

January 29, 2026

Sent via email

To
Mr. Nahid Islam
Convener
National Citizen Party
Dhaka, Bangladesh

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

Honorable Mr. Islam,

As Bangladesh prepares for its upcoming national election, the Committee to Protect Journalists, an independent, nonprofit press freedom organization, urges the National Citizen Party (NCP) 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 central to the credibility of any election and functioning democracy. Journalists play a vital role in informing voters, scrutinizing those in power, and enabling meaningful public debate. As a political party that has emerged from a period of civic mobilization and public demand for accountability, the NCP has a unique opportunity to affirm its commitment to democratic norms by supporting press freedom.

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.

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Bangladesh remains one of Asia's leading jailers of journalists, with [five](#) currently imprisoned on criminal and [national-security charges](#) that appear to be connected to their reporting or [perceived political affiliations](#). At the same time, impunity for violence against journalists persists. No one has been held accountable for the murder 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 journalism and have compromised the broader information environment in which citizens must make informed electoral choices.

Key press-freedom concerns that warrant urgent attention include:

- Impunity: Attacks, threats, and violence against journalists are rarely investigated or prosecuted, fostering fear and self-censorship.
- Legal safety: Journalists face criminal and national-security charges, charge-stacking, prolonged pre-trial detention, and repeated denial of bail, particularly when reporting on political unrest.
- Physical safety: Journalists covering rallies, protests, and sensitive political issues are exposed to threats, intimidation, and mob violence, including attacks on news outlets.
- Digital safety and harassment: Surveillance, coordinated online abuse, and hate campaigns increasingly translate into real-world risks.
- Access to information: Barriers to official information, press briefings, and public records undermine fair and accurate election coverage.

As the election approaches, we propose the NCP 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 endorsing or justifying the misuse of criminal, national-security, or counter-terrorism laws against journalists for their reporting or commentary.
- Reject rhetoric or ideological labelling that places journalists at risk.
- Respect editorial independence and the right of journalists to cover political movements, protests, and public institutions without obstruction.



Committee to Protect Journalists

- Support transparency by promoting fair access to information and engagement with the press throughout the campaign period.

Freedom of expression and of the press are guaranteed under Article 39 of Bangladesh's Constitution and under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Bangladesh is a state party. These protections apply irrespective of political affiliation or electoral outcome.

CPJ urges the NCP to make clear commitments to strengthen press freedom and to contribute to a safer, more open environment for journalism during this critical democratic moment.

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

Sincerely,

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