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Freedom on the Net 2025 - Bangladesh



Key Developments, June 1, 2024 – May 31, 2025

Internet freedom improved significantly in Bangladesh after a student-led uprising resulted in the ouster of longtime Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League (AL) government. The interim government that assumed power in August 2024 enacted some positive reforms and ended a number of repressive practices, though the AL and its perceived supporters faced a concerning pattern of retaliation during the coverage period.

- The AL government carried out a brutal crackdown against student-led protests, which began in June 2024 and were organized in part on social media.¹ Authorities imposed internet shutdowns,² arbitrarily arrested protesters, and engaged in indiscriminate violence that contributed to the deaths of more than a thousand people by the time AL leaders fled the country in early August (A3, B8, C3, and C7).³
- The interim government appointed Muhammad Emdad-Ul-Bari as the new chair of the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) in September 2024.⁴ He pursued policy changes to prevent internet shutdowns and pledged to treat internet access as a human rights concern (A5).⁵
- In May 2025, the interim government repealed the Cyber Security Act (CSA), a draconian framework for internet censorship, and issued the Cyber Security Ordinance (CSO), which featured some positive provisions, including safeguards against harassment and sexual exploitation online. However, the CSO retained concerning rules related to content removal, criminal penalties for online speech, and surveillance (B3, C2, and C5).⁶
- The interim government took a series of retaliatory measures against the AL. Prosecutors obtained a court ruling in December 2024 that prohibited the online dissemination of former Prime Minister Hasina’s speeches,⁷ and in May 2025 the government banned all AL party activities under an antiterrorism law (B2 and B4).⁸
- In the aftermath of the uprising, security forces arbitrarily arrested hundreds of people based on their real or perceived support for the AL, including online journalists who were seen as friendly to the AL government.⁹ Others were detained in connection with their social media activities (C3).¹⁰

Political Overview

Before its ouster in August 2024, the AL had ruled the country for 15 years, maintaining control by harassing political opponents and co-opting state institutions. The new interim government, which had the backing of the military and student protesters, was led by Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus. It moved to reopen political and civic space and began to reform state institutions, but violence and political retribution remained problems.

*This report has been abridged for Freedom on the Net 2025 due to **ongoing budget constraints**. Please consider making a **donation** to support future editions of this vital resource.*

*For additional background information, see last year's **full report**.*

A Obstacles to Access

A1 0-6 pts

| | |
|---|--------------|
| Do infrastructural limitations restrict access to the internet or the speed and quality of internet connections? | 3 / 6 |
|---|--------------|

A2 0-3 pts

| | |
|--|--------------|
| Is access to the internet prohibitively expensive or beyond the reach of certain segments of the population for geographical, social, or other reasons? | 1 / 3 |
|--|--------------|

A3 0-6 pts

| | |
|---|--------------|
| Does the government exercise technical or legal control over internet infrastructure for the purposes of restricting connectivity? | 2 / 6 |
|---|--------------|

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 because the AL government repeatedly imposed internet shutdowns during the student-led uprising, including an 11-day restriction on mobile internet service in July 2024. [11](#)

A4 0-6 pts

| | |
|---|--------------|
| Are there legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles that restrict the diversity of service providers? | 4 / 6 |
|---|--------------|

A5 0-4 pts

| | |
|---|--------------|
| Do national regulatory bodies that oversee service providers and digital technology fail to operate in a free, fair, and independent manner? | 2 / 4 |
|---|--------------|

Score Change: The score improved from 1 to 2 because decisions made by the BTRC's new leadership better protected internet freedom, particularly with respect to internet shutdowns. [12](#)

B Limits on Content

B1 0-6 pts

Does the state block or filter, or compel service providers to block or filter, internet content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards?

3 /
6

B2 0-4 pts

Do state or nonstate actors employ legal, administrative, or other means to force publishers, content hosts, or digital platforms to delete content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards?

2 /
4

B3 0-4 pts

Do restrictions on the internet and digital content lack transparency, proportionality to the stated aims, or an independent appeals process?

2 /
4

Score Change: The score improved from 1 to 2 because the CSO, which included problematic provisions for the blocking of online content, was nevertheless more transparent and offered more avenues for appeal than the previous legal framework. [13](#)

B4 0-4 pts

Do online journalists, commentators, and ordinary users practice self-censorship?

2 / 4

Score Change: The score improved from 1 to 2 because of an opening in the online environment since the ouster of Sheikh Hasina's government, [14](#) though a degree of self-censorship persisted among supporters of the AL. [15](#)

B5 0-4 pts

Are online sources of information controlled or manipulated by the government or other powerful actors to advance a particular political interest?

2 /
4

The score improved from 1 to 2 because the interim government did not appear to have engaged in domestic influence operations to distort online content, though pro-AL networks were active in manipulating information during and after the uprising. [16](#)

B6 0-3 pts

Are there economic or regulatory constraints that negatively affect users' ability to publish content online?

2 /
3

B7 0-4 pts

Does the online information landscape lack diversity and reliability?

3 / 4

B8 0-6 pts

Do conditions impede users' ability to mobilize, form communities, and campaign, particularly on political and social issues?

4 /
6

C Violations of User Rights

C1 0-6 pts

Do the constitution or other laws fail to protect rights such as freedom of expression, access to information, and press freedom, including on the internet, and are they enforced by a judiciary that lacks independence? | 2 / 6

C2 0-4 pts

Are there laws that assign criminal penalties or civil liability for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards? | 1 / 4

Score Change: The score improved from 0 to 1 because of the repeal of the CSA, which prescribed severe penalties related to online speech, though the new CSO retained an overbroad “cyber terrorism” provision that carried significant criminal penalties.¹⁷

C3 0-6 pts

Are individuals penalized for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards? | 2 / 6

C4 0-4 pts

Does the government place restrictions on anonymous communication or encryption? | 2 / 4

C5 0-6 pts

Does state surveillance of internet activities infringe on users’ right to privacy? | 1 / 6

C6 0-6 pts

Does monitoring and collection of user data by service providers and other technology companies infringe on users’ right to privacy? | 2 / 6

C7 0-5 pts

Are individuals subject to extralegal intimidation or physical violence by state authorities or any other actor in relation to their online activities? | 1 / 5

C8 0-3 pts

Are websites, governmental and private entities, service providers, or individual users subject to widespread hacking and other forms of cyberattack? | 2 / 3

Score Change: The score improved from 1 to 2 because there were no public reports of cyberattacks against media outlets or civil society organizations during the coverage period.

Footnotes

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- 7Julhas Alam, “Bangladesh court bans publication of speeches by ousted Prime Minister Hasina,” AP, December 5, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/bangladesh-hasina-yunus-speech-ban-media-eba...>
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