killed while reporting on the quota protests in July 2024.

Taken together, these press freedom violations have had a chilling effect on election-related reporting and muddied the broader information environment in which citizens vote.

Key press-freedom concerns that warrant urgent attention include:

- Impunity: Attacks, threats, and violence against journalists are rarely investigated or prosecuted, creating a climate of fear and intimidation.
- Legal safety: Journalists face criminal and national-security charges, multiple criminal cases, prolonged pre-trial detention, and denial of bail, particularly when reporting on political unrest.
- Physical safety: Journalists covering rallies, protests, or sensitive political issues face threats, intimidation, and mob violence. News outlets have been attacked during periods of unrest.
- Digital safety and censorship: Surveillance, content monitoring, online hate campaigns, and digital harassment increasingly expose journalists to both virtual and real-world threats.
- Access to information: Barriers to official information, press briefings, and public records weaken fair and accurate election coverage.

As the election approaches, we propose the BNP include the following commitments in its election manifesto and public statements:

- Publicly affirm the role of independent journalism as essential to free and fair elections.
- Commit to protecting journalists from harassment, arbitrary detention, violence, and intimidation, including by party supporters or affiliated groups.
- Refrain from using criminal, national-security, or counter-terrorism laws against journalists for their reporting or commentary.
- Safeguard digital rights by opposing unlawful surveillance, censorship, and arbitrary content restrictions.
- Support editorial independence and pluralism by rejecting actions that pressure news outlets or journalists to adopt political positions.
- Promote transparency by ensuring fair access to information, official briefings, and timely responses to journalists' inquiries throughout the campaign period.

Freedom of speech and expression are protected under Article 39 of Bangladesh's Constitution and under the International Covenant on Civil and



Political Rights, to which Bangladesh is a party. These rights must be upheld regardless of partisan politics.

To this end, CPJ urges the BNP to make clear electoral commitments to enhance press freedom and, if elected, to work toward implementing the above recommendations.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

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