

The Report of the Media Reform Commission
22 March 2025

The Report of the Media Reform Commission

22 March 2025

The Content

Serial	Title (Subject)	Page
	Introduction to the Commission	7
	Signature	10
	Commission's Scope of Work and Procedures	11
	Acknowledgements	12
	List of Officers/Employees Providing Secretarial Assistance to the Media Reform Commission	13
	Executive Summary	15
1	Preface	19
2	The Historical Journey of Media in Independent Bangladesh	22
2.1	Legacy and the new journey in the independent country	22
2.2	Silencing Voices under One-Party Rule	23
2.3	The Era of Military Rule	24
2.4	Return to Democracy and Liberalization of Media	25
2.5	The Era of Anarchy	27
2.6	Post-Student-People's Uprising Period	29
3	Who Owns the Media?	35
3.1	Major Corporate Entities	35
3.2	Ownership of FM Radio	40
4	Scope and Challenges of Mass Media	44
4.1	Newspapers	44
4.2	Private Television Channels	52
4.2.1	Allegiance and Sycophancy vs. Broadcast Policy	54
4.2.2	Reluctance to Form a Broadcast Commission	58
4.2.3	Broadcast Policy and Freedom of Journalism	60
4.2.4	Phantom TRP	60
4.2.5	Cable Operator and DTH System	61

4.3	Online News Portals	62
4.4	FM Radio	65
4.5	Private News Agencies	66
5	Regulatory Framework for Mass Media	68
5.1	Penal Code, 1860 (Sections 499, 500, 501 & 502 Defamation)	69
5.2	Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898	69
5.3	From the ICT Act to DSA and CSA	69
5.4	Official Secrets Act, 1923	70
5.5	Press Council Act, 1974	70
5.6	Contempt of Court Act, 1926	71
5.7	Review of Laws Related to Incitement	71
5.8	Right to Information Act, 2009	72
5.9	Blocking or Removal of Information/Data	72
5.10	Review of the National Broadcast Policy, 2014	72
5.11	Review of the National Online Media Policy, 2017	72
5.12	The Printing Presses and Publications (Declaration and Registration) Act, 1973	73
5.13	Journalism Safety Act	73
6	Public Perception and Expectations about Media	75
7	The State Broadcasting Media	77
7.1	Bangladesh Television (BTV)	77
7.1.1	From State Media to Propaganda Machine	79
7.1.2	Bureaucratic Influence	81
7.1.3	Corruption and Lack of Transparency	82
7.2	Bangladesh Betar (Radio) from the Concept of Public Service Broadcaster	82
7.2.1	Farce regarding Betar's autonomy law	84
7.2.2	Irregularities in the Recruitment Process and Political Interference	84
7.3	Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS)	85

7.3.1	More Non-Journalists in BSS	87
7.3.2	New Challenges	88
7.3.3	Experiences of Other Countries	88
	Advertising Standards, Misuse, and Market Control Attempts in Mass	90
8	Media	
9	Efforts to Create a Climate of Fear in the Mass Media	93
10	How is Media Sustainability Possible?	95
10.1	Profit-Loss Scenario	95
10.2	Political Influence and Group Interests	97
10.3	What is the Way Forward?	97
11	Self-regulation: Proposed Bangladesh Media Commission	99
11.1	Bangladesh Press Council	99
11.1.1	Broadcast Policy and Authority	100
11.1.2	Media Accountability and Regulations: Examples of Global Best Practices	100
12	Eligibility to be a Media Owner, Editor, and Journalist	104
12.1	Editorial Institution	104
12.2	The Question of Journalists' Eligibility	105
12.3	Editor with Reasonable Qualifications?	106
12.4	Conditions for Media Ownership	107
13	The Government Training and Research Institutions	109
13.1	Press Institute Bangladesh (PIB)	109
13.2	National Institute of Mass Communication (NIMCO)	111
13.2.1	NIMCO's Scope of Work	113
13.2.3	NIMCO's Research Activities	114
13.3	Bangladesh Cinema and Television Institute	114
14	Financial Security and Labor Law for Journalists and Media Employees	115
15	Actions Required to Achieve Gender Equality in Media	121
16	Creating Equal Opportunities for Indigenous and Disabled Populations	123

16.1	Disabled and Special Needs Population	124
16.2	Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Media	125
17	Risks of Misinformation/Disinformation	127
17.1	Bangladesh Scenario	128
18	Actions to Expand Media Literacy in Bangladesh	132
19	Media Misuse and Unethical Journalism	133
20	Accountability and Questionable Journalism	137
20.1	The Way Journalism Became Questionable	139
20.2	News Presentation Style and the Mental Health of Readers and Viewers	143
21	Recommendations	144

INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMISSION

The Members are not listed in order of seniority.

Kamal Ahmed is head of the Media Reform Commission and works independently with various national and international media outlets. His columns are regularly published in the country's leading Bengali and English newspapers. He has also served as a consultant for the International Truth and Justice Project. Previously, he was the Consulting Editor of *Prothom Alo*, Senior Producer at BBC New Media and BBC World Service, Editor of BBC Bangla, South Asia Analyst at BBC World Service, and BBC's Dhaka Correspondent. He also served as a consultant for UN Radio and initiated its Bengali broadcasts in 2012.

Shamsul Huq Zahid is the editor and chief executive of The Financial Express, the country's first and leading business daily. He represents the Editors' Council in the Media Reform Commission. Zahid has been working in journalism for 52 years. He previously worked for a long time at the now-defunct English dailies Morning News and Bangladesh Times. He also served as the Executive Editor of the weekly Dhaka Courier. Zahid led various journalistic organizations.

Kamrunnesa Hasan is a well-known name in Bangladeshi television. She began her career as a radio announcer in 1967 while still in college. After completing her Master's in

Dr. Gitiara Nasreen is a Professor and former Chair of the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at the University of Dhaka. After completing her undergraduate and postgraduate degrees at the University of Dhaka, she earned an MA in Communication on a fellowship from the East-West Center at the University of Hawaii and an MA and PhD. Degrees in Political Science. She has been a fellow at the University of British Columbia, the University of Padova, and the Library of Congress, and was a Fulbright Scholar at Howard University.

Akhtar Hossain Khan began his career in journalism as a student at *the Pakistan Observer* newspaper. He joined government service in 1974. He held diverse roles: Sub-divisional Administrator, Deputy Commissioner, Commercial Counselor in an embassy, Director General of Social Services, and Managing Director of Biman (Bangladesh Airlines). He later served as Secretary in the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, the Planning Division, and the President's Secretariat. After retirement, he worked as a consultant for the World Bank, ADB (Asian Development Bank), and the European Investment Bank in Dhaka. He is a part-time consultant for the Newspaper Owners Association of Bangladesh. He translated poet Sudhindranath Dutta's autobiography, the *World of Twilight*, into Bengali.

Anjan Chowdhury is a successful Bangladeshi entrepreneur, widely known for his visionary leadership and belief in dynamism and empowerment as keys to

Sociology from the University of Dhaka, she joined Bangladesh Television as a producer in 1980 and retired in 2009 as Deputy Director General. She received several awards for women's empowerment from the cultural group Prokashpat in 1986 and the Inner Wheel District in 2009. She was on the cover story in the *Japan International* magazine during her NHK training in Japan in 1996. In 2008, she represented Bangladesh's cultural delegation at the Asian Youth Cultural Competition in Shenzhen, China. Besides writing, she also published an edited book. After retirement, she served as a consultant in BRAC's education program.

He actively participated in the Liberation War of 1971 and was one of the 13,500 individuals selected and trained as commandos at the Chakrata Cantonment in Dehradun, India. He currently serves as the Managing Director of Maasranga Television, President of the Aviation Operators Association of Bangladesh (AOAB) and the Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO), Vice President of the Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA), and Director of Square Group. He received the National Sports Award in 2009 as the best organizer for his exceptional contribution to sports. He is also a prominent film producer and was awarded the National Film Award for Best Producer by the Government of Bangladesh for *Monpura* (2010) and *Bishwoshundori* (2020).

Syed Abdal Ahmed is the Executive Editor of the daily *Amar Desh*. He began his journalism career at *Dainik Bangla*, serving in various roles until its closure in 1997. A career spanning nearly 40 years, he has also worked with BSS, *Bichitra*, *Dinkal*, *Janakantha*, and other publications. He was the former General Secretary of the National Press Club and a permanent member of the Bangla Academy. He authored 20 books and has received the prestigious Philips Award and the ESCAP-FEJB Award for investigative reporting.

Fahim Ahmed formally began his career at *Jajaidin*, followed by *Dainik Arthaniti* and *Jugantor* roles. In 2003, he joined the private television channel NTV. Since then, he has remained in the television industry, working at *Desh TV*, Channel One, Channel 24, and *Jamuna Television*. Over 28 years in journalism, he held roles from trainee and feature reporter to newsroom editor, news editor, and Chief News Editor. He is currently the Chief Executive of *Jamuna Television* and a trustee of the Bangladesh Broadcast Journalist Center (BBJC).

Jimi Amir began her journalism career at *Amader Shomoy* and started her television journalism journey at Channel One in 2008. She later worked as a Staff Reporter, Senior Reporter, and Joint News Editor at *Banglavision*, *Independent TV*, Channel 24, and *Bangla TV*. She also served as a news

Mostafa Shabuj holds a bachelor's in Sociology and pursued higher studies at the South Asian University (SAU) in New Delhi, India, on a scholarship. After completing his two-year Master's program, he began his professional career in 2017 as the *Bogura Correspondent* for the national English daily

and program presenter. From 2017 to 2020, she worked as Joint News Editor at the news portal sarabangla.net. In 2022, she was the Head of Business News at Channel Nine. Since 2023, she has served as a Project Officer at Deutsche Welle Akademie in Germany. Since August 2024, she has been the Convener of the journalist rights organization Media Support Network (MSN).

Titu Datta Gupta began his journalism career as an intern during his student years and has worked regularly in news agencies and newspapers since 1991. Starting as a general reporter, he later moved into business and economic reporting, eventually taking on various newsroom supervisory roles. He is currently a Deputy Editor at the English daily *The Business Standard*. His previous work experience includes *New Age*, *Kaler Kantho*, *The New Nation*, *The Independent*, and the news agency UNB.

The Daily Star. Writing since childhood, he focused on the lives of marginalized communities in northern Bangladesh. Alongside reporting, he regularly writes columns on contemporary issues concerning farmers and agriculture in *The Daily Star*.

Md. Abdullah Al Mamun is a member of the Media Reform Commission as a student representative on the Commission. He is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Journalism and Media Studies at Jahangirnagar University. He became involved in journalism soon after enrolling at the university in 2020. He previously worked as the Jahangirnagar University Correspondent for DBC Television and is currently the university correspondent for *Prothom Alo* and the General Secretary of the Jahangirnagar University Journalists' Association. While covering the anti-discrimination student movement in 2024, he was assaulted by police in the line of duty.

Signatures

The Commission's Scope and Procedures

The Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has established the Media Reform Commission to propose necessary Reform to make the country's media independent, robust, and objective. In its first meeting, the Commission defined the following scope and procedures:

Scope:

1. The Commission will review the current state of all forms of media, including newspapers, government and private television and radio, news agencies, and news-based online portals.
2. This review aims to identify obstacles and barriers to independent journalism.
3. The Commission will assess the nature and extent of formal or informal pressure or threats from government, private, or interest groups that influence or seek to control the media and journalism.
4. It will identify laws that hinder independent journalism and explore ways to address them.
5. The Commission will seek to ensure a competitive media environment that delivers diverse content, news, and opinions to readers, listeners, and viewers, while preventing the concentration of media power in the hands of a few entities.
6. It will determine measures for establishing editorial policies that raise journalistic standards to the highest ethical level. It will also propose ways to ensure transparency within media institutions and to avoid conflicts of interest.
7. The Commission will outline potential steps for creating an effective system of self-regulation or an independent supervisory body to ensure the accountability of journalists and media organizations.

Procedure:

1. Conducting a national mass media survey to gauge public opinion, the most important segment of stakeholders.
2. Having consultations with various stakeholders, including owners, editors, journalists, and professionals.
3. Exchange meetings at the divisional level outside Dhaka with district representatives.
4. Reviewing ownership, objectives, and ideals of mass media organizations, as well as their business sustainability and vested interests through the review of government documents.
5. Identifying deviations regarding compliance with government policies and laws.

Acknowledgements

The Media Reform Commission extends its heartfelt gratitude to civil society, various stakeholders, organizations, and institutions nationwide for the invaluable support received while carrying out its responsibility to draft Reform proposals for an independent, objective, and robust media.

The Commission is thankful to all who provided their opinions, both online and offline, whether individually or on behalf of organizations or institutions. Their insights have significantly enriched this report. The Commission also owes a debt of gratitude to those who participated in the national public opinion survey on media Reform.

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics played a vital role in this process through their dedicated efforts, which provided, for the first time, an understanding of the relevance of media in the country, its credibility, and the public's expectations from the media.

Special recognition goes to journalist-researcher Md. Abul Kalam Azad for his outstanding contribution as the lead researcher for this report. The Commission is also indebted to several professionals who voluntarily offered their services supporting this initiative.

Internationally, the Commission sincerely thanks UNESCO, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), and other international organizations that extended their cooperation.

Finally, the Commission is deeply grateful to the officials and staff of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting for their tireless efforts throughout this process.

List of Officers and Staff Who Provided Secretarial Support to the Media Reform Commission:

1. Mr. Kazi Ziaul Baset, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka.
2. Mr. Md. Sayem Hossain, Senior Information Officer, Department of Information, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka.
3. Mr. Saiful Islam, Programmer, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka.
4. Mr. Md. Rashidul Karim, Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka.
5. Mr. Md. Walul Haque, Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka.
6. Ms. Morzina Yasmin, Assistant Director, Department of Films and Publications, Dhaka.
7. Mr. Md. Abdul Momin, Assistant Director, Department of Films and Publications, Dhaka.
8. Mahmuda Shiuli Akter, Assistant Director, Department of Films and Publications, Dhaka.

9. Mr. Md. Yusuf Ali, Administrative Officer, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka.
10. Mr. Md. Lutfur Rahman, Editorial Assistant, Press Institute Bangladesh (PIB), Dhaka.
11. Mr. Jamal Uddin, Staff Writer, Department of Films and Publications, Dhaka.
12. Mr. Md. Nazrul Islam, Chief Assistant, Department of Information, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka.
13. Mr. Md. Shahadat Hossain Hawlader, Stenographer-cum-Computer Operator, Department of Films and Publications, Dhaka.
14. Mr. Bashir Ahmed, Steno-Typist-cum-Computer Operator, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka.
15. Unnati Baroi, Steno-Typist-cum-Computer Operator, Department of Mass Communication, Dhaka.
16. Mr. Shipu Akter, Office Assistant-cum-Computer Typist, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka.
17. Mr. Md. Mizanur Rahman, Office Assistant-cum-Computer Typist, Department of Films and Publications, Dhaka.
18. Mr. Md. Aminul Islam, Office Assistant-cum-Computer Typist, Department of Films and Publications, Dhaka.
19. Mr. Md. Shamim, Office Assistant-cum-Computer Typist, Department of Films and Publications, Dhaka.
20. Mr. Masud Alam, Copy Holder, Department of Films and Publications, Dhaka.
21. Mr. Robiul Sarker, Office Assistant-cum-Computer Typist, Department of Mass Communication, Dhaka.
22. Mr. Mofazzal Hossain, Driver, Department of Mass Communication, Dhaka.
23. Mr. Md. Afzal Hossain, Dispatch Rider, Department of Films and Publications, Dhaka.
24. Mr. Shafiqul Islam, Driver, Bangladesh Film Archive, Dhaka.
25. Mr. Md. Bakul Hossain, Office Assistant, Department of Films and Publications, Dhaka.
26. Mr. Md. Hasanur Rahman, Office Assistant, Department of Films and Publications, Dhaka.

Executive Summary

The role played by the media during the public uprising in July sparked public outrage. In this context, the Media Reform Commission conducted a survey to understand public expectations of the media. Conducted through the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) in January–February this year, the survey was the first national-level study of media consumers in Bangladesh. It revealed that 68 out of every 100 people want the media to be independent, while 60% expect impartial and unbiased journalism. People also want media that are free from government, political, and corporate influence—objective media that meet the needs of the general public and are free from yellow journalism. Additionally, 38% of respondents believe that the media in Bangladesh is not independent.

When asked why the media lacks independence, 79% of respondents cited political interference, 72% mentioned government intervention, and 50% pointed to the influence of influential individuals. Many also noted that journalists' interests, the business motives of media owners, and pressure from advertisers are contributing factors.

These expectations are not unrealistic. It is the media's responsibility to fulfill them. The failure of the media to live up to these expectations is reflected in the survey results, which also provide insight into the reasons behind this failure.

Although individual media outlets have made some progress, the overall development of an independent media landscape in Bangladesh remains stagnant. No past government has made serious efforts to foster a healthy media environment, and in the past 15 years, the situation has worsened significantly.

The main barriers to developing a free, responsible, and strong media in Bangladesh are legal, institutional, and financial. Additional issues include ownership concentration and a lack of supportive government policy. Legal and institutional Reform are essential, and ownership structures must be altered to ensure financial success and trustworthy information flow.

Ownership Crisis

Over the past three decades, most media expansion has occurred through private investment. However, little scrutiny has been placed on the sources of that investment. As a result, political influence has deeply penetrated the media. Business groups have used media to protect their interests and have influenced editorial policies to align with the ruling party's narratives. The same group often owns multiple newspapers, TV channels, radio stations, and online platforms, leading to the concentration of influence and diminishing fair competition, credibility, and financial sustainability.

Regulation of media ownership is necessary. To prevent the abuse of single ownership, mid-to-large media enterprises should be directed toward public listing, with limits placed on shareholding by founding directors and their families, similar to rules in the banking sector. Many countries have taken steps to prevent media concentration under single ownership. Bangladesh must consider adopting a 'One House, One Media' policy to ensure diversity and neutrality.

Joint ownership models have proven more sustainable and successful in maintaining editorial independence, an essential element for media success.

Legal Reform

Though press freedom is guaranteed in the Constitution, certain vague and unreasonable restrictions remain. Outdated colonial-era laws, as well as new laws, continue to restrict journalistic freedom. As a result, journalists often face state repression. Influential political figures, government agencies, and intelligence services have all sought to control the media to serve their interests.

Key laws that need Reform include the Penal Code (1860), the Criminal Procedure Code (1898), the Official Secrets Act (1923), the Contempt of Court Act (1926), and the Cyber Security Act (2023). The interim government has proposed replacing the Cyber Security Act with a Cyber Protection Act, though rights activists and legal experts have expressed concerns about its provisions.

Journalists in Bangladesh face harassment and physical attacks while exercising their right to free expression. The lack of justice in the high-profile murder of journalist couple Sagar and Runi over a decade ago has reinforced a sense of impunity. A legal framework to protect journalistic freedom is essential to global best practices.

The Media Reform Commission has included a draft ordinance on the Protection of Journalism in this report and recommends its swift enactment.

Media Accountability and Self-Regulation

All forms of media should be brought under a unified, independent supervisory body. The existing Press Council for print and news agencies and the proposed Broadcast Commission for electronic and online media can be merged into a new “Bangladesh Media Commission.” This institution should be free from government control and ensure accountability in line with global best practices through self-regulation. It should be financially autonomous, funded by a small portion of media revenues, similar to the model used in India. Government grants may be accepted, but only if they are unconditional.

The commission should prevent individuals convicted of criminal offenses or loan defaulters from owning or editing media outlets. It would also be responsible for drafting and enforcing journalist codes of conduct, setting minimum educational qualifications for journalists, maintaining a national register of working journalists, and issuing licenses for broadcast and online media.

A draft law to establish this institution is included in this report.

Given the oversaturation of media outlets and rising educated unemployment, journalist salaries and benefits are declining or becoming uncertain. The Commission recommends setting an entry-level standard wage for all full-time journalists across the country, equal to the basic pay of a Grade 9 government officer, adjusted annually for inflation. It also suggests eliminating pay

disparities between journalists working inside and outside Dhaka and proposes housing allowances, pensions, and gratuities for journalists.

Institutional Problems

Bangladesh's media landscape's dramatic growth and transformation over the past two to three decades have been largely unplanned. Attempts to adapt to global realities have been disorganized and tainted by authoritarian political agendas. There is a severe shortage of skilled professionals, and journalistic standards are declining. Existing government-run training institutions are inadequate in terms of both number and quality.

Regulatory institutions under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting have also failed. For example, the Department of Films and Publications (DFP) has not been able to verify the actual circulation numbers of print newspapers. DFP's media list includes 590 Dhaka-based newspapers with a combined reported circulation of nearly 20 million per day, while actual sales across the country rarely exceed one million.

The outdated Printing Presses and Publications (Declaration and Registration) Act has allowed district administrators to issue declarations for thousands of nominal newspapers, creating many problems.

Financial Crisis

Financial independence is a prerequisite for media freedom. Historically, Bangladesh's media have never been fully financially self-reliant. A limited advertising market now supports intense competition between traditional and digital media. Print newspaper circulation is declining rapidly, and broadcast media are losing their audience. Advertising revenue is also dropping. Though online readership is growing, but revenue is not.

Media owners claim that no outlet is currently profitable. Even previously successful newspapers are now cutting costs. The same is true for private TV and radio channels.

Though newspapers are recognized as an industry, they receive little policy support. The high corporate tax rate (27.5%) threatens to cripple the sector. The government should remove advance taxes and import duties on newsprint.

The Commission recommends merging two public institutions—Press Institute Bangladesh (PIB) and the National Institute of Mass Communication (NIMCO)—into an intensive national media training and research institute.

To qualify for government advertising, newspapers must be listed with the DFP and meet minimum circulation requirements. However, the current verification process is opaque and corrupt. Actual circulation should be determined based on sales and payment receipts. Making income tax return submissions mandatory would also help determine real circulation figures and ensure transparency in advertising distribution.

The state-owned TV and radio have failed to function as public service broadcasters. These institutions could be merged under one umbrella with two branches, maximizing shared resources and expertise, as seen with the BBC and Deutsche Welle.

BSS, the state-owned news agency, is also losing relevance due to political interference, nepotism, and corruption. However, its newsroom has potential. BSS could serve as the news division within a unified national broadcaster.

The proposed National Broadcasting Corporation, formed by merging these three entities, would remain state-funded but should also explore its revenue streams, including reintroducing a television license fee. Many European countries, including the UK, fund public broadcasting this way.

The Media Reform Commission believes that regardless of how many reform proposals are implemented, true media freedom ultimately depends on financial sustainability. Financially independent media organizations can exercise editorial freedom and survive adverse conditions, a reality already demonstrated in Bangladesh.

Government policy support, well-thought-out business models, and innovation are essential for sustainable growth of the media. Additional recommendations have been made to promote transparent investments in creative and new media ventures of all sizes.

Preface

We begin by paying tribute and expressing our deepest gratitude to the martyrs of the heroic student-led uprising in July-August 2024 that, after nearly a decade and a half of authoritarian rule, created an opportunity for media Reform and the restoration of press freedom and freedom of expression in a previously stifled nation. We solemnly remember the proud sacrifice of five journalists who gave their lives during this movement. Our empathy extends to the thousands who bear this transformative struggle's physical and emotional scars.

The interim government formed through this mass movement tasked the Media Reform Commission with a profound responsibility: to identify a way out of the media's disorientation during the long, undemocratic misrule. The Commission was established by a government notification on November 18, 2024, to propose Reform for a free, robust, and objective media. It held its first meeting on November 19, where it defined its mandate and purpose.

The Commission had two historical precedents to look back on: the first Press Commission report of 1984 and the 1997 Commission on the autonomy of Bangladesh Television (BTV) and Bangladesh Betar. The 1984 commission, led by former Prime Minister Aaur Rahman Khan, included eminent editors such as Obaidul Haque, Shamsur Rahaman, Enayetullah Khan, Mainul Hossein, Ahmedul Kabir, and Ahmed Humayun—all of whom have since passed away. The 1997 commission, chaired by former secretary Asafuddoula, included senior editors, broadcasters, and cultural figures.

Those commissions had over a year to conduct their reviews and consult stakeholders. The broadcast commission even visited countries like the UK and India to study their systems. In contrast, within 120 days, this commission had to analyze a vastly more complex and diversified media landscape deeply.

In 1982, only a dozen dailies were published in Dhaka, and the total number of newspapers and magazines across the country stood at 604. Today, the number stands at 3,270, including 1,371 in Dhaka. The Department of Films and Publications (DFP) has 1,340 registered dailies. Before 1997, Bangladesh had no private television or radio; now, there are 53 approved private TV channels (about 40 active) and 28 licensed FM radio stations (with about 20 broadcasting regularly)—online portals, once unimaginable, now number 228 registered and over 3,000 unregistered.

Despite this explosion in media outlets, audiences are still deprived of accurate, objective reporting, impartial analysis, and representation of diverse viewpoints. There are exceptions, but they have not been strong enough to shift the overall trend. The ruling authoritarian Awami League and its allies have systemically repressed dissenting voices and rewarded sycophants, fostering an environment where conformity thrived and courage was punished. While loyalists were empowered with unchecked control, courageous journalists faced enforced disappearances, murders, arrests, and various forms of harassment.

In a country where every other investor must declare the source of their capital, media owners face no such obligation, opening the door to undisclosed or illicit funding. While the media

routinely investigates the assets of politicians, bureaucrats, and business elites, the financial and ownership transparency of media outlets themselves is virtually nonexistent. The media publishes stories on labor rights in the garment sector and others, yet provides no platform for resolving its own journalists' grievances.

The media landscape in Bangladesh is a paradox. On the one hand, legacy media is losing relevance, suffering revenue declines, and experiencing financial strain. Conversely, the allure of influence continues to attract new players, often backed by vested interests. As political and elite interference grows, journalism has become more insecure and uncertain. Bangladesh's media now stands at a historic crossroads, shaped by decades of military and civilian authoritarianism and fleeting, fragile democracy.

Without true democracy and the rule of law, fostering a transparent and competitive media environment or building strong institutions that enable objective and independent journalism is impossible. To find a way forward, the Commission prioritized understanding public expectations. During the first week of the year 2025, a national media survey, conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics gathered opinions from over 45,000 people. The findings offer valuable insights into changing news consumption habits and public perceptions, forming a key basis for Reform.

The Commission also held dialogues with stakeholders such as publishers, editors, journalists, and professionals from other sectors. Meetings were held with representatives of major journalist unions and associations, including the Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists, Dhaka Union of Journalists, Dhaka Reporters' Unity, Sub-Editors' Council, Photojournalists' Association, Women Journalists' Forum, and the National Press Club. Nine meetings were held outside Dhaka, including in divisional cities and hill districts, involving 1,026 participants. In total, 45 consultation sessions were held with 1,401 individuals.

We examined global best practices in media transformation, journalistic ethics, accountability, and self-regulation. We objectively reviewed the 54-year evolution of Bangladeshi media, grounding our evaluations in complex data. Hundreds of government records were scrutinized to trace the development and operations of media organizations over time. This demanding process was made possible with sincere cooperation from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and its affiliated departments and agencies.

Some stakeholders wanted the Commission to weigh in on the court-pending issue of implementing the latest wage board for newspapers. However, our official mandate is limited to ensuring strong, independent, and objective journalism. Still, recognizing that "money is the root of all misfortune," the financial stability of media and journalists has been an unavoidable focus.

Quoting a public policy analyst, we acknowledge that there is no perfect model for media economics before us. What is evident, however, is that unchecked dark money and abuse of the media's influential power for personal, group, or political gain are pushing the press toward chaos and dysfunction. A transparent and competitive environment is essential for healthy and ethical media to serve the public good.

News is primarily a public service, not a commercial product meant only for profit. While it may not always be profitable, it must be managed sustainably. The current business model must be reformed boldly and courageously.

Another major obstacle to objective and independent journalism is the abuse of power. Those in power often misuse laws and policies to silence dissent and favor political, financial, or social loyalists. Over the past 15 years, repressive laws and government regulations have been used to crush criticism and nurture favoritism. Legal Reform is essential to dismantle these structures and ensure journalistic rights.

Accountability in media should rest with readers, viewers, and listeners. If media organizations voluntarily uphold transparency, explain decisions, acknowledge mistakes, and issue corrections, the need for government interference is minimized. A system of self-regulation, free from government influence, must be established to protect media independence.

The Commission also faced limitations. Letters were sent to all registered and active political parties seeking their views on media reform, but few responded. However, it is encouraging that some major parties have pledged to support a journalism protection law.

Several media outlets accused of collaborating with the fallen regime continue to operate without acknowledging or apologising for their role. The interim government did not sanction them, and some individuals from the movement have joined these outlets in senior roles. The Commission's invitation to license holders of such television outlets to reflect on their past sparked criticism and resistance from some quarters. As a result, the Commission could not hear from them about their current stance, particularly from those who received licenses by pledging to promote the ruling party's agenda.

The sole purpose of the Commission's recommendations is to fulfill the national aspiration for a free, vibrant, independent, and accountable media that supports democracy and the rule of law. The Commission hopes the interim government—and the next elected administration—will take the necessary steps to realize that goal.

The Historical Journey of Media in Independent Bangladesh

The phrase "newspapers are the mirror of society" is often used. Still, the reality of a country's media landscape is a reliable indicator of the nature of the state itself—whether it is democratic, autocratic, monarchical, authoritarian, or under a one-party regime. The media journey of Bangladesh over the past 54 years is no exception. The media's character, objectives, and behavior have changed significantly with each power transfer. A chronological analysis reveals distinct phases in the development of the press, including two short periods when it enjoyed relative freedom.

The first phase of media freedom was brief, lasting about two years after independence. The second phase occurred after the restoration of democracy in the 1990s. The situation between these two periods was rather bleak. From 1973 to 1975 and from 1982 to 1990, media freedom was severely curtailed, and consistent efforts were made to impose strict controls. However, during the 1975–1982 period, the media did have limited opportunities to exercise their rights.

Following the restoration of democracy in 1990, Bangladesh witnessed a similar pattern: first a gradual liberalization, followed by new and innovative control methods. The situation deteriorated so much that for the last one decade and a half, Bangladesh's position in global media freedom indices declined steadily, now ranking 165th out of 180 countries. In 2021, Reporters without Borders (RSF) included Bangladesh's fallen autocrat Sheikh Hasina alongside Russian President Putin, Chinese President Xi, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in its list of "Press Freedom Predators."

At various times, governments have used incentives and repressive tactics to ensure media loyalty. These include controlling publication and broadcast licenses; imposing import duties on printing materials and broadcasting equipment; allocating government advertisements; delaying payment for advertisements; restricting access to government institutions and events; interfering with editorial decisions under the guise of formal or informal "consultations"; using laws to issue indirect threats and harassment; and in some cases, resorting to violence.

Immediately after independence, the government implemented a quota system on locally produced newsprint under the pretext of high foreign export demand. In the following years, as newspapers became increasingly dependent on imported newsprint, this quota system became a tool for influencing editorial policy. Political allies were given extra allocations, which enabled unethical profiteering in the black market. Government advertisement became a standard method of rewarding loyalty.

2.1 Legacy and New Journey in an Independent Nation

The first few years of governance in newly independent Bangladesh were chaotic and crisis-ridden. Alongside political instability, the government's policy toward the media was inconsistent and contradictory. Given the media's significant role in the liberation struggle against autocratic rule and West Pakistani exploitation, the sector shared the euphoria of

newfound independence. Many newspapers and magazines that had ceased publication during the Pakistani military crackdown resumed operations. Those newspapers that continued publishing during the war saw their owners flee to Pakistan, go into hiding, or have their editors removed. A notable exception was *The Bangladesh Observer*, owned by former Pakistani minister Hamidul Haq Chowdhury. Its editor, Abdus Salam, retained his position under the new government. However, he lost his job in early 1972 after writing an editorial titled "*The Supreme Test*," which called for forming a national government.

Due to the widespread urge for vengeance against collaborators of the Pakistani army, destruction of infrastructure and industries that caused massive unemployment, and shortages of food and essential goods, law and order deteriorated significantly. Public lynching became a near-daily occurrence. Frustrated by the government's failure to prevent violent deaths across the country, journalist Nirmal Sen wrote an article titled "*We Demand a Guarantee of Natural Death*" on March 14, 1973, in the state-run *Dainik Bangla*, holding the government accountable. His colleagues were concerned about his safety and the future of the newspaper. However, surprisingly, the state-funded newspaper reprinted the article the following day due to some printing errors in the first edition.

2.2 Silencing Voices under One-Party Rule

Unfortunately, the state was not always tolerant in other instances. In the same year, a newspaper journalist, Mahfuz Ullah, wrote a two-part article titled "*This Side of the Padma, That Side of the Ganges*" on the problems caused by the Farakka Barrage. However, due to government intervention, the second part was never published. The government and ruling party activists repeatedly attacked newspapers. Several newspapers critical of the government, including *Haq Katha*, published by Maulana Bhasani, had their publishing licenses revoked. Another newspaper, *Dainik Gana Kontho*, known for its sharp criticism of the government and its ties to the newly formed opposition party Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Jasad), faced constant harassment and attacks, and its editor, poet Al Mahmud, was arrested.

Similarly, under the Press and Publications Act of 1973, the publication of *Holiday* was suspended for two months that year, and on May 23, 1975, it was banned again. Its editor, Enayetullah Khan, was imprisoned under the Special Powers Act. The government was enraged when he wrote an article titled "*Sixty-Five Million Collaborators*," in the context of popular artists like Abdul Latif, Abdul Alim, and Ferdousi Rahman being banned from radio and television.

In 1973, the Awami League government passed the Press and Publications Act, granting itself the authority to issue newspaper licenses and register all publications, including books. Then, on February 2, 1974, it introduced the Special Powers Act, which empowered the government to issue preventive detention orders indefinitely. Under this law, the authorities could ban the publication of any report in the name of maintaining law and order.

Subsequently, on January 25, 1975, the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution was enacted, abolishing the multi-party parliamentary system and making Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the new President of the Republic. On February 24, 1975, a new party called the Bangladesh Krishak

Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL) was formed, with all membership powers vested in the President. Membership in the party became mandatory for members of both the civilian and military services. With a few exceptions, editors and journalists became members of BAKSAL.

On June 16, 1975, the government issued the Newspaper Declaration (Amendment) Ordinance, which banned the publication of 29 daily newspapers and 138 weeklies and magazines. Only two English and two Bengali newspapers were allowed to continue under direct government control. The Bangladesh Observer and Dainik Bangla were already under state control among these four. The other two were *The Bangladesh Times*, owned by Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni, and *Dainik Ittefaq*, owned by the successors of the late Tofazzal Hossain (Manik Mia), who had well-known family ties with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The International Press Institute (IPI), an organization advocating for press freedom, stated in its 1975 annual report: "The suspension order of June 16 on all newspapers except for government dailies has marked the end of the last traces of press freedom in the country. Thus, within three years, the press has moved from the virtual freedom of 1972 to complete government suppression."

2.3 The Era of Military Rule

A tragic shift occurred in Bangladesh's political landscape on August 15, 1975, when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated in a bloody military coup. The coup leaders formed a new government under Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed, a close associate of Mujib. Several Awami League leaders joined the new cabinet. However, within a short span, two more coups and counter-coups took place, through which General Ziaur Rahman emerged as the de facto ruler and formally assumed the presidency in April 1977. Political parties slowly began to re-emerge with the presidential elections of 1978 and the parliamentary elections of 1979.

However, even before Ziaur Rahman became the Chief Martial Law Administrator, some of the restrictions imposed on the media began to be lifted. The Moshtaque government scrapped the Newspaper Declaration (Amendment) Ordinance (1975) and dissolved BAKSAL's system of governance. As a result, many previously banned newspapers were allowed to resume publication. For many journalists, this marked the end of uncertainty and a chance to return to their profession. Later, General Zia launched a new government-funded newspaper, *Dainik Barta*, from northern Bangladesh, established the Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) to train journalists, formed the Press Council as an arbitration body for resolving complaints against newspapers, and allocated government land to the National Press Club. When he founded his political party, he also launched *Dainik Desh*, a daily newspaper to promote his party's policies and activities.

Despite these seemingly positive steps in favor of journalism, government interference in editorial freedom continued. The weekly *The Reporter* was shut down after publishing a list of alleged Soviet spies. Journalist Durga Das Bhattacharya was arrested and imprisoned under the Special Powers Act. After Zia's assassination, his successor, President Sattar's civilian government, retained issuing so-called "press advice." In his writings, the late journalist Mahfuz

Ullah cited an example from April 26, 1982, when newspapers were advised not to report on arrests during a curfew, fearing such news would politically challenge the government.

When Lieutenant General Hussain Muhammad Ershad seized power in 1982, “press advice” became an integral part of state policy used to control the media. Shortly after taking office, Ershad assured journalists that he wanted them to write independently and objectively, which he claimed was impossible during the previous BNP government. However, his regime issued more written directives to the media than any other, often concerning matters unrelated to the state. For instance, in November 1985, during a visit to Malaysia, a directive was issued instructing newspapers to publish a poem written by him.

Ershad and his ministers frequently used press advice not to promote policies but to hide uncomfortable truths or embarrassing information. The Press Information Department (PID) was the source of most press advice, and newspaper offices kept a logbook under that name. Most of these advisories arrived in the evening. Ershad also issued directives to publish false news. On August 16, 1985, newspapers were instructed to report that five political parties had held a press conference in Dhaka. They formed an alliance called the “National Front,” even though no such press conference had occurred—the announcement had been made via a press release. Sometimes, newspapers were advised not to publish the president's speeches or comments. On November 23, 1985, a directive asked newspapers not to report or reprint Ershad's interview with the UK-based weekly *Jagoron*.

To avoid harsh consequences under Ershad’s rule, journalists developed creative strategies to inform readers about opposition activities. When the government banned news coverage of hartals (general strikes), journalists would refer to the opposition’s call for “nationwide programs,” a euphemism easily understood by readers.

Ershad initiated monthly meetings with newspaper editors, where he would make dismissive remarks about critical articles and pressure newspaper owners. Several weeklies, including the popular *Jajaidin*, were shut down, and Editor Shafik Rehman was forced to leave the country temporarily. Another weekly, *Bichinta*, also ceased publication under his regime. In February 1987, the Awami League-backed newspaper *Banglar Bani* was banned for several months. Banning foreign newspapers and magazines became a regular occurrence.

Towards the end of 1990, as the fall of Ershad's regime became imminent due to the unprecedented unity between political rivals Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, he attempted to impose strict pre-censorship on the media. Newspapers were instructed to seek government approval before publication. Rejecting this policy, journalist unions and the Editors’ Council went on strike on November 27. This strike culminated in the eventual downfall of his government.

2.4 Return to Democracy and Liberalization of the Media

Following the transition from military autocracy to democracy through the mass uprising in 1990, a significant improvement in media freedom was observed. However, this improvement was short-lived. After the fall of Ershad, a caretaker government was formed under the

leadership of the then Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, with the consensus of all parties, and was tasked with holding a general election within 90 days. The caretaker government amended the repressive provisions of the Special Powers Act through an ordinance, which previously empowered the government to shut down any publication without showing cause.

The 1991 election, considered free and fair by local and international observers, was won by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and Khaleda Zia became the Prime Minister. However, her first term saw instability on several issues, including the demand to introduce a neutral caretaker government system for conducting general elections. Despite this instability, positive changes were initiated in the media environment on a limited scale. Her government opened the airwaves for foreign broadcasters for the first time, allowing BBC World Service to broadcast its programs on FM frequencies. The US-based cable TV network CNN was also permitted to broadcast in Bangladesh. However, permission to broadcast in the private sector was not granted. State-owned television and radio were allowed to broadcast news of the opposition parties on a limited basis.

The US-based organization Freedom House is known for observing global trends in political rights and civil liberties since 1973. In 1991, they granted Bangladesh the status of a 'Free' democracy, the essential conditions of which included civil and political rights and freedom of the press and expression. Although this acquired freedom was maintained for most of her first term, it did not last.

Media freedom gradually contracted during the power transitions between the Awami League and BNP until 2006, and risks for journalists increased. In 1996, the Awami League returned to power for the first time since 1975. It granted broadcast licenses to three entities – Ekushey TV, ATN Bangla, and Channel I – for broadcasting news and current affairs programs for entertainment purposes. However, journalists suffered severe physical abuse for reporting on corruption and political hooliganism, including Tipu Sultan, then Feni correspondent of Prothom Alo. In 1997, Sheikh Hasina's government shut down the trust-owned newspapers Dainik Bangla, The Bangladesh Times, Bichitra, and Ananda Bichitra.

In 2002, when BNP was in power, the High Court revoked the license of ETV, and security forces seized their broadcasting equipment, citing a court ruling regarding the exclusion of private channels from terrestrial broadcasting. Newspapers and journalists were critical of the government and faced threats and harassment. This situation was relatively worse compared to the previous Awami League tenure. However, after the Awami League came to power in 2009, the deterioration of the media freedom situation peaked. The Awami League also shut down three private TV channels licensed during the previous BNP rule, closed down the BNP-backed newspaper 'Amar Desh' printing press, and arrested the newspaper's editor and publisher. According to data from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), five journalists were killed between 1996 and 2001, and the number of journalists killed between 2002 and 2006 was seven. The same historical data indicates that 11 journalists died between 2012 and 2021. CPJ's reports clearly show the intensity of the threats faced by the media under successive governments in Bangladesh.

2.5 The Era of Anarchy

In recent years, the notion of media pluralism in Bangladesh has been reduced to a mere numerical abundance, where diversity of opinion, dissent, and variation in perspectives are virtually absent. In Bangladesh's early independence days, "media" mainly referred to print newspapers, since electronic or broadcast media were entirely under state control. However, today, both traditional and digital media platforms have expanded significantly. Dhaka alone has declarations for roughly 1,200 daily newspapers, and over 3,000 nationwide—although the exact number of those publishing is unclear. Additionally, more than thirty television channels are currently in operation. Unfortunately, this uncontrolled growth has created serious challenges for genuine media freedom.

The country has undergone unprecedented political transformation over the past 15 years. In this period, the media have not only been directly attacked by the government and its supporters in the campaign to eliminate the opposition, but state institutions have also failed to provide legal protection. Law enforcement agencies have violated fundamental rights and engaged in brutality, while the courts have been unable to protect journalists, with some judges even accused of political bias.

Three prominent editors in the country were arrested on various charges, placed in remand repeatedly, and imprisoned for extended periods. *Amar Desh* editor Mahmudur Rahman was arrested, his printing press shut down, and the declaration of his newspaper was canceled with the excuse of using alternative printing presses. He was charged with 124 cases, including sedition, attempted murder, abduction, and defamation, and was imprisoned for over five years in two phases. Numerous defamation cases were filed against him across different districts, particularly related to allegations against Sheikh Hasina. When appearing in court for one such case in Kushtia, he was physically attacked by Awami League activists, and the police failed to provide medical care. He was also convicted of contempt of court for criticizing the judicial process. While in custody, he was named as an accused in a case alleging a plot to kidnap and murder the ex-Prime Minister's son, Sajeeb Wazed Joy. In the same case, *Jajaidin* editor Shafik Rehman, in his 80s, was also arrested and taken into remand.

In 2019, *Sangram* editor Abul Asad was physically assaulted inside his office by members of the Awami League and its student wing due to political commentary on the war crimes tribunal process, and he was handed over to police. A case was filed against him under the Digital Security Act, and he spent nearly five years in jail as an under-trial detainee.

Other editors have also faced harassment under the Digital Security Act. *Prothom Alo* editor Matiur Rahman faced 55 lawsuits across various districts. *Daily Star* editor Mahfuz Anam was hit with 84 lawsuits, including 16 for sedition, after admitting in a TV interview that he had once published military intelligence (DGFI) information during the 2006–07 caretaker government period without verifying from alternate sources. No reliable statistics exist on the number of such harassment cases against journalists and editors, but rights groups estimate the number to be several dozen or more.

Journalist leaders Shawkat Mahmud and Ruhul Amin Gazi were jailed for more than a year. *Manab Zamin* editor Matiur Rahman Chowdhury and *New Age* editor Nurul Kabir have faced various forms of intimidation. Journalist Oliullah Noman was jailed. Ekushey TV chairman Abdus Salam and journalist Kanak Sarwar were also imprisoned for airing speeches of exiled BNP leader Tarique Rahman. The authoritarian government grossly abused state incentives and punitive tools to enforce loyalty. These included control over licenses for publication and broadcasting, import duties on newsprint and broadcasting equipment, allocation and delayed payment of government advertisements, limited access to official events and offices, formal and informal advisories, application of legal threats and harassment, and at times, the use of violence.

Regardless of whether it was a newspaper, TV channel, radio, or online platform, licenses were often granted based on political affiliation rather than adherence to any legal or policy criteria. Financial corruption was deeply involved. Even individuals with no media experience or financial capacity received licenses simply by identifying themselves as Awami League supporters and promising to use their TV channels to promote the party's ideology. Many journalists known for their loyalty to the Awami League competed in flattery and sycophancy at press conferences with the Prime Minister, thereby not only polluting the journalism profession but also empowering authoritarianism. These loyalists often received TV licenses, editorial positions, or diplomatic appointments abroad.

After 2009, many newly approved television channels received licenses through such declarations of party loyalty, voluntarily and knowingly participating in the consolidation of authoritarianism. Although Chapter 3 of the 2014 National Broadcasting Policy outlines standards for "accuracy of information," "professional ethics and impartiality," and the "presentation of all sides in talk shows," these were largely ignored as these channels turned into propaganda tools for the ruling party and its allies.

This became especially visible during democratic movements and elections, where the media regularly portrayed opposition figures in a negative light and labeled protesters as terrorists. Even the slightest dissent or logical questioning led to individuals being blocked from television appearances, with reports of state intelligence agencies threatening or coercing media managers and journalists, sometimes forcing owners to terminate their employment.

During the student-led mass uprising of July and August, several TV channels aired false, inciting narratives against student leaders. Some newspapers took direct positions against the movement and supported or justified the brutality of armed government loyalists. Several pro-Awami League and affiliated journalists encouraged the use of force and violence to suppress the protests. Shockingly, some joined a meeting at the Prime Minister's residence with the former PM who was later accused of crimes against humanity for allegedly ordering the killing of hundreds of students. In that meeting, they blamed the security forces for failing to suppress the protests and demanded more aggressive measures.

To quell the July–August mass uprising of students and citizens, the previous government resorted to extreme brutality—attacks on protestors, indiscriminate shootings, and killings. They imposed strict media control to prevent the public from learning the truth. As a result, most

media outlets did not report the real situation and instead published misleading, manipulated, and agenda-driven content to divert attention from the spontaneous movement.

The following headlines provide a clear picture of this distortion:

□ **17 July**

"Public support collapses after self-declaration as Razakars" – Janakantha.

"Political blueprint revealed" – Bhorer Kagoj

□ **21 July**

"BNP-Jamaat's death bite" – Bhorer Kagoj

□ **24 July**

"Wounds of violence inflicted by miscreants are visible across the country" – Kaler Kantho

□ **26 July**

"200+ BNP leaders involved in directing the movement" – Bhorer Kagoj

"Top 50 leaders of Jamaat-BNP behind the scenes" – Kaler Kantho

□ **27 July**

"Conspiracies and propaganda both at home and abroad" – Bhorer Kagoj

□ **28 July**

"Student murdered the day after posting against Shibir and Chhatra Dal" – Kaler Kantho, Bangladesh Pratidin, Daily Sun

2.6 Post-Student-People's Uprising Period

Following the fall of the Awami League government, Bangladesh's media landscape has experienced notable shifts in leadership and management over the past few months. Many high-ranking figures in news organizations, including editors, faced threats to their safety and the risk of job loss. Some went into hiding. Media personnel such as Mozammel Babu of *71 TV*, Shyamal Dutta of *Bhorer Kagoj*, Shakil Ahmed (Head of News), and special correspondent and talk show host Farzana Rupa were arrested while allegedly attempting to flee the country, and later shown as arrested in murder cases. Among them, the first two were accused of trying to cross the border illegally.

The central allegation against them is that over the last 15 years, they acted not as professional journalists but as collaborators of the fascist regime, engaging in activities that violated journalistic ethics. They allegedly operated more like party activists—suppressing democratic movements, promoting human rights abuses against dissenters, and, in some cases, inciting state violence.

Due to this collaborative and fascist-aligned role, several media outlets faced intense public backlash following Sheikh Hasina's fall. While cases have been filed against many individuals, not all have been arrested. Multiple organizations working on journalists' rights have criticized the murder charges brought against the four arrested journalists. Many have argued that

incitement or instigation should be handled as attempted murder or similar charges, not as direct murder, which has triggered widespread criticism of the interim government's legal handling of the matter.

During the 15-year authoritarian regime and under one-party dominance, many media owners, editors, and journalists developed a symbiotic relationship with the ruling party, marked by sycophancy and opportunism. As a result, many of these journalists became the target of mass resentment during the uprising. The interim government has since frozen the bank accounts of several individuals and suspended their financial transactions.

The government also came under fire for broadly canceling press accreditation cards. However, it explained that many non-journalist party activists had been granted such cards during the previous regime, leading to misuse. Therefore, the new administration pledged to reissue accreditation cards based on a revised process. A committee comprising relevant stakeholders was formed, and new policies were drafted to address and resolve the issue based on their recommendations.

According to the latest data from Bangladeshi Journalists in International Media (BJIM), an association of Bangladeshi journalists working for foreign media, at least 31 journalists have been attacked while performing their duties in the six months following August 5. This number alone offers a clear picture of the hostile environment journalists are currently working in.

Due to accusations of having served as enablers of Hasina and her government, many journalists faced political pressure to resign. Some voluntarily stepped down. Others were dismissed by their channel authorities, who then hired journalists known for their opposition to the Awami League government. Similar shifts in media leadership have occurred in the past during political transitions. After the Awami League came to power in 2009, its loyalist journalists aggressively sought control of various media institutions. In 2015, Awami League-supporting journalists even forcibly removed the elected leadership of the National Press Club and took it over. Similar incidents were reported outside Dhaka as well, where journalists not aligned with the Awami League were charged with various cases, including murder, due to their political activities.

This time too, some were dismissed from their jobs, while others were forced to resign. In certain instances, there were even reports of fear of group assaults or mob violence. A recent survey conducted across 30 television channels gives a partial view of the situation. The survey found that over 150 journalists working in TV channels were fired in a single year, most of them after August 5. The Broadcast Journalist Center (BJC), a broadcast journalists' organisation, conducted this survey.

Conversations with individuals working or previously employed at various television stations, newspapers, and online news portals revealed that leadership changes in at least 29 media outlets have occurred in the past six months. This includes 16 TV channels, 11 daily newspapers, and two online news portals. However, no such changes were reported in any private FM radio channel.

Particularly noteworthy is that after the political shift, those who assumed leadership or control of these media outlets are mostly journalists known to be supporters of the BNP and Jamaat, long-standing rivals of the Awami League. In essence, media owners closely aligned with the ousted government made these changes as part of a strategy to build ties with political forces that gained momentum following the mass uprising.

In addition, several media outlets saw changes in their boards of directors. The boards were restructured, and new chairpersons or managing directors assumed responsibility.

Some notable examples of such changes are given below:

Ekattor TV

One of the key figures of the channel, Mozammel Babu, faced criticism and controversy for his role and for turning Ekattor TV into a key propaganda outlet for Sheikh Hasina and her government. On August 5, enraged protesters attacked the station. Immediately after Hasina's fall, dramatic changes occurred at Ekattor TV. Shafik Ahmed took control of the channel. Initially a BNP beat reporter, he was appointed Head of News and later promoted to COO, taking complete control of the station.

Nagorik TV

This channel, owned by Rubana Huq and her son Navidul Huq, laid off the highest number of employees—40, including 25 journalists. Among them were the Chief of News Deep Azad, three reporters, and two news editors. Multiple staff members stated that due to Deep Azad's pro-Awami League stance, he and the channel faced serious risks after August 5. He eventually resigned, responding to the owners' concerns. Azad was also the Secretary General of the Awami League-aligned Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists.

East West Media Group (Bashundhara Group)

Four out of five media outlets under this group saw significant changes. After August 5, Kader Gani Chowdhury—a BNP media cell and Ziaur Rahman Foundation member—was appointed as a key controller of East West Media Ltd. He took over as Deputy Managing Director (DMD). Previously, with BNP-owned Dinkal, he had deep links to BNP politics. Bashundhara and its media platforms were under intense scrutiny and uncertainty following the political shift. In addition, Akbar Sobhan and his son Sayem Sobhan, chairman and managing director, respectively, were named in a murder case filed over a shooting incident during the public uprising in Badda on August 5.

Kaler Kantho & Bangladesh Pratidin

Hasan Hafiz replaced Imdadul Haq Milan as editor of *Kaler Kantho*, while Abu Taher was made acting editor of *Bangladesh Pratidin*, replacing Naem Nizam. Hasan Hafiz previously worked with *Amar Desh*, *Boishakhi TV*, and *Dainik Bangla*. In the last National Press Club election, he was elected Senior Vice-President from the BNP-Jamaat-supported panel. After Hasina's fall, he became the President.

News24 & Banglanews24.com

Leadership changes occurred in both media outlets. Jewel Mazhar was removed from *Banglanews24.com* and replaced by Lutfur Rahman Himel, a former *Bangladesh Pratidin* journalist. At *News24*, Farhadul Islam Farid, previously News Editor, returned from Desh TV to become Executive Editor. Several other posts, like Chief News Editor and Planning Editor, were filled with journalists known for their BNP affiliation.

ATN Bangla & ATN News

Owned by Mahfuzur Rahman, both TV channels saw changes in key positions. Executive Editor J I Mamun from ATN Bangla and Chief of News Probash Amin from ATN News were dismissed. Moinur Rahman replaced Mamun, and Probash was replaced by his deputy Shahidul Azam.

Independent TV

Beximco-owned *Independent TV* had a different case. Executives M Shamsur Rahman and Mamun Abdullah retained their top roles. However, after August 5, Mustofa Akmal, a journalist previously sidelined for his BNP ties, took operational control. He became Chief News Editor after Ashish Saikat was barred from entering the office and resigned.

DBC TV

Four top officials were dismissed or resigned amid internal pressure and activism from anti-discrimination student groups: Zayadul Ahsan Pintu, Pranab Saha, Naeem Tariq, and Masud Karzon. Loton Ekram, formerly of *Samakal*, joined as editor. Despite the changes, Chairman Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury and Chief Editor Manzurul Islam remained in their roles, though they had been absent from the office since August 5.

RTV

Owned by Bengal Group and Morshedul Alam, RTV appointed Elias Hossain as the new Chief of News. Previously, with *Kalbela*, *Banglavision*, and *Independent TV*, he worked at the now-defunct *Channel One*. Former CEO Ashik Rahman and senior journalist Sharif Uddin Lemon were dismissed after August 5.

Boishakhi TV

Longtime Chief of News Ashok Chowdhury was replaced by Ziaul Kabir Sumon (formerly with the now-closed *Diganta TV*). Touhidul Islam Shanto, a former BNP beat reporter at the channel, replaced Chief News Editor Saiful Islam. Three others, including a news editor, were also dismissed.

Asian TV

Sirajul Islam, formerly with Radio Tehran, was appointed Chief of News, replacing Belal Hossain, who left in September.

Desh TV

Special Correspondent Mohiuddin was promoted to Chief Reporter and later to Chief of News. Senior reporters Joy Deb and Shamima Akhtar were dismissed for their Awami League affiliations. MD Arif Hasan was arrested and is currently in jail for attempted murder. Former

Environment Minister Saber Hossain Chowdhury reportedly relinquished his stake in the channel.

Gazi TV

Currently overseen by Iqbal Karim Nishan as Chief Editor. After August 5, Gaosul Azam Bipu, a long-time BNP beat reporter, was appointed Chief of News after being first appointed Planning Editor.

Somoy TV

Somoy TV faced significant fallout after August 5. City Group, the majority shareholder, took over operations and dismissed MD Ahmed Zubayer. Shampa Rahman, daughter of City Group chairman Fazlur Rahman, replaced him. The chief of News and three others resigned; five more were dismissed in December. Allegations suggest anti-discrimination activist Hasnat Abdullah played a role.

Mohona TV

A new board was formed after August 5. Previously chaired by Awami League MP Kamal Ahmed Majumder, control was taken over by five other shareholders after his arrest in a murder case. The new chairman is Atahar Ali, and the MD is MA Hashem of Sajib Group. No other leadership changes were reported.

Ekushey TV (ETV)

On the day of Hasina's fall, August 5, original owner Abdus Salam resumed channel control. He removed several journalists and appointed his team. Rashed Chowdhury was replaced by Deutsche Welle journalist Harun ur Rashid as Chief of News. Harun had previously worked at ETV. The channel has a long, controversial history—Abdus Salam was arrested in 2015 under the pornography act after airing a live speech by Tarique Rahman. The Awami League government later gave control to the S. Alam Group, which restructured the staff.

Global TV

Nazmul Ashraf, a journalist formerly with US-based Bangla online media TBN24, was recently appointed Chief Editor. He previously worked at *The Daily Star*, *NTV*, *Channel One*, *Jamuna TV*, *SA TV*, *RTV*, and *Deepto TV*.

Protidiner Bangladesh

In January, following the resignation of editor Mustafiz Shafi, Managing Editor Morsalin Babla took over as acting editor.

Samayer Alo

Senior journalist Shahnewaz Karim assumed the role of acting editor after Kamalesh Ray resigned in September last year.

Dainik Samakal

After Sheikh Hasina's fall, Editor Alamgir Hossain was forced to resign from *Samakal*. His perceived bias toward the Awami League and refusal to publish content critical of the government led to internal dissatisfaction, which erupted after August 5. According to two senior

journalists at *Samakal*, some staff publicly opposed him in September and pressured him to step down. Eventually, the management barred him from the office and refused to renew his contract. Abul Kalam Azad, a Hamim Group director, was appointed acting editor.

Dainik Jugantor

Among the two central media units of the Jamuna Group, only *Jugantor* experienced a change in editorship. Long-serving editor Saiful Alam resigned under pressure in January after being named in a murder case. He was succeeded by poet and writer Abdul Hai Shikdar, who previously worked at *Amar Desh* and *Inqilab*. He is a former pro-BNP-Jamaat Dhaka Union of Journalists president and an advisor to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

Desh Rupantor

In January, Kamal Uddin Sabuj became editor following the resignation of Mostafa Mamun. Sabuj had earlier served as president of the National Press Club but lost the 2022 election running with BNP-Jamaat backing. He previously worked at BSS and UNB.

Dainik Ittefaq

Special correspondent Shyamal Sarkar lost his job and stopped coming to the office after August 5. The management also appointed new officials to the Executive Editor, Managing Editor, and Joint Editor positions that had remained vacant for some time. Saiful Islam, a special correspondent, became Managing Editor, and Anwar Al Din was appointed Joint Editor.

Bhorer Akash

Manoranjan Ghoshal was removed as editor and replaced by Elias Khan as acting editor. Elias Khan, a BNP-nominated candidate, had previously served as General Secretary of the National Press Club but lost the position in the latest election.

Alokito Bangladesh

After August 5, Managing Editor Shamim Siddiqui, who also served as acting editor, stopped attending the office. Colleagues indicated that he is unlikely to return, and a new appointment is expected soon.

Sarabangla.net

Owned by Gazi Group, this news portal was sold in September due to the group's financial crisis following the arrest of former MP and ex-Textile Minister Golam Dastagir Gazi in August. Due to non-payment of salaries, the portal was acquired by ICC Communications. After the ownership change, Deputy Editor Sandwipan Basu and Chief News Editor Rahman Mustafiz were dismissed. Special correspondent Golam Samdani was promoted to the position of chief news editor.

A phase of instability has emerged across the media industry as one faction replaces another in control of various media organizations. However, there have been a few allegations of direct or indirect government interference in media operations. Still, many outlets reportedly practice self-censorship due to political uncertainty and unrest. There are also accusations that some outlets have been reluctant to hold emerging political forces and opposition parties accountable through proper scrutiny.

Who Owns the Media?

Most media outlets in Bangladesh are controlled by powerful business conglomerates involved in sectors such as banking and finance, food and consumer goods import and distribution, the garment industry, pharmaceuticals, insurance, gas and electricity, and real estate. These economically dominant groups wield significant influence over both state and society, and many are also actively involved in politics. However, several media owners are journalists who acquired licenses primarily due to political backing and later attracted investors to establish media ventures.

3.1 Major Corporate Entities

East West Media Group (Bashundhara Group)

Bashundhara Group is led by Chairman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan and Managing Director Sayem Sobhan Anvir, his son. The group entered the media industry by establishing East West Media Group in 2009 and has since acquired ownership of seven media outlets, five of which are news-based. Following the Awami League's return to power in 2009, Bashundhara quickly expanded its media footprint, launching four outlets rapidly. Kaler Kantho was launched on January 10, 2010, followed by Bangladesh Pratidin on March 15, 2010. The online portal Banglanews24.com began operations on July 1, 2010, and The Daily Sun was introduced on October 24, 2010.

No other individual or company has received such rapid media approvals in such a short time. The commercial logic behind publishing two Bengali dailies under the same ownership has been questioned, mainly since both often publish identical reports and analyses on the same day, suggesting a monopolistic intention rather than healthy competition.

With the rise of television viewership, Bashundhara launched *News24* on July 28, 2016. In November 2015, the group also obtained a license for FM radio station *Radio Capital*, primarily focused on entertainment. In 2021, it acquired *Titas TV* from Dhanad Islam Dipto of Millennium Media Limited and rebranded it as *T Sports*, the country's first dedicated sports TV channel.

S. Alam Group

S. Alam Group's chairman, Saiful Alam, has recently been embroiled in bank fraud allegations and has entered the media landscape. In 2021, the group launched *Nexus TV*, with Saiful Alam as Managing Director and his wife as Chairperson. He is also allegedly involved in anonymous investments in various media ventures.

In 2024, he became linked to *Star News*, a TV channel that originally received its license as *Sampan TV*. The channel was initiated by *Nabil Group*, which reportedly obtained massive loans from several Shariah-based banks, including Islami Bank, through irregular means. A central bank investigation identified Nabil Group's companies as shadow entities of S. Alam Group. The group also runs an online news portal.

Transcom Group

Founded by the late industrialist Latifur Rahman, Transcom Group built two of Bangladesh's most influential newspapers: *The Daily Star* (launched in 1991) and *Prothom Alo* (launched in 1998).

Although editors Mahfuz Anam (*The Daily Star*) and Matiur Rahman (*Prothom Alo*) hold minor shares in their respective owning companies—Mediaworld and Mediastar—they have operated these papers independently. While Transcom retains sole ownership of Mediastar, Mediaworld also includes shares from Rangs and Arlinks Limited (formerly owned by the late Azimur Rahman).

Transcom also acquired the FM radio license for *ABC Radio* from *Manabzamin* editor Matiur Rahman Chowdhury. The station launched on January 5, 2009. In 2023, *Rongdhonu Group* purchased this struggling station, which had been running at a loss for several years.

Meghna Group

In 2009, journalist Mozammel Hossain Babu secured a license for *Ekattor TV*, later selling a large portion of the shares to Meghna Group Chairman Mostafa Kamal. The shares were bought under his name and those of his son and two daughters. Babu had initially applied for licenses for 10 different channels. Meghna Group also runs *Radio 71*, an FM station that began broadcasting on March 26, 2015.

Multimedia Production Company Ltd.

Mahfuzur Rahman is the chairman and owner of both *ATN Bangla* and *ATN News*. *ATN Bangla*, Bangladesh's first satellite television channel, began broadcasting on 15 July 1997, while *ATN News* started on 7 June 2010. Before obtaining official approval, Mahfuzur Rahman had launched another channel called *ATN World*, which later received authorization as *ATN News*. Despite initially operating a second channel without permission, no action was taken against him. Awami League-affiliated journalist Manjurul Islam also owns shares in the company.

Gazi Group

Former MP and ex-Minister of Textiles and Jute, Golam Dastagir Gazi, owned *Gazi Television (GTV)*, which was officially launched on 12 June 2012. He also founded the online portal *Sarabangla.net*, which was sold in September last year following the change in government.

Renaissance Group

Led by Awami League politician and former State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam, this group owns *Duronto TV* and *Radio Dhol*. He received approval in 2013 and began broadcasting in 2017 through *Barendra Media Ltd*. Though *Radio Dhol* started in 2015, it later ceased operations.

Gemcon Group

Kazi Anis Ahmed of Gemcon Group owns *Dhaka Tribune* (English daily) and *Bangla Tribune*

(online portal). Another director, Kazi Nabil Ahmed, is a controversial MP elected under the Awami League banner.

Karnaphuli Group

Owned by former AL MP Saber Hossain Chowdhury, the group manages *Bhorer Kagoj* and *Desh TV*. The main office of *Bhorer Kagoj* was recently closed, laying off most staff, though limited publication continues. *Desh TV* was initially licensed to former BNP MP Mushfiqur Rahman, but Saber Hossain later acquired the majority shares. Under the supervision of AL MP Asaduzzaman Noor, the channel launched on 26 March 2009, with Noor serving as Managing Director. However, control of the channel shifted to Arif Hasan after August 5. He was later jailed in an attempted murder case and is also accused of money laundering.

City Group

City Group owns *Somoy TV* and *Ekhon TV* (formerly *Spice TV*). *Somoy TV*'s no-objection certificate was issued in 2009 to Ahmed Zubayer, nephew of former AL State Minister Kamrul Islam. He sold 75% of his shares to City Group Chairman Fazlur Rahman but retained operational control. After August 5, he was dismissed, and the group assumed complete control. *Spice TV* was approved in August 2017 and later renamed *Ekhon TV*. CEO Mohammad Hasan and Editor-in-Chief Tushar Abdullah lead the channel, which began complete broadcasts in June 2022. Shila Islam, daughter of Fazlur Rahman, serves as MD of *Somoy TV* and chairperson of *Ekhon TV*. *Spice FM*, owned by City Group, began airing on 1 September 2016. Although the license was initially granted to Fu-Wang Food Ltd., City Group later acquired majority ownership.

Kazi Farms Ltd.

Kazi Media Ltd., a subsidiary of *Kazi Farms Ltd.*, owns *Deepto TV*. Managing Director Kazi Zahedul Hasan applied on 11 November 2011 and received approval on 22 December. The channel began broadcasting in 2015.

Impress Group

Channel i and *Radio Bhumi* fall under Impress Group, a diversified conglomerate. *Channel i* is one of the country's oldest private TV channels, launched in 1999 with a no-objection certificate granted to Faridur Reza Sagar. *Radio Bhumi* launched on 30 September 2012 under *Ganchil Media Ltd.*, where singer Kumar Bishwajit holds only 100 shares, while seven others (including Faridur Reza Sagar) each own 700 shares.

SA TV

Licensed to transport magnate Salauddin Ahmed, *SA TV* launched on 19 January 2013. However, due to irregular salary payments, the company faced staff unrest. In 2019, 18 employees were terminated, leading to protests outside the owner's residence. Legal proceedings over unpaid wages are still ongoing.

Channel 9

Initially applied for by Major General (Retd.) Syed Shafayetul Islam, brother of former AL General Secretary Syed Ashraf Islam, the channel's license was granted to his wife, Syeda

Mahbuba Akter. Later, 85% of the shares were purchased by former NTV MD Enayetur Rahman.

AG Group

Owned by AG Agro Group Chairman Shahidul Ahsan, *DBC News* was licensed in 2013 under journalist Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, then media advisor to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. He remains chairman under *Dhaka Bangla Media & Communication Ltd.*, with Manjurul Islam as Chief Editor. Islam was previously a shareholder in *ATN News*.

Best Group of Industries

Chaired by AL MP Kamal Ahmed Majumder (Dhaka-15), the group founded *Mohona TV*. Reports indicate he used the office for political activities. After his arrest on August 5 in a murder case, control passed to the other five shareholders.

Globe Pharma

Global TV is owned by former AL MP Mamunur Rashid Kiron (Noakhali-3). He applied in 2016 under *Globe Multimedia Ltd.* and received approval in 2017. The channel began broadcasting on 30 June 2022.

Mohammadi Group

Founded by the late Annisul Huq, *Nagorik TV* received approval only after he became Mayor of Dhaka North City with the AL government's nomination. Before that, he was repeatedly denied a license between 2007 and 2009. The group also has investments in *The Daily Observer*.

Broadcast World Bangladesh Ltd.

Abdullah Al Mamun (Koushik) owns *Channel 21* and *Times Radio*, both of which were approved in 2013, though neither has begun broadcasting yet.

Bishwas Builders

Nazrul Islam Dulal, MD of Bishwas Builders, owns *Kalbela* newspaper. Launched in 2022 with fanfare, the paper soon faced criticism for poor journalistic standards. It was initially edited by Abed Khan, who later resigned and was replaced by Santosh Sharma. Dulal is the Vice President of Jhenaidah District AL and was an AL nomination-seeker in the 2024 Jhenaidah-1 by-election, but did not receive the ticket.

HRC Group

Owned by Sayeed Hossain Chowdhury, HRC Group controls *Jaijaidin*, a daily founded initially by journalist Shafik Rehman. After the Awami League assumed power, Rehman lost control. Rehman published *Jaijaidin Protidin* following the July uprising, while Chowdhury launched *Jaijaidin 1984 Theke*. Sayeed also holds shares in *New Age* and the now-defunct weekly *Holiday*, both English-language publications. *Businessman Shahidullah Khan primarily owns New Age*.

Jamuna Group

Jamuna Group owns two major media outlets: the daily *Jugantor* and *Jamuna TV*. The late Nurul

Islam Babul, the group's former chairman, founded both. After his passing, his wife, Salma Islam, became the principal figure overseeing these media entities. *Jugantor* began publication in 2000, and *Jamuna TV* launched broadcasting on April 5, 2014.

Ha-Meem Group

Industrialist A.K. Azad owns two media houses under this group: the newspaper *Samakal* and *Channel 24*. *Samakal* was launched on May 31, 2005, under Times Media Ltd., while *Channel 24* began broadcasting on May 24, 2012.

Square Group

Anjan Chowdhury, Managing Director of Square Group, is the chairman of *Masranga Communications Ltd.* and applied for the license for *Masranga TV* on November 28, 2007. The channel received approval in 2010 and started broadcasting on July 30, 2011. Square Group also launched a radio station, *Radio Dinrat*, in 2016.

Rongdhonu Group

This group, led by Chairman Rafiqul Islam, owns three media outlets: *Green TV*, *Protidiner Bangladesh*, and *ABC Radio*. *Green TV* was established under Green Multimedia Ltd., with former Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud reportedly backing the initiative while serving as Environment Minister. His daughter was appointed chairman of the channel. Former RAB and police Chief Benazir Ahmed was also allegedly linked to *Green TV*. In 2023, *Protidiner Bangladesh* began publishing. That same year, *Rongdhonu Group* acquired *ABC Radio*.

Chowdhury Nafeez Sarafat

Owner of Race Portfolio & Issue Management Company, Nafeez Sarafat, founded the *Dainik Bangla* newspaper and *NewsBangla24.com*. His rapid rise followed the Awami League's return to power. Accusations of corruption and financial fraud, including stock market manipulation and illicit connections to multiple banks, surround him. He also shares ownership of *Dainik Bangla* with Nazrul Islam Mazumder, chairman of NASA Group, who is currently in prison on money laundering charges.

Bijoy TV

Late ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, a prominent AL leader and former Mayor of Chattogram, initially secured the license for *Bijoy TV* in 2006. The license was revoked due to procedural issues, but was reissued in 2009 under the Awami League government. Unable to run the channel, he temporarily transferred some shares to *ATN Bangla* chairman Mahfuzur Rahman. Later, his family reclaimed full ownership.

Channel S

Ismat Kadir Gama, former General Secretary of Bangladesh Chhatra League, applied for a TV license in 2021 and received approval in 2022. He is the chairman of Sunshine Media Ltd. The channel has yet to begin broadcasting.

My TV

Part of a batch of ten channels approved by the Awami League on October 11, 2009. Owned by

Nasir Uddin Sathi, Chairman and MD of VM International Ltd., Journalist leader Altaf Mahmud played a key role in securing his license.

In addition to existing channels, several new TV channels have been licensed. Amar TV was founded by Dwitiyo Syed Haque, son of Syed Shamsul Haque, while Rashed Khan Menon owns Khela TV. Citizen TV is linked to Shafikur Rahman, a former MP, DSE brokerage owner, and journalist. Prime TV is owned by Tanzia Islam, and TV Today by Abu Bashar Rokibul Baset. Nur Mohammad, MD of Millennium Multimedia, owns Utshob TV, and M.K. Bashar of BSB Foundation owns Cambrian TV. Finally, Ananda TV is owned by Hasan Tawfiq Abbas.

Meanwhile, several business groups have ventured into the newspaper industry. The US-Bangla Group owns both Ajker Patrika and the online portal Dhaka Post. The Unique Group owns Amader Shomoy and Desh Rupantor, which the Rupayan Group owns. The Amin Mohammad Group owns Samayer Alo, and Dainik Janakantha is owned by the Globe Janakantha Shilpa Paribar.

3.2 Ownership of FM Radio Stations

Based on documents from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms, along with other research, a brief overview of the ownership of FM radio stations is provided below:

Radio Today

Radio Today Company, the first private FM radio station in Bangladesh, began planning to launch an FM radio channel in 2005 with garment businessman Md. Rafiqul Haque is the Managing Director of this company. Its official broadcast started in October 2006. This urban-focused channel primarily emphasizes music and has gained considerable popularity among listeners. Sometime after starting its broadcast, Radio Today began airing news. Alongside news and music, Radio Today also focuses on interactive programs, allowing listeners to participate in various live shows via SMS.

Radio Foorti

This channel is owned by MJH Group, whose Managing Director is businessman Anis Ahmed. He is the Managing Director of Radio Foorti Company Limited. Radio Foorti officially began 24-hour broadcasting on September 21, 2006. Radio Foorti can be heard in Dhaka and its surrounding districts within the coverage area of the Dhaka station's 150-kilometer transmission capacity. Radio Foorti began broadcasting in Chittagong on July 22, 2007. In addition to Dhaka and Chittagong, this radio can be heard in eight other districts. At that time, this FM medium created a widespread stir among people. Millions of listeners were eager to listen to music and various shows on this 24-hour channel.

Dhaka FM

Businessmen Akram Khan and Dolly Iqbal are the owners of this FM channel. Akram Khan is involved in the garment business and is the head of Newtex Group. On the other hand, Dolly Iqbal was previously a dancer at BTV. Dhaka FM officially began its journey on January 1, 2012. Their programs are broadcast in Dhaka, Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Sylhet, Rangpur,

Rajshahi, Khulna, Bogura, Barisal, and Mymensingh. Begum Dolly Iqbal is the Chairperson of this company.

Peoples Radio

Chittagong businessman Abdul Awal and his wife, Sayeda Masuda Haque, are the proprietors of this channel. They were granted the license for this radio on February 15, 2011. Awal is involved in 7-8 types of businesses, including brokerage houses and asset management. Abdul Awal, the Managing Director of Peoples Radio, holds 345,000 shares, while his wife holds 5,000 shares. The channel's central station is located in Dilkusha, Dhaka. Besides Dhaka, it broadcasts in 15 surrounding districts.

Radio Shadhin

Owned by the leading advertising, marketing, and public relations firm Asiatic Group, this FM channel began broadcasting from Dhaka on March 20, 2013. On that day, then Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu inaugurated the radio station at the Asiatic Centre in Banani. Sara Zaker is the Managing Director of the organization. Ali Zaker, Sara Zaker, and Asaduzzaman Noor are the three shareholders of the company, each holding 2,000 shares.

City FM

This FM station, established under Media City Limited Company, officially began broadcasting on March 23, 2013. Saidur Aftab is the Managing Director of City FM. Another shareholder of the company is Aftab Uddin Ahmed. Both of them are involved in business. Saidur Aftab owns a consultancy firm.

Colors FM

Rakib Ahmed Fakhru owns this FM channel under Tune Bangladesh Limited Company. He is the Chairman of this company. This Dhaka-based radio station began its journey on January 10, 2014. This 24-hour channel broadcasts various programs. Rakib Ahmed Fakhru is involved in the Ayurvedic business. He is the Chairman of Ayurvedic Pharmacy (Dhaka) Limited.

Radio 71

This Dhaka-based FM radio broadcasts 24 hours a day. Meghna Group of Industries launched this FM radio on March 26, 2015. Initially, the principal proprietor of this channel was M A Matin. However, he later sold his shares.

Radio Dhoni

This is a 24-hour radio channel that broadcasts news, music, and entertainment programs. It began its journey with a test broadcast on April 14, 2015, and started commercial broadcasting on June 22. Businessman Rashedul Hossain Chowdhury is one of the key proprietors of this channel. He is the Managing Director of Radio Dhoni Limited Company. Farzana Chowdhury is another shareholder.

Radio Age

Radio Age, the country's first sports-based FM radio, began its journey in October 2017. Cricketer Mashrafe Bin Mortaza inaugurated this Dhaka-based FM radio station. Radio Age broadcasts updates, commentary, inside information, players' personal lives, sports fashion, and sports-related topics covering the country's two main sports, cricket and football, as well as all kinds of domestic and international sports. The Managing Director of Radio Age is businessman Shafkat Samiur Rahman.

Jago FM

This Dhaka-based FM radio station broadcasts programs 24 hours a day. The FM radio began its journey on October 27, 2015. Jago FM is owned by AKC Private Limited, whose Managing Director is Ahsan Khan Chowdhury. Ahsan Khan Chowdhury is the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the industrial group PRAN-RFL Group. He is the son of the group's founder, the late Major General (Retd.) Amjad Khan Chowdhury. The group also owns the online news portal Jagonews24.com. Another news-based online portal of this group is Jago News.

Bangla Radio

Bangla Radio is a Dhaka-based FM radio station that broadcasts programs 24 hours a day. The FM radio began its journey on April 11, 2016. This channel is part of the business group Reza Group. The proprietor of this FM is Shahid Reza.

Sufi FM

Md. Mamunur Rahman, the Chairman of Golden FM Limited, is the proprietor of this FM channel. Later, Masudur Rahman joined as the Managing Director. Both of them are involved in business.

Radio Ambar

Radio Ambar is a 24-hour FM channel broadcasting from Dhaka, which began its journey on September 1, 2016. It is established under Radio Masti Limited Company, whose proprietor is Md. Aminul Hakim. He also owns Ambar IT Limited, which is involved in the internet business.

Radio Amar

This channel, owned by Gias Uddin Quader Chowdhury and his family, is quite old. Radio Amar officially began its journey on December 11, 2007. It gained popularity by broadcasting news, Bengali songs, English songs, band music, weather reports, traffic updates, and market news. Initially, his son, Samir Quader Chowdhury, was the Managing Director. In 2020, Samir Quader was succeeded by his other son, Saker Quader Chowdhury.

Radio Next

Owned by Niloy-Nitoll Group Limited, this channel inaugurated its test broadcast at the head office of Nitoll-Niloy Group in Mohakhali on January 26, 2015, but later failed to go into full broadcast. Following an application, the approval for this channel was revoked.

Loss of Popularity of FM Radio

FM radio in Bangladesh peaked in popularity within 2-3 years of its launch in 2006. However, since the introduction of 3G in the country in 2012, the popularity of FM radio has declined. The rise of private television and digital media occurred after this period. With the arrival of various OTT platforms and the popularity of YouTube, Facebook, and other social media for entertainment, people started turning away from FM radio. Consequently, listenership and advertising decreased, making it difficult for owners and entrepreneurs to keep FM radio running. Many FM radios are struggling to operate. Four channels have completely shut down: Radio Next, Radio Amar, Radio Dhol, and Asian Radio.

5 FM Radios Awaiting Broadcast

Times Radio: Owned by Broadcast World Bangladesh Limited, whose Managing Director is Abdullah Al Mamun (Koushik).

Desh Radio: Theatre personality Nader Chowdhury is the proprietor of this channel.

Radio Active: Shomi Kaiser has received the license for this channel under the banner of Dhanshiri Communication Limited.

Radio Prime: Syed Zahirul Islam, Chairman of CIUS Private Limited, is the proprietor of this radio channel.

Radio Music Today: Owned by Kazi Mahfuzur Rahman, Managing Director of Media Today Limited.

Several reasons can be mentioned for the rapid decline in the popularity of FM radio in the country in recent years: imitating popular programs of others instead of bringing diversity, relying solely on broadcasting music, broadcasting programs according to the whims of advertising agencies, and no significant change in the quality of programs. In addition, with the rapid decline in advertising, investment in program production is also close to zero.

4

Scope and Challenges of Mass Media

4.1 Newspapers

The role of newspapers in various historical and political events in Bangladesh is glorious. Before and after independence, until 2008, daily and weekly newspapers were the most reliable medium for the general public. At that time, the role of state-controlled radio and television in news dissemination was limited. The primary function of these two institutions was to broadcast news of government activities and the authorities' statements on various issues. However, they demonstrated creativity in cultivating and promoting arts and culture.

Subsequently, with the return to democracy after the end of military rule, numerous new newspapers were published. Many of these aimed to serve political or business interests. In a commission-led survey of newspaper owners regarding the purpose of their publication, very few owners cited public service or social welfare as their objective. Anonymous opinions were sought from members of the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (NOAB), the recognized organization of newspaper owners, who participated in exchange meetings with the commission. Furthermore, opinion was sought via email from publishers of newspapers which are not members of the association, but are listed in the government's Department of Films and Publications (DFP) media list and sold. Only one of those responded. Consequently, the publishers' clear statement of purpose (mission statement) is unavailable.

Newspapers continued to operate in Bangladesh even under the difficult circumstances of military rule. Despite facing cases, attacks, and harassment from the government, newspapers spoke for democracy and the people. However, that opportunity has significantly narrowed over the past fifteen and a half years of the Awami League government. On the other hand, with the expansion of the internet and social media, the circulation and revenue of print newspapers have decreased. Now, most newspapers are incurring losses. Like many countries worldwide, several newspapers in Bangladesh have shut down. But even in this situation, the number of newspapers in Bangladesh has not decreased; instead, it has increased. There is considerable confusion regarding the number of daily newspapers. The most significant ambiguity has been created concerning circulation figures.

According to data from the Department of Films and Publications (DFP) as of November 2024, the total number of registered daily newspapers is 1340. Of these, 546 are published from Dhaka, and 794 are from outside Dhaka. However, there is doubt about how many of these are published regularly. According to calculations from May of the same year, the number of registered weekly newspapers is close to that of dailies, and like dailies, more weeklies are published from outside Dhaka. There are 355 weeklies in Dhaka and 863 published from outside Dhaka, totaling 1218 weekly newspapers. Some bi-weekly, monthly, bi-monthly, and quarterly magazines are also available in the DFP list. In total, there are 3270 newspapers and magazines in the country. Of these, 1371 are in Dhaka, and 1898 are outside Dhaka.

It can be stated with certainty that many prominent newspapers and magazines have ceased publication or are published irregularly. Many daily newspapers, although registered, are solely dependent on government advertisements. If a profitable amount of advertising is received, the newspaper is printed in limited copies on that day, but not on other days. When an organization provides an advertisement, copies of these newspapers and some government offices are delivered to that organization. Some newspapers are also found printed in the same structure, simply changing the newspaper's name. Readers never hear the names of most of these newspapers.

Furthermore, some newspapers print only a handful of copies, which are delivered to specific government offices and those featured in special news. These newspapers are known as 'wall pasting' and 'underground newspapers'. Moreover, there are many controversies and complaints regarding DFP's media listing. According to data from August 2024, the number of daily newspapers listed in DFP media is 584, of which 284 are Dhaka-centric. This list includes 87 weeklies, 12 bi-weeklies, 24 monthlies, and one quarterly, totaling 708 media-listed newspapers and magazines. The two hawker associations through which all types of newspapers are distributed in Dhaka do not have more than 56 names on their papers or receipts. In reality, about 50 daily newspapers, both Bengali and English, are bought by readers with money. No other newspaper is on the hawkers' sales list.

a) Behind the Controversy over Circulation Figures

At the root of the controversy over newspaper circulation figures is the tendency to inflate them, which has become almost a general rule. The only exceptions are those newspapers that voluntarily declare their actual circulation. Investigations reveal two main reasons for inflating

circulation figures: obtaining higher advertising rates and making extra income by importing newsprint at a lower duty and selling it in the open market. The idea of getting high advertising rates due to reputation has almost been forgotten. Private advertisers pay significantly less to other newspapers than the top two or three newspapers. However, this market principle does not apply to government advertisements. There, circulation figures and implementation of the Wage Board determine the advertisement rates. Consequently, newspapers dependent on government advertisements are eager to exaggerate circulation figures. Additionally, showing higher circulation figures provides some tariff exemption on imports, creating an opportunity for income by selling excess newsprint in the open market.

The sum of the declared circulation figures of the newspapers on the DFP media list is almost 17.5 million daily. According to DFP's calculations, each of 57 daily newspapers published from Dhaka prints 100,000 or more copies daily. However, according to the sales figures of newspapers distributed by the two Dhaka Hawker associations nationwide, the total number is not more than 1 million daily. So, where do the remaining 17 million copies go? Even in the old paper buying and selling business, there is no credible evidence of selling such a massive amount of unsold paper. Newspapers listed in DFP media are supposed to submit audited accounts twice a year. The audit is supposed to include records from the printing press, printing bills, sales bills, and newsprint usage records. There is also a provision for inspectors from DFP's Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) to periodically inspect printing presses and verify documents, based on which the accuracy of circulation figures is supposed to be confirmed.

In addition to verification by government officials, there is also a monitoring system involving representatives from various industry unions to ensure whether circulation figures, Wage Board implementation, and the conditions for newspaper publication are properly complied with. Government advertisement rates are determined based on the certification by this committee. As verifying the documents of nearly 600 media-listed newspapers is time-consuming, the commission verified the documents of five newspapers published from Dhaka as a sample: The Tribunal, The Financial Express, Prothom Alo, Manobjamin, and Ajker Patrika. In the DFP list, the Tribunal is at the top regarding circulation, and the Financial Express is among the top five. Although there is controversy regarding the circulation of the top Bengali dailies, Prothom Alo, which voluntarily declares a lower circulation, the relatively new publication Ajker Patrika, and Manobjamin, the only tabloid, were chosen.

The picture of English newspaper circulation figures is unbelievably messy. According to the DFP list, The Daily Tribune, which is at the top, received its declaration on November 24, 2014, and applied for media listing on August 1, 2016. Within about a month, the DFP office and press were inspected, and it was listed on September 7 with a declared circulation of 6,005 copies. Eight months later, on May 25, 2017, they applied to increase their circulation. Without inspection, its circulation was predetermined at 21,300 copies on June 6. The government advertisement rate increased from 104 taka to 122.20 taka. Three months later, in September, an application was made to predetermine the advertisement rate, claiming the implementation of the Eighth Wage Board. The newspaper was inspected on November 30, and the rate increased almost four times to 503 taka on December 14. In April 2018, when another application was made to increase circulation, it was inspected on May 5 and determined to be 38,500 copies on May 9. The rate also increased to 533 taka. Another application in December resulted in it being

set at 38,990 copies. In March 2019, after an application and inspection, it was set at 40,100 copies, and the rate was increased by 5 taka. This time, the application, inspection, and decision were completed in three days. Later that year, after an application on August 21, it was inspected and determined to be 40,500 copies, and the advertisement rate became 543 taka.

As circulation increases, not just the advertisement rate but also the newsprint allocation increases. The allocation increased with the announcement that it would be 12 pages on October 26, 2020. In September 2021, it was increased from 48.72 tons to 73 tons. On February 23, 2022, DFP inspected and on April 19, reduced the circulation to 13,500 copies and the rate to 392 taka. Newsprint allocation also decreased to 16.32 tons. After this, the court restored it to its previous state from June 11, 2024. This is how the newspaper remains at the top among English dailies on paper.

The Daily Star, which has been at the top for the past few decades, had a circulation of 44,500 copies before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Due to the pandemic, The Daily Star's circulation dropped to 29,400. At that time, the entire newspaper industry experienced a collapse in circulation, and everyone's sales dramatically decreased. Against this backdrop, DFP redetermined everyone's circulation in February 2022, and The Daily Star regained the top position. However, based on the Tribunal's case, the previous circulation remained in effect. The credibility of this list is close to zero, and based on it, low-circulation newspapers are profiting by receiving government advertisements at high rates, which is a waste of public money. On the other hand, popular newspapers are receiving fewer advertisements, exacerbating their financial crisis.

Reviewing the documents of other newspapers clarifies the flaws in the inspection process. There is no correlation between the Hawker Association bills and the DFP list. Whether the listed papers can fulfill the minimum requirements for workforce, office size, and equipment is also questionable.

According to the Media Listing and Audit Policy for Newspapers and Periodicals, printing orders, bills, lists of agents, customer ledgers, etc., should be audited. The 2022 policy stated that newspapers with a circulation of more than 100,000 copies should have an income tax certificate, but this has not been effectively implemented for either Bengali or English newspapers. If this condition were followed correctly, it would be possible to stop showing fake circulation figures. However, many unknown newspapers create counterfeit documents and, in collusion with the individuals responsible for the audit, receive government advertisements by showing unrealistic circulation figures. Furthermore, the justification for keeping this income tax document requirement for circulation above 100,000 is now obsolete. In the case of English newspapers, even if this number were one-twentieth of that, many would still be outside its scope. Regardless of circulation, it is not understandable why the requirement for an income tax certificate should not apply to everyone.

b) Newspaper Declaration

The Printing Press and Publications (Declaration and Registration) Act 1973, which has been amended several times between 1976 and 1991, is currently not up-to-date. The emergence of

numerous newspapers in the last three to four decades, many of which are nominal, has created various problems. These problems could have been largely avoided if the government had given proper importance to Article 12(2)(f) of the said Act when granting declarations for newspaper publication. This article states the District Magistrate's satisfaction regarding the publisher's necessary financial capacity for the regular publication of the newspaper. There are allegations that this article is unimportant to the Ministry when granting declarations. According to documents from the Department of Film and Publication, obtaining a newspaper declaration showing a bank balance of just five lakh taka is currently possible. Such a small deposit is not even enough to cover the publication expenses of a daily newspaper for a week.

c) Government Advertisements

Whether print or digital, advertising is the primary revenue source for all media. There are primarily two sources of this advertising: government and private. Government advertisements are distributed based on newspaper circulation figures and the implementation of the Wage Board. However, opacity exists in both cases. Just as there is exaggeration in circulation figures, many newspapers also provide misleading or false information regarding the Wage Board implementation to the government. The system, called the Wage Board Monitoring Committee, which certifies its implementation, also faces allegations of irregularities and corruption.

Recently, the number of government and private newspaper advertisements has significantly decreased. Most private advertisements now go to social media platforms, digital media, and television. A recent report in 'The Financial Express' mentioned that nearly 78 percent of advertisement revenue goes to digital media. However, according to Bangladesh Advertising Agencies Association members, slightly more than 50 percent of advertisements go to digital media. Because of this, newspapers have become excessively dependent on government advertisements. The government, however, has shown indifference to the revenue needs of newspapers for a long time. The rate for government advertisements is very low. This rate has not been increased in the last 10 years since 2014, even though the annual inflation rate touched 5 to 6 percent every year until 2019 and 10 percent since 2020. Newspaper publication costs have also increased several times. Newspaper owners claim that even without implementing the 9th Wage Board, the salaries and allowances of some newspapers have reached nearly 40 percent of the total monthly expenditure.

Although the number of English newspaper readers in the country is low, these newspapers have been playing a valuable role in disseminating news about the country internationally and promoting English as an international language among the country's youth. However, by judging their circulation figures against the same standards as Bengali newspapers for determining advertisement rates, English newspapers have been subjected to discrimination in terms of advertisement allocation and rates. The essentiality of English dailies is undeniable. Naturally, the circulation of English newspapers in Bangladesh is lower than that of Bengali newspapers. However, the operating costs of English newspapers are usually higher than those of Bengali newspapers. Considering these factors, it would be logical to categorize English newspapers separately and revise advertisement rates, but this has not been implemented yet.

d) Regional / Local Newspapers

The situation of regional newspapers outside Dhaka is somewhat similar to that of the world of newspapers in Dhaka. The excess number of newspapers there has also created unhealthy competition, driven by economic reasons and attempts to expand political power. In some district towns, 32 local daily newspapers are published for five lakh adult citizens. Naturally, most of these newspapers have no readers, at least no readers who buy the newspaper with money. In the exchange meetings held by the commission outside Dhaka, information has also emerged that during elections, candidates of the ruling political party publish daily newspapers to appoint their workers as journalists at polling stations. Arrangements are made through the Deputy Commissioner's office for an unusually high number of accreditations from the Election Commission, and the job of these workers is to deprive genuine journalists at the polling stations, assist in manipulation, or cover up manipulation. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, there were also allegations that before the 2018 elections, a state intelligence agency provided funding for publishing a daily newspaper. After a few issues were published, it also shut down when the funding stopped. However, an online portal under the name of that newspaper was kept active by that intelligence agency for some time.

Regional newspapers are deprived in various ways in the case of government advertisements. In particular, they are largely neglected in the case of supplements published from Dhaka. However, they can effectively hold public representatives and government service providers accountable for field-level corruption. Several regional/local dailies in Bangladesh have significant readership popularity. Regional/local newspapers are given special importance for local democracy worldwide. In some Western countries, they are given direct financial assistance by the state.

e) Expatriate Bengali Newspapers

Although Bengali newspapers published in foreign countries are mainly weekly, they still play an essential role in maintaining communication between expatriates and the country. There are instances where information that could not be published due to censorship within the country created a stir after being published in Bengali newspapers abroad. However, with the widespread expansion of online media, it is now impossible to keep any news secret for long. These weekly newspapers are still playing an active role by publishing news about the various activities of Bangladeshi politicians abroad, irregularities and corruption in embassies, good and bad news about various state institutions, and reflecting the opinions of expatriates. On behalf of expatriate newspapers, first from the British-Bangla Press Club in Britain and later from the Canadian newspaper 'Desh-Bidesh', calls have been made for initiatives to publish supplements on various national days in those newspapers and advertisements from state institutions whose large customer base consists of expatriate Bangladeshis. Although most passengers on Biman's international routes are Bangladeshi, advertisements targeting them are broadcast only within the country, not abroad. Advertisements for incentives for collecting remittances by various banks also do not go to those newspapers. However, Bengali newspapers abroad are now facing economic challenges like other newspapers.

f) Government Policy Support

Although the government has declared the newspaper sector an industry, it has not yet taken any significant supportive measures. The newspaper industry has not received any incentives from the government. For example, the time of the COVID pandemic can be mentioned. At that time, although the government arranged for loans at low interest rates for all industries in the private sector, the newspaper industry was the only sector that did not receive any assistance during that difficult situation. About 30 percent of the import value is spent on VAT and taxes for newsprint import. The VAT rate is 15, the import duty is 5, the advance tax at source is 5, and the advance tax is 5 percent. Although it is called an advance tax, it is not adjusted for the annual applicable tax. As a result, an unannounced tax has effectively been imposed on this industry in the name of advance tax. Those newspapers (a handful) that pay tax to the government have to pay corporate tax at a rate of 27.5% on their operating profit. This is the highest tax rate for companies not listed on the stock exchange. The Newspaper Owners' Association (NOAB) has often negotiated with the National Board of Revenue and the Ministry of Finance regarding VAT and other taxes. Still, despite admitting the rationality of the issues, the government has not taken any action. There is an allegation that former autocrat Sheikh Hasina considered the independent press her enemy and was enthusiastic about adopting anti-industry policies. Another major obstacle for newspapers is the non-payment of advertisement bills. The government delays the timely payment of bills and shows reluctance to clear arrears even during various festivals and holidays.

Newspapers and Government Advertisements

The financial self-sufficiency or solvency of the media in Bangladesh, whatever you call it, definitely deserves neutral analysis. Historically, the media have never been completely economically self-sufficient.

The newspaper is uniquely the oldest and most influential medium. Although the number of newspapers was countable after the country gained independence, not all newspapers were economically self-sufficient.

Except for the daily Ittefaq and the English daily Bangladesh Observer, no other daily was financially solvent. At that time, the private advertisement market was also minimal. Government advertisements and classified advertisements were the primary sources for newspapers. After the political change in 1975, the number of newspapers gradually increased; consequently, competition in the advertising market increased. In such a situation in 1976, the government announced a policy for distributing its advertisements. The central theme of that advertisement policy was that newspapers included in the government's media list would receive government advertisements based on their circulation figures at rates determined by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The Audit Bureau of Circulation under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting determines the circulation figures of newspapers through audits. At that time, autonomous bodies distributed their advertisements to the newspapers themselves.

A few months after General Ershad took power in 1982, the advertisement policy changed again. There, the distribution of advertisements of all government agencies began through the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Of course, the provision that autonomous bodies would distribute their advertisements remained in effect. More allegations of corruption were raised in the distribution of government advertisements through this process.

In response to such allegations, the government's advertisement distribution process was decentralised again in 1982. And that advertisement policy has remained in effect until now.

Private Advertising

Over the past 50 years, Bangladesh's economy has evolved from a monocentric model to a privately driven one. The economy is now almost entirely open. As a result, a substantial amount of advertising is distributed annually from the private sector. These advertisements are broadcast on newspapers, television, and digital media. There was a time when all advertising revenue, except for Bangladesh Television, went to newspapers. That situation no longer exists. Television and digital media now receive the majority of private advertising revenue.

Transparency is expected in distributing private advertisements because advertising should be allocated based on competition, relevance, and necessity instead of corruption and collusion. Nevertheless, there are allegations of dominance by a handful of advertising agencies in the private advertising market. Disadvantaged advertising agencies have recommended the intervention of the Bangladesh Competition Commission in this regard.

Due to the large number of newspapers and advertisers increasingly leaning towards digital media, circulation and advertising revenues are steadily declining. There are no signs of this trend changing. Therefore, newspapers are trying to strengthen their online and multimedia versions.

Advertisers are taking advantage of the large number of newspapers. There is no longer anything like a fixed advertising price rate for newspapers. Almost all newspapers are offering significant discounts or rebates on advertising rates. On the one hand, the volume of advertising has decreased, and on the other hand, the income of newspapers from advertising has plummeted due to these rebates.

Newspaper Printing Costs

Naturally, the cost of printing newspapers is constantly increasing. There are many reasons behind this. The size of newspapers has increased, advanced technology has been incorporated, and the volume of newspapers has grown. According to the first Press Commission report of 1984, the printing cost of one copy of a newspaper at that time was Tk 1.5 to Tk 2, and the selling price of an 8-page copy was Tk 1.40. Again, 35% of that selling price was taken by hawkers or as commission. Currently, the printing cost of a 16-page first-class newspaper is at least Tk 12. The selling price, excluding hawkers' commission, stands at Tk 9. Due to political patronage, hawker associations have maintained a monopoly on newspaper distribution, and no newspaper has been able to devise an alternative to reach customers directly at a lower cost through its management.

Publication and Salary Costs

The publication and salary costs of a Grade-1 newspaper are almost equal. In the 1980s, the average expenditure on salaries and allowances was 40 percent of the operating expenses. All daily newspapers operate at a financial deficit except for a few newspapers. Many newspaper

owners are covering the deficit from other businesses or funds. Some owners publish newspapers without paying journalists and employees their proper salaries. However, the owners of nominal newspapers are making profits by getting government advertisements for their low-cost publications.

4.2 Private Television Channels

The liberalization of broadcast media in Bangladesh began after the fall of the autocratic ruler Ershad, stemming from the spirit of the mass uprising.

Following the BNP, led by Begum Khaleda Zia, coming to power in the 1991 elections, foreign TV and radio airspace was initially opened only for broadcasting news and current affairs programs. As a result, BBC and CNN news broadcasts and BBC Radio news broadcasts began on FM frequencies.

Subsequently, in 1998, the decision was made to open the airspace for domestic private TV channels. The government published the first policy for establishing and operating private television channels in 1998. The stated objective was, "In Bangladesh, the single television channel is broadcasting educational, informational, entertainment, and developmental programs with limited technological facilities during specific hours, which is not able to meet the widespread demand of the audience. Therefore, the necessity of launching multiple TV channels and broadcasting internationally is being felt."

This statement revealed two main objectives of the government: 1. to provide opportunities to private entrepreneurs because BTV alone could not meet the viewers' demands; and 2. to broadcast Bengali programs internationally. The second objective was likely a strategy to facilitate the licensing of private entrepreneurs, which is why the initial channels sought permission to export programs abroad, and subsequently, almost all entrepreneurs sought the opportunity to promote Bangladesh's art, culture, history, heritage, and development stories abroad. However, in reality, very few of these channels have been able to broadcast internationally. Moreover, the mandatory use of Bangabandhu Satellite for uplink and downlink for private channels has made it impossible to show these programs in most parts of the world, including the Middle East and Europe.

According to documents from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 53 private TV channels have been granted broadcasting permission from 1997 to date. Among them, 41 channels started broadcasting, but currently, 34 are operational, meaning seven channels have closed down after launching. Among these, five channels that received licenses during the BNP-Jamaat coalition government were shut down by the previous government. None of these five closed channels were revived in the last government's tenure. Two more channels were closed after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government on August 5th. Additionally, the Awami League government approved 12 more channels in the last few years of its term, but they have not yet started broadcasting. During her first term (1996-2001), Sheikh Hasina began granting licenses for private television channels and approved three channels: ATN Bangla, Ekushey TV, and Channel i.

After the BNP-Jamaat coalition government, led by Khaleda Zia, came to power, the High Court declared the terrestrial broadcasting license of Ekushey TV illegal in 2002, leading to its closure. When an appeal was made to the Supreme Court against the High Court's verdict, it dismissed the appeal, resulting in its permanent closure. Later, in 2005, Ekushey TV was allowed to resume

broadcasting under a change of ownership and on the condition of operating only as a satellite channel.

During the BNP government's tenure (2001-2006), 10 private channels were approved. These were: NTV, RTV, Banglavisión, Boishakhi TV, Desh TV, Channel One, Islamic TV, SNTV, CSB, and Diganta TV. In 2002, Jamuna TV was granted a terrestrial broadcasting license, which was revoked. There are allegations that these channels were licensed based on political considerations because almost all the channels' owners were directly or indirectly involved with the BNP. The owners of NTV and RTV were Mosaddak Ali Falu, the former Private Secretary to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, and a BNP Member of Parliament. On the other hand, the owner of Channel One was Gias Uddin Mamun, a close associate of Tarique Rahman. RTV is no longer under Mosaddak Ali's control. The ownership of this TV changed in 2007 when Mosaddak Ali was in jail. Morshed Alam of Bengal Group bought all the shares. There are allegations that a state security intelligence agency played a role in this transfer of shares.

CSB TV was owned by Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, the Parliamentary Affairs Advisor and former Member of Parliament to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia; Desh TV's license was given to Mushfiqur Rahman, a former secretary and BNP Member of Parliament; Islamic TV was owned by Khaleda Zia's brother, Major (rtd) Sayeed Iskandar; and former BNP Members of Parliament Salah Uddin and Nasir Uddin Pintu owned SNTV. On the other hand, Dhaka City Corporation Mayor and BNP leader Sadeque Hossain Khoka, businessman Abdul Haq, and several other BNP leaders were reportedly behind the Banglavisión channel. A.Y.M. Kamal, the head of Boishakhi TV, was close to BNP leader Mirza Abbas.

In 2007, during the Fakhruddin Ahmed-led caretaker government, CSB's license was revoked on charges of broadcasting anti-government propaganda during a live news report. After the Awami League came to power, Diganta TV, Channel One, Islamic TV, and SN TV were shut down on misinformation charges during Sheik Hasina's second term. After Jamuna TV regained its license through the court during the caretaker government and started test broadcasts, the Hasina government revoked it in November 2009 and asked them to reapply for a new license. Following a re-application seeking permission to re-broadcast, the suspended license was reinstated in 2013.

From the beginning of 2009, Awami League leaders, their close business people, and journalists began applying en masse for TV channel licenses. In that year, 10 channels were approved on the same day. The 10 channels that received No Objection Certificates on October 11, 2009, were: Ekattor TV, Bijoy TV, Gazi TV, Channel Nine, Somoy TV, Independent TV, Maasranga TV, ATN News, Mohona TV, and My TV. Awami League insiders and their close business people and journalists obtained most of these channels' licenses. Subsequently, in 2010, 2 channels (Channel 24 and SA TV) and in 2011, 3 channels (Asian TV, Gaan Bangla, Deepto Bangla) were approved by the government. In 2013, another mass licensing of 13 channels took place. The recipients of these licenses were primarily members of the ruling party, their family members, close associates, and business groups. Among them were also some journalists. These are: DBC, Duronto TV, Nagorik TV, Anand TV, Nexus TV (formerly Rangdhanu), T Sports (formerly Titus TV), Spice TV, Global TV, Green TV, Channel S, News 24, and Bangla TV. Bangla TV,

which started as a TV channel for expatriate Bangladeshis in the UK, fully transferred its operations to Bangladesh after nearly two decades.

Before being ousted from power on August 5, 2024, the Awami League government approved 12 more channels. As before, these channels were also granted to Awami League leaders and their close associates, including business people, politicians, and journalists. These 12 channels are: Channel 52, Channel 21, Amar Gaan, Utsab TV, Cambrian TV, Khela TV, Amar TV, Citizen TV, Prime TV, TV Today, Star News (formerly Sampan TV), and Dhaka TV. These channels have not yet started broadcasting due to the lack of frequency allocation. After the interim government took charge, a proposal was made to change Sampan TV's name to Star News. According to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting records, an application was made on September 24, 2024, to change the channel's name and relocate the main broadcast center from Chittagong to Dhaka. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting approved this application on October 6th. This process was completed mainly quietly despite allegations of corruption and money laundering against some of its sponsors. Green TV and Gaan Bangla TV were shut down after the August 5th uprising. Green TV's broadcast was suspended on August 19th last year, and Gaan Bangla's was suspended on December 11, 2024 due to the failure to pay outstanding broadcast service charges.

4.2.1 Allegiance and Sycophancy vs. Broadcast Policy

There have been allegations of party loyalty, nepotism, and corruption in granting permission to launch television channels in the private sector. As a result, an anarchic situation has been created by issuing licenses that far exceed the market's demands and capacity. Although objective and goal 1.2.9 of the National Broadcast Policy 2014 states, "To create open and fair competition in establishing broadcast media," the beginning of the policy in 1.2.2 further states: "The government's goal is to follow international norms and standards regarding freedom of expression and broadcast media, uphold pluralism and diversity, and ensure free access to information in broadcast media." However, the licensing process has never been based on open competition and transparency.

Most conditions for issuing No Objection Certificates (NOCs) for establishing television channels have remained unchanged across different governments. However, the Awami League government added some additional conditions, behind which political motives were at play. For example, the NOC given to ATN Bangla, the first TV channel on July 7, 1997, contained some general conditions necessary for operating a channel. But about two months later, two additional conditions were attached to that NOC. One was—besides showing respect for Bangladesh's history, culture, independence, the spirit of the Liberation War, social and religious values, no program contrary to sovereignty, national unity, development, and the state's image could be exported or broadcast.

The second condition was that important national programs and days such as August 15th National Mourning Day, March 17th the birth anniversary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman/National Children's Day, as well as February 21st, Victory Day, Independence Day, and religious festivals must be observed by the TV channel with due dignity. These two conditions were also added to the NOCs of Channel i and Ekushey TV, which

received licenses during Sheikh Hasina's first term. Subsequently, in 2001, while approving TV channels, the BNP-Jamaat coalition government retained the first of the two additional conditions but dropped the second one. However, the BNP-led coalition government did not add any new conditions related to their political interests.

After Sheikh Hasina assumed power for the second time in 2009, the Ministry of Information added the previous condition to the NOC. In addition, the Awami League government imposed several new conditions. Notable among these are that TV channels must conduct anti-terrorism and anti-militancy campaigns and broadcast operations through Bangabandhu Satellite. Upon reviewing the NOCs, it has been observed that the number of conditions has steadily increased over the past decade and a half. Imposing so many new conditions, especially political ones, makes it difficult for any media outlet to practice neutral and independent journalism. Due to such conditions, many channels may have been compelled to show bias towards the Awami League government. Therefore, no such conditions should be attached to granting licenses that would obstruct the natural flow of information and create obstacles in the path of neutral and objective journalism.

Pledges to Realize the Head of Government's Dreams

On the other hand, most applicant channels, to please the government and obtain licenses, mentioned their preferred narratives in their applications. Their application letters and affidavits contained various promises that aligned with the political philosophy and strategies of the Awami League. In their applications, they indicated that if approved, they would accept the government and its political ideology and help or play a role in implementing it. For example, Harun Ur Rashid, the president of Bangabandhu Sainik League and a businessman, received the license for Asian TV. He submitted his first application on October 13, 2008, stating his intention to establish the channel by following the rules and regulations. Later, after the Awami League came to power, he submitted another application on June 7, 2011, stating that he wanted to establish the TV channel "to be a partner in realising the Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's declaration of Digital Bangladesh." Similarly, in the application for Independent TV, Salman F Rahman and Nazmul Hasan Papon promised to contribute to implementing the Awami League government's programs. The application for Channel 52, owned by Morshedul Alam, Chairman of Bengal Group, mentioned a commitment to realizing the "Vision 2021," and the application for Channel 21 mentioned realising the dream of building "Vision 21 and Digital Bangladesh."

In 2022, Bashundhara Group bought the ownership of Titas TV. Currently, the channel's name is T Sports. In the application for Titas TV, the applicant Dhanad Islam Dipta firmly declared that his channel would play a positive role in "building a modern Bangladesh enriched with the spirit of the Liberation War, the golden Bengal of the dreams of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the greatest Bengali of a thousand years." Ismat Qadir Gama, the former General Secretary of Bangladesh Chhatra League, in his application seeking a license for Channel S in 2021, described himself as "a dedicated and devoted worker of the Awami League." In addition, he used the Mujib Year logo in the application. He declared his commitment to "working tirelessly under the leadership of the Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to realise the dream of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu".

Md. Mamunur Rashid Kiran, the Awami League Member of Parliament for Noakhali-3 constituency, applied for Global TV. In his application, he stated, "The channel wants to go on air to build a non-communal, democratic, and poverty-free Bangladesh inspired by the ideals of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman." He further mentioned that if the Global TV channel is granted permission, they will have "the opportunity to participate in the Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's fight to build a Digital Bangladesh that helps bring about change".

The application for Channel Nine stated, "Our channel will highlight the development activity on the 'Vision 2021', as part of the pro-liberation force, we will focus on the development activity of the present government to build the Digital Bangladesh." Syed Golam Dastagir, Chairman of Green Multimedia Limited, applied on November 21, 2013. In his application, he mentioned, "I want to work as a supportive force through Green TV to realize the dream and ideals of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, including the Honorable Prime Minister's commitment to building Digital Bangladesh and realizing the Vision 2021."

Many Awami League ministers, Members of Parliament, members of parliamentary standing committees, and individuals affiliated with the Awami League have received licenses. Many have applied for and received TV and FM radio channel licenses while holding government positions. Again, in many cases, family members of Awami League leaders have been granted licenses.

In short, those with direct or indirect power who could influence state or national decisions have received channel licenses. Among them are Shahriar Alam, Ismat Qadir Gama, Salman F Rahman, Nazmul Hasan Papon, Kamal Ahmed Majumder, journalist Mozammel Hossain Babu, Ahmed Jobayer, ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, Harun-or-Rashid, journalist Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, and many others. Duronto TV's owner, former State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam, applied for this TV's license while serving as a member of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Journalist Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, while serving as the Media Advisor to the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on November 21, 2013, applied for the DBC channel and received the NOC within three days. Similarly, Kamal Ahmed Majumder, ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, Harun-or-Rashid, and Nazmul Hasan Papon received television licenses while they were Members of Parliament. Although applying for a private TV channel while holding a vital government position is not by the rules, they faced no problems obtaining licenses. Due to political and influential individuals' acquisition of media ownership, there was no opportunity for objective and neutral journalism in those institutions. Instead, their media outlets were mainly used for their and the government's propaganda, many examples of which were seen during the previous Sheikh Hasina government.

A news report published in Prothom Alo on October 20, 2013, revealed the picture of granting TV licenses based on political considerations and selling licenses in violation of the rules. Mentioning the approval of Channel 52 based on political considerations, the report stated that although it was given in the name of Khaleda Bahar Beauty, the wife of late Awami League leader Abdul Malek Ukil's son Baharuddin, the person behind it was Morshedul Alam, Chairman of Bengal Group, who had already bought RTV owned by Mosaddak Ali. Baharuddin was then the Deputy Director (News) of BTB. Moreover, he did not have the financial capacity to

establish and operate a TV channel. Also, as a government official, he could not obtain a license. Therefore, he enlisted Bengal Group as a financier and formed a company named 'Bengal Television Channel Limited'. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting granted the license for Channel 52 in the name of this company. Both Morshed Alam and Baharuddin then admitted these facts to Prothom Alo. The report further stated that most license holders did not have the capacity or experience to establish and operate a channel. However, in their affidavits, everyone claimed financial solvency and the ability to develop a channel. Many took the licenses and sold the ownership at high prices. And in this way, many television channel owners who received licenses based on political considerations benefited without any capital investment. Moreover, they did not even take the government's permission before selling.

The then Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu admitted to Prothom Alo about the change of channel ownership in violation of rules, the continuation of licenses even without going on air on time, and the sale of shares to anyone to earn money. The same thing happened in the case of many channels. For example, after obtaining the license, Mozammel Babu sold half of the Ekattor TV shares to Meghna Group. Similarly, Ahmed Jobayer sold the license of Somoy TV to City Group. In this way, they became owners of large sums of money and arranged the expenses for establishing the channel. Eighty-five percent ownership of Channel Nine was sold to Enayetul Rahman, the former Managing Director of NTV, for Tk 22 crore. Although retired military officer Brigadier General Sayeed Shafayatul Islam applied for this channel, the NOC for this TV was later given to his wife, Syeda Mahbuba Akhter. Besides Mahbuba Akhter, her husband, son, brother, and brother's son held shares. Shafayatul Islam is the brother of Syed Ashraf ul Islam, the former General Secretary and Minister of the Awami League.

A somewhat different incident occurred with Bijoy TV. Former Mayor of Chittagong and Awami League leader ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury obtained the license for this TV in 2006. However, due to irregularities, a case was filed against Mohiuddin Chowdhury during the last caretaker government's tenure. Although the Awami League government re-issued the license, being unable to run it, he, his wife, Hasina Mohiuddin, and son, Chowdhury Mohibul Hasan, transferred some of their shares without any payment to Mahfuzur Rahman, Chairman of ATN Bangla, and his wife, Sheikh Urmi Rahman (Eva Rahman). However, Mohiuddin Chowdhury mentioned in his affidavit that the financial expenses would be met through his income, the joint investment of the directors, and commercial banks. However, in 2013, Mohiuddin Chowdhury's family took back all the shares from them.

Despite having financial capacity, some have established channels by taking out large bank loans. Among them is Beximco Group. It is known that Salman F Rahman's company took a bank loan of Tk 300 crore to establish Independent Television. Although the license for Desh TV was in the name of Mushfiqur Rahman, a former BNP diplomat and Member of Parliament, later Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Asaduzzaman Noor became the heads of this channel and established it with a large amount of debt.

Many have indirectly contributed positively to the country's economy by earning revenue, especially foreign currency, through broadcasting and exporting various programs and news worldwide via satellite channels, which has rarely happened. Some channels could not air within

the stipulated time, yet the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting or BTRC did not act against those channels.

There is a significant flaw in the process of granting media licenses. On the one hand, the government has tried to use the media in its favor by imposing certain conditions. On the other hand, the licensees have violated many conditions by making various promises in their applications and affidavits. Another notable issue is that although many channels, including News24 of the Bashundhara Group and Mohona TV of Kamal Ahmed Majumder, stated in their applications that they would maintain neutrality and objectivity in their news media, those channels played the opposite role. Despite breaking promises and engaging in propaganda against business and political opponents by presenting distorted information for their promotion, the government has not been seen monitoring and taking action. The reason behind this is that the owners of those media outlets are connected to the government or are leaders and businesspeople of the Awami League.

On the other hand, there have been reports of harassment in various ways if any media outlet's objective news went against the government. In addition, although applicants mentioned many things on paper, such as creating basic, creative, and unique news and programs, promoting education, and developing art and literature, they forgot about them after going on air. Upon reviewing the application letters of various channels, it was observed that many channels were granted licenses within just a few days. Multiple documents, such as trade licenses, company records, income tax certificates, VAT registration, bank solvency certificates, and affidavits, were supposed to be submitted with the applications. Verifying these documents is a time-consuming task. However, the precedent of approving at least seven channels within 3/4 days of submitting the applications shows that these applications were not verified, and licenses were granted based on political considerations. Another noticeable point is that the language of several affidavits is almost the same. In some cases, there is a complete match.

4.2.2 Reluctance to Form a Broadcast Commission

The Broadcast Policy 2014 mentioned the formation of an independent Broadcast Commission. This commission would recommend a unified policy after discussing with stakeholders, and based on that policy, the Broadcast Commission would recommend to the government for granting licenses. However, the Awami League government did not form that commission and kept the power to grant permits in its own hands. Chapter Three of the Broadcast Policy 2014, under the sub-heading "Standards to be followed in News and Program Broadcasting," sets out the standards to be followed. In 3.1.1, the three mandatory standards to be followed are: a. Objectivity of the broadcast information; b. Professional ethics and neutrality; and c. Responsibility in broadcasting. It further states 3.2.2, "Any misleading and false information and data should be avoided in discussion programs. In such programs, there must be an opportunity to appropriately present all parties' arguments."

The past autocratic government, just as it did not remember the aims and objectives of its declared policy, completely abandoned the standards to be followed. Instead, it encouraged party-loyal owners and journalists to engage in information distortion, propaganda, one-sided promotion in favor of the ruling party, slander against the opposition, suppression of criticism,

and preventing the broadcast of news that embarrasses or goes against the government. Along with political pressure, sometimes verbal and sometimes written instructions were given for these tasks. Above all, state security intelligence agencies were used to create fear. Due to keeping the government and the ruling party satisfied, private channels have lost their independence. However, in a statement submitted to the commission, the Association of Private Television Channel Owners (ATCO) said, "Editorial freedom is being hampered due to pressure from the government and the opposition, business syndicates, and terrorist groups."

These channels have become known as 'another BTV'. Viewers have become attracted to foreign channels. The dependence on advertising revenue to meet operating expenses has increased so much that an unhealthy competition is going on about who will broadcast advertisements at a lower price than whom. From news headlines to various parts of the news, they have to depend on the sponsorship of advertisers. As a result, information about any irregularities or corruption of the institution that sponsors the news headline with name escapes scrutiny in the news. However, the National Broadcast Policy 2014 states that advertising should be avoided in the form of news and as part of any program. It does not seem that any policy is effective regarding broadcasting advertisements in programs other than news. Although the general rule is not to broadcast more than 12 minutes of ads per hour, it is often not followed. In most programs, the logo or product name of the commercial sponsor has now permanently taken place on the screen. On the other hand, as social media has emerged as a powerful medium, private television stations are now focusing on increasing revenue from their digital media.

From a business perspective, many channels are limping. The tendency to run channels with subsidies or rely on bank loans is also prevalent. Those providing subsidies are doing so either for political interests or to use the power and influence of the mass media for other business interests. During the past two farcical elections (2018 and 2024), the owners of several channels were seen using their channels conspicuously and unfairly for personal election campaigns against opponents and in their favor. In contrast, in the case of most of these channels, the salaries and allowances of journalists and employees are irregular. Although a few journalists receive market-competitive salaries and benefits, most have to work at low wages. There is no separate salary structure for broadcast media, unlike the wage board for newspapers. The most common complaints received are job insecurity and disregard for labor laws. The latest report of the Broadcast Journalists Center (BJC) details the problems of dismissal at any time without any opportunity to show cause, not following the rule of maximum working hours per week, not providing training and safety equipment, and the lack of effective measures to prevent and redress sexual harassment of women in the workplace. This report states that more than 150 journalists in the country's television stations were dismissed in 2024. Despite legal obligations, over 48 percent of televisions do not provide dismissal benefits. Less than half of the television channels pay their employees on time. In 20 percent of televisions, employees' salaries are paid in arrears in two to five months. In 35 percent of televisions, salaries are irregular and paid in installments. Eighty-two percent of televisions do not have a sexual harassment prevention committee. Only about 20 percent of channels provide health insurance benefits. Seventy-two percent do not have life insurance. Provident funds and gratuity arrangements are absent in almost 90 percent of television companies. About a quarter of the channels have a provident fund, and 10 percent provide gratuity benefits. Many compare this situation to that of garment

workers, saying that the irony is that those who broadcast news about the salaries and rights of garment workers cannot speak for their own rights.

4.2.3 Broadcast Policy and Freedom of Journalism

The 2014 Broadcast Policy has effectively curtailed the freedom of journalism and created obligations for promoting and disseminating the ruling Awami League's political ideology. Right at the beginning of the sub-heading 'Other Matters in Broadcasting', 'any ridicule or sarcasm towards national ideals or objectives' has been prohibited. By blurring the line between the state and the government, the government broadcast policy has not permitted disseminating 'military, civilian, or government information that could jeopardize state security'.

Similarly, the imposition of the condition, "Any kind of propaganda in favor of a foreign state that can influence an issue between Bangladesh and the concerned country, or any kind of propaganda against a friendly foreign state that could create the possibility of damaging good relations between that state and Bangladesh, shall not be broadcast visually or orally," has severely undermined the freedom of objective debate and expression of dissent. As a result, broadcasting incidents of fatalities occurring at the country's borders or the victims' statements may also be compromised. Even a comparative discussion of the terms of foreign loans could become impossible under this provision.

4.2.4 The ghost TRP

The primary source of revenue for private television channels is advertising, as discussed previously. However, unlike newspapers, government advertisements in these channels are almost negligible. They are entirely dependent on private advertisements. The primary consideration for private advertisers is the number of viewers. The number of viewers is not just a simple count; it involves many complex issues. Advertisers' decisions are determined based on various criteria such as viewers' age, gender, viewing time, preferred programs, regional popularity, etc. Identifying, analyzing, and compiling these viewer trends is called Television Rating Point or Target Rating Point (TRP). Previously, various private agencies used to determine this TRP. However, in January 2022, the state-owned company Bangladesh Satellite Company Limited (BSCL) submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to provide TRP services. Following this, the ministry in principle formed a feasibility study committee. This committee, consisting of representatives from stakeholders, conducted a feasibility study. At a meeting at the ministry on December 27 of that year, the deadline for preparation to provide TRP services was set for January 2023. A directive in this regard was issued on January 4, which stipulated that activities should commence with installing a minimum of 500 set-top boxes.

Subsequently, another directive on January 25 stated that BSCL would sign agreements with television companies, subject to the approval of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. They would have to start their activities within two months of signing the agreement. Initially, they must begin with a minimum of 2000 devices/set-top boxes and increase this number to 8000 within six months. The commission's investigation in December 2024 found that BSCL was still operating with only 200 devices/set-top boxes. The commission was informed that the number of

set-top boxes had increased to 300 in March. Examining a copy of the agreement signed between Ekushey TV and BSCL, the commission found that the agreement, signed on October 7, 2024, mentioned starting services with 500 devices as the first phase and spoke of installing 1068 devices in the second phase. However, the agreement did not say when the second phase would begin. The agreement was signed without installing 500 devices per the government directive, and false information was provided. The company will charge a monthly fee of 1 lakh 25 thousand taka for TRP services, and an initial security deposit of three months' payment, i.e., 3 lakh 75 thousand taka, has to be submitted.

It is impossible to get an accurate picture with so few devices. Moreover, BSCL officials have admitted that not all of these devices are constantly active. The result of such unacceptable service from a state-owned enterprise has been useless to this industry and advertisers. Instead, compensation should be provided to the service recipients for the confusion created by low-quality and incomplete information from the TV channels. Representatives of TV channels and the advertising industry must determine an effective way to overcome the current flawed TRP system.

4.2.5 Cable Operator and DTH System

In delivering television programs to viewers, the role of another important group is currently being discussed. This group consists of cable operators and direct-to-home (DTH) service providers. They supply television programs to viewers in exchange for a fixed price and collect a fixed fee monthly. However, no television channel receives any money directly from them. Cable and DTH operators only pay the government a one-time annual renewal fee for obtaining and renewing their licenses. Officials of the Cable Operators Association of Bangladesh have told us that they provide services to approximately 15 million customers. And in the case of DTH service, most customers are of Beximco's Akash DTH set-top boxes, the number of which is six lakh according to their accounts.

Program producers will not receive any money for their creative work. Still, a third party involved in the distribution system of that creative work will earn hundreds of crores of taka by selling it; such a strange occurrence will not be found in any other country. Moreover, the license for the DTH business was not given through any transparent and open competition, but through a behind-the-scenes understanding. Finally, in two cases, the DTH service and the TV channel license have been given under the ownership of the same business group. Conflict of interest was not considered there. These groups are the Beximco Group and the Mohammadi Group, both affiliated with the Awami League. The Beximco Group owns Independent TV and Akash DTH, and the Mohammadi Group owns Nagorik TV and Jadu Digital. The key person of the Beximco Group is Salman F Rahman, the investment advisor to Sheikh Hasina, and the founder of the Mohammadi Group is Annisul Huq, the former mayor of Dhaka North.

Cable operators have stated that if the digitalization of the program distribution system is completed, they are ready to pay a fair amount of money to the television channels based on their viewership and popularity. DTH operators have also expressed the same opinion. They have recommended that the responsibility of digitalization be placed on Bangladesh Satellite Company Limited (BSCL). This process is mainly dependent on the decisions and role of the

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. However, some experts believe that DTH and cable operators can also digitize with their investment. Cable and DTH operators have raised questions about the logic of some conditions of their licenses. The obligation to broadcast various announcements of the police, law enforcement agencies, and administration at the local level almost always creates difficulties for them. Besides, cable operators have complained that they face unequal competition as the three DTH service providers have received additional benefits in broadcasting more foreign channels.

The Tofee app of Banglalink, a foreign-owned mobile phone operator, has been added to the program distribution system of these channels. Through this app, programs from almost all channels are broadcast directly. Cable operators have complained that the Tofee app is also harming them. On the Tofee app, programs from numerous domestic and foreign channels can be seen on mobile phones. However, although Banglalink gets additional financial benefits by selling Tofee app packages, the government does not benefit from it. In response to the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) investigation, it has been learned that the government does not receive any revenue for approving the Tofee app. Moreover, the approval of the Tofee app did not take place through any competitive and transparent process.

DTH and cable operators have also mentioned looking into the issue of live streaming services of Internet Service Provider (ISP) organizations. Stating that they are being harmed due to these live streaming services, they say that BTRC and the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunications are the regulators of ISP services. However, DTH and cable operators fall under the purview of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. This has created a kind of inconsistency. Opinions have also been expressed that there should be an opportunity to provide TV and data/internet services together.

4.3 Online News Portals

With the expansion of technology and the rapid accessibility of the internet, like the rest of the world, a rapid change began to occur in Bangladesh's journalism landscape after 2010. Readers and viewers gradually leaned towards the internet and social media. Among them, the prevalence of mobile phone usage increased, and a tendency to consume everything on digital platforms developed. As a result, to stay in competition, the country's media outlets were forced to start online versions, and on the other hand, many new online-based news portals emerged.

It isn't easy to get an exact count of how many online news portals there are in the country. However, some ideas can be obtained from a count by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The government announced a policy for online portals in 2017, which was further amended in 2020. This policy has also imposed the obligation to comply with the National Broadcast Policy on online portals. In the definition of online media in the online policy, it is stated that it will mean any information-content presented or disseminated in static and moving images, audio and text, or any other form of multimedia, hosted from the land of Bangladesh or broadcast directly or indirectly via internet-based radio, television and newspapers, or through the use of the internet, intended for dissemination by any Bangladeshi citizen or organization or institution registered in Bangladesh.

A shadow of the Awami League's party political views or directives can be found among the objectives and goals mentioned in the law. One such clause states, "To ensure that information and content published by online media service providers are in harmony with public interest, the history, ideals, and consciousness of the great liberation war, social values, and the fundamental principles of state governance." Another added condition is, "To assist in eliminating and countering terrorism, communalism, and militancy." Due to the widespread use of political rhetoric to label political opponents as terrorists and militants, the issue of compliance with this policy has raised questions about the government's intentions. Besides, one of the main objectives of formulating this policy was "To bring all online media under coordinated management through the provision of registration." Although it was mentioned that the registration work would be placed on the proposed Broadcast Commission of the then government, the government did not form that commission. Instead, the entire control of the registration process was left in the hands of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

In the exchange of views meeting with stakeholders, representatives of online portal owners and editors raised questions about the logic of some conditions of this registration process. Notable among them is the issue of the no-objection certificate from the Ministry of Home Affairs being made based on the investigation of other security intelligence agencies of the country besides the police investigation. Besides, high registration fees and annual renewal fees have been fixed. They have claimed that imposing the obligation to renew registration annually for online portals is also illogical and harassing. It is not at all clear why a portal should have to go through the bureaucratic process of government registration renewal every year. Online portals do not receive government advertisement or patronage, as newspapers do.

A guideline in this policy that is indicative of curtailing media freedom is restricting news dissemination by IPTV and online radio. Where written news or reports and news-based discussion programs can be broadcast on online portals, how logical is the restriction on news dissemination there? When online portals are obliged to follow the National Broadcast Policy 2014 in broadcasting news, programs, and advertisements, the Broadcast Commission will act as their regulatory body.

As of January 2024, the Ministry of Information has registered 213 online news portals and 196 online portals of daily newspapers. Besides those centered in Dhaka, some online portals of regional newspapers have also been registered among the daily newspapers. According to the the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the number of registered private television channels' online portals is 17. Besides this, sources at the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting have informed that several thousand more applications are pending for registration.

Stating the need to curb fake news and anti-state propaganda, the government tightened online news portal registration rules in 2020. Allegations exist that this decision was essentially taken as part of establishing control over the media. However, on September 14, 2021, the High Court directed the government and the regulatory body, Bangladesh Telecom Regulatory Commission, to shut down all unregistered news portals.

On February 25, 2024, the then Law Minister Anisul Huq informed the National Parliament that there were plans to gradually increase vigilance over online media brought under registration. He

also told the Parliament that if any unregistered online newspaper or online-based portal in the country is involved in broadcasting anti-state news or false and fabricated news, necessary steps will be taken to shut it down.

However, the Awami League government has irregularly registered online news portals. In this case, too, many portals of political individuals were registered based on party considerations. While many individuals close to party leaders and the Awami League were given registration, mainstream media were deprived. Although some mainstream media outlets applied, their names were not on this list. Instead, the names of many unknown portals were seen. However, later, mainstream media online news portals were also brought under registration.

Among those whose portals were registered based on party considerations by the Awami League are: Sajeeb Wazed's online portal Dainandini Dotcom, Mohibul Hassan Chowdhury's DesheBideshe Dotcom, Bidyut Barua's SaraDin Dotnews, Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya's Mayer Star Sangbad Dotcom, Obaidul MuktaDir Chowdhury's Meghdoot Dotcom, Chowdhury Nafiz Sarafat's Newsbangla24 Dotcom, Apurba Ukil's PanKouriNews Dotcom, Mahiuddin Khan Alamgir's Currentnews Dotcom and journalist Shameema Dolly's NewsNow Bangla Dotcom, Nuh-ul-Alam Lenin's UttaranchalBarta Dotcom, a member of the Awami League's advisory council and Farida Yasmin's Women's i Dotcom, the then president of the National Press Club.

In the meantime, with the increase in smartphone usage and the spread of the internet in the country, people have become much more online-oriented. They want to read and know everything quickly, which online news portals can fulfill. The prevailing mainstream media couldn't meet that demand. At the same time, Facebook and YouTube became widely popular. The trend of spreading all daily news through these social media began. For these reasons, online media has become a significant source of information. As a result, online news portals have sprung up like mushrooms. Many believe that this number will exceed several thousand at present. While the opportunity to get news or information instantly online has been created, on the other hand, the tendency to spread fake news, misinformation, or rumors has also increased. Maintaining objectivity and reliability in the flood of information has become difficult.

However, those online portals and the online versions of many mainstream media outlets in the country publish fake news, misleading information, and click-bait news. This trend has been seen to increase with the rise in online outlets. People belonging to all social classes and professions, including the government, political parties, religious groups, and journalists, get involved in various types of misinformation and propaganda. Many online portals are being used for such unethical activities.

The rise of countless ethical, neutral, and unethical online news portals has posed a significant challenge to objective and reliable journalism. Journalists working in online news portals have complained that there is no mandatory regulation regarding their jobs and salaries. Just as the salary structure is not standardized. Similarly, labor laws are completely ignored in questions of job conditions, work environment, and workplace rights. Most complaints against the management or owners of online portals have come from journalists outside Dhaka, who say that the sale of journalist identity cards has become a practice for some. After appointing trainees on no salary for a few days, they are replaced by new people. There is no system to get redress for

such unethical practices. They have also complained that they are always neglected when getting accreditation cards. A proposal has been made for a new integrated media policy that will equally apply to newspapers, TV, radio, and online media.

Among the online-based news portals in the country, bdnews24.com is a prominent one. Its journey started in 2005 as a web-based news organization. bdnews24.com is the first online-based news medium in Bangladesh. Besides this, the other leading portals are Dhaka Tribune, banglanews24.com, newsbangla24.com, jagonews24.com, Dhaka Post, Bangla Tribune, and Risingbd.

4.4 FM Radio

Within a few years of launching FM (Frequency Modulation) radio in Bangladesh in 2006, this medium gained widespread popularity. However, in the last few years, the attraction and interest of listeners towards these radio channels have vastly decreased. Due to the crisis of advertisements and listeners, several FM radio stations have already been shut down. In the national opinion poll conducted at the beginning of the year by the Media Reform Commission on what kind of media people in the country want to see, a disappointing picture of declining radio listeners has emerged. In a survey conducted on nearly 45,000 people, 94 percent of respondents said they do not listen to the radio, and 54 percent said they do not feel the need to hear.

Bangladesh Betar, the national institution, has been the most active broadcaster on the FM waveband. Even a few days ago, Bangladesh Betar used to broadcast popular foreign media like BBC, Voice of America, and Deutsche Welle with the help of its FM transmitters. However, due to declining listener demand, these organizations have completely shut down their radio operations and focused on multimedia platforms.

Radio Today was the country's first private FM radio station to receive approval. From that year onwards, the country's people became acquainted with domestic FM radio. According to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the government has approved 28 channels. However, 19 channels are currently continuing their broadcasting operations. Four channels have already been shut down. Although approval has been given for five more radio channels, their broadcasting has not started.

In 2006, during the tenure of the BNP-led coalition government, approval was given to launch two FM radio channels named Radio Today and Radio Foorti. Two more channels, Radio Amar and ABC Radio, received approval during the 1/11 government in 2007 and 2009, respectively. The remaining 24 were approved between 2010 and 2015 during the previous Awami League government. With the increase in the popularity and demand for FM radio among the country's people, many FM channels emerged within a few years. Like TV channels, businesspeople were also interested in establishing FM radio stations. Apart from industrial groups like Bashundhara, Square, and Pran-RFL, those who received approval for FM radio channels included Awami League and its alliance leaders and supporters, among whom notable are Member of Parliament and former State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam, and actresses Shomi Kaiser and actor Nader Chowdhury.

In the case of private television channels, the National Broadcast Policy 2014 has created various obstacles in the questions of freedom of speech, dissent, and diversity, almost all of which also apply to FM radio. In that consideration, the opportunity to broadcast objective news, express independent opinions and democratic debates, and reflect pluralism is very limited in these radios. They also cite some examples of how the intervention and strict control of the ruling authoritarian government remained in place even as listeners dwindled in radio program broadcasts. An incident of seeking an explanation and expressing displeasure as to why a speech by the former Minister of Road Transport and Bridges and General Secretary of the Awami League, Obaidul Quader, was not made the headline in the news during the broadcast of a program is one such example. Conversely, there are allegations that in FM radio, the ethics of decency and aesthetics are almost always ignored in the programs of young presenters, a section known as radio jockeys.

From an economic perspective, FM radio is facing a challenging situation. During the exchange of views with stakeholders, many of the entrepreneurs and managers of FM radio stations spoke of unequal competition. Due to the kind of concessions given for private advertisements on television and online platforms, advertisers are turning away from radio. Again, although the government issues directives to broadcast various public interest announcements free of charge at different times, no government advertisements are given to these radio stations. They also raised questions about the logic of the security deposits held by the government against the licenses. Besides, the annual license renewal fee has burdened these struggling institutions.

4.5 Private News Agencies

Around the time of Bangladesh's independence, the Dhaka bureau office of Pakistan Press International (PPI), a private news agency of Pakistan, got the opportunity to start operating as Bangladesh Press International (BPI). Within a short time, it merged with the government news agency, (BSS). The first Press Commission report mentions that shortly before independence, in 1970, a private news agency named Eastern News Agency (ENA) was launched in the then East Pakistan. Before independence, the ENA fell under the wrath of the Pakistani government for its independent journalism, and the then-military government shut it down. Its operations were suspended during the Liberation War.

After independence, ENA resumed its operations. It started as a private company, with 75 percent of the shares belonging to the entrepreneurs and 25 percent to various business people. A six-member governing council used to manage it. According to the first Press Commission report, only 20 percent of their income came from newspapers, 60 percent from radio and television, and 10 percent from the government's Press Information Department. The remaining 10 percent came from various commercial ventures. ENA did not receive any subsidy from the government. At that time, the teleprinter was the primary medium of news transmission, dependent on the telecommunications system. However, their business faced difficulties due to the high cost of telecommunication services.

During the military rule of General Ershad, the organization fell into further financial difficulties, and eventually its operations were completely shut down. However, during that military regime, in 1983, the United News of Bangladesh (UNB) started its journey in the private sector. Initially,

UNB only provided news, but now they have also focused on video services. UNB is the sole authorized distributor of photos and news of the United States news agency Associated Press (AP) in Bangladesh. UNB's number of clients is not very high. However, regular revenue comes from PID, BTV, and Bangladesh Betar. All in all, their income is now about 50 percent of their operating expenses. For this reason, they demand government assistance like other media outlets. They have expressed interest in getting special supplements on their online portals, similar to the supplements published by the government in various newspapers on special days.

Despite being a small news agency, they have a good network of correspondents nationwide. The organization is operating on a small budget and does not receive any assistance from the government. Compared to the government-funded news agency, the success of this private sector news agency is by no means negligible. They have claimed that the impact or effectiveness of the news they produce is much higher, as seen in their evaluations.

Along with the government's obstacles in the path of independent and objective journalism, the journalists of this organization have also mentioned the barriers of the private sector. UNB's clients include other media outlets whose ownership includes various business groups. If reports are made on the irregularities and corruption of organizations owned by such businessmen, there is a risk of facing pressure. For this reason, some instances of self-censorship occur.

Regulatory Framework for Mass Media

Some existing laws from the British colonial rule have been obstructing the growth of independent and free media. Even after the end of colonial rule, domestic rulers have retained these for their own interests. Since the birth of Bangladesh as an independent state, several new laws have been enacted in the last 54 years, some of which are far more repressive than their predecessors. As a result, independent journalism has been widely curtailed, and the media and journalists have become targets of the government's wrath. On one hand, state institutions are caught in various restrictions, while on the other hand, non-state actors patronized by those in power are also using multiple tactics and tools to undermine the freedom of the media. Surveillance technology and digital tools have reached dangerous levels of monitoring journalists. As a result, a culture of fear has been created in the media world. Journalists are choosing the path of self-censorship to avoid the legal harassment of fear and false cases. Article 39 of our Constitution guarantees freedom of expression and the press. Under the heading "Freedom of thought and conscience, and speech," this article states:

- (1) Freedom of thought and conscience is guaranteed.
- (2) Subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or about contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence—
 - (a) the right of every citizen to freedom of speech and expression; and
 - (b) Freedom of the press is guaranteed.

However, it is noteworthy here that due to the broadness of issues like "friendly relations with foreign states," "decency," "defamation," and "contempt of court," misuse of the law is often seen. It is not necessary that "restrictions imposed by law" will always be "reasonable." These can also be misused as political tools to suppress dissent, of which we have seen countless examples recently. Repressive laws like the Information and Communication Technology Act (ICT Act) and the Digital Security Act (DSA) can be mentioned in this context. Therefore, changes are needed in this article of the Constitution.

Recommendation: The first Press Commission, led by former Prime Minister Aaur Rahman Khan, expressed the opinion that the question of national security can only arise in wartime. In normal times, such restrictions are contrary to democracy and fundamental rights. The Media Reform Commission also holds the same view and recommends amendments to the Constitution. Several countries have separate and specific provisions in their constitutions regarding the freedom of the press. For example, the Swiss Constitution guarantees journalists the right to express their opinions freely, protects the confidentiality of sources, and guarantees the right not to violate their privacy. The Swedish Constitution also provides similar guarantees for the freedom of the press. Although our Constitution mentions "freedom of the press," it lacks a clear

explanation. Specific provisions for media freedom, similar to those in the Swiss Constitution, need to be added to our Constitution to remove this ambiguity.

Apart from this article of the Constitution, laws that directly and indirectly create obstacles to the freedom of the press or have a negative impact are discussed below.

5.1 Penal Code, 1860 (Sections 499, 500, 501 & 502 on Defamation)

Sections 499, 500, 501, and 502 of the Penal Code regarding defamation have often been used to harass journalists and intimidate the media. The misuse of this law has been most prevalent in the last decade. The most significant risk of this law is the possibility of prolonged pre-trial detention. Although the law clearly states that only the individual who is the victim of defamation can file a case under this law, and multiple cases cannot be filed, the opposite has been seen in reality. Third parties have filed cases with the logic that "defamation of my leader is defamation of me and my party," and numerous cases have been filed in different places. Surprisingly, the courts have accepted these cases, and accused individuals have been arrested. Journalists and editors, after receiving summons, have been forced to appear in courts in different districts of the country, and in many cases, bail has not been granted. Many editors, publishers, and journalists, including Mahfuz Anam, editor of The Daily Star, and Matiur Rahman, editor of Prothom Alo, have had to appear in such situations numerous times. As a result, the freedom of the media has been curtailed in various ways, and the trend of self-censorship has increased.

5.2 Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898

Sections 99K and 99 L of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, which give the government the power to confiscate newspapers, are contrary to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

5.3 From ICT Act to DSA and CSA

The Information and Communication Technology Act (ICT Act) was enacted in 2006 during the last period of the BNP-led coalition government. In 2013, the Sheikh Hasina government made the ICT Act even more stringent through amendments. Section 57 of this Act allowed for the arrest of anyone without any cognizable offense. Primarily, people of the ruling party misused this Act by filing cases against those who criticized the government and expressed dissenting opinions on Facebook, on charges of alleged defamation, propaganda, and hurting religious sentiments. Facing widespread protests against the Act at national and international levels and demands for its repeal, the government enacted the Digital Security Act (DSA) in 2018.

The Digital Security Act, issued in 2018, retained many aspects of the previous ICT Act. Moreover, some new restrictions were added to it. According to the human rights organization Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), 1295 cases were filed under this Act from 2018 to April 2023. Among the accused, 403 were political figures, 355 were journalists, and 355 were students. 27.41 percent of the total cases were filed against journalists. Ain o Salish Kendra collected information on 350 cases. It was seen that the plaintiffs in 165 cases were police, leaders, and

activists of the ruling party and its affiliates. That is, influential ruling party figures filed 47 percent of the cases. Sections 8, 21, 25, 28, 29, 31, 32, 43, and 53 of the Digital Security Act were contrary to the freedom of speech and the press guaranteed by the Constitution. Fourteen sections of the Act were non-bailable. The Act created fear in the media world, forcing journalists to impose self-censorship. The United Nations Human Rights Commission recommended the repeal of sections 21 and 28 of the Act and the amendment to 8 harmful sections. Facing protests from journalists, human rights organizations, and civil society, the Awami League government repealed the Digital Security Act and enacted the Cyber Security Act 2023. Provisions for the trial of cases under the Digital Security Act were kept in the new law, and many issues were kept unchanged in the Cyber Security Act, retaining the continuity of the previous Act. The interim government has, however, proposed repealing the Cyber Security Act and enacting the Cyber Security and Crime Prevention Act, various provisions of which have raised concerns among rights activists and legal experts.

5.4 Official Secrets Act, 1923

This is a repressive law. Several sections of this law from the colonial era create obstacles in investigative journalism. In section 3(1) of the Government Secrets Act of 1923, the words "security and interest of the State" are vague, and there is scope for misuse. This Act was misused to stop a legitimate investigation into allegations of irregularities and corruption in the health department's activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. A case was filed under this Act against Prothom Alo journalist Rozina Islam, and she was kept in police custody for a long time.

5.5 Press Council Act, 1974

The objective of the Press Council Act, 1974, is to preserve the freedom of the press and to maintain and improve the standards of journalism in newspapers and news agencies. Through this Act, the Council has been empowered to formulate a code of conduct for upholding the standards of journalists of newspapers and news agencies and to take necessary steps to ensure its compliance. At the same time, if anyone is aggrieved by any news publication and files a complaint with the Council, the Council can investigate it and direct the accused newspaper/agency to take remedial measures to resolve the complaint. Under this Act, the Council, even on its own initiative, can take necessary measures to preserve the freedom of the press and maintain journalistic standards.

Unfortunately, in 50 years, the Council has not been able to play much of a role in protecting the freedom of the press. In 1993, the Council issued a code of conduct for newspapers, news agencies, and journalists, and amended it once in 2002. Besides this, it has resolved some cases by investigating and hearing complaints filed by individuals and organizations aggrieved due to news publications. There is virtually no effective remedy for victims of unethical reporting (such as privacy breaches or false reports) other than seeking legal recourse. Despite having the power of a civil court, the Press Council has not played a significant role in ensuring accountability in such incidents.

During the previous regime, the Press Council virtually turned into a partisan institution due to extreme politicization in various sectors of the state and society. On one hand, in the

appointment of retired judges to the post of chairman by the government, their political decisions during their judicial career were given priority. On the other hand, in the members' posts, supporters of the ruling party were ensured nominations even from owners, editors, journalist unions, bar councils, Bangla Academy, and the University Grants Commission. And through three consecutive controversial elections that created a virtually opposition-less parliament, the two MPs who came to the commission as members also played a role in the politicization of the institution. This process of political control over the Press Council by the past government has not only distanced the institution from achieving its goals, but it has also sometimes turned it into a tool for fulfilling the political objectives of the ruling government.

The Press Council, led by retired Justice Nizamul Haque Nasim, prepared a draft proposal to amend the 1974 Act, which was not published for public opinion vetting as it gave birth to controversy. However, without any discussion or debate, it was sent to the Ministry of Law for vetting for passage. The proposed law also included provisions for imprisoning journalists, editors, and publishers and imposing hefty fines. The Press Council Act draft was not made public for public opinion vetting. When the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the current Press Council were asked for the draft, they did not agree to share it with the Media Reform Commission, stating that it was "pending for vetting in the Legislative and Parliamentary Affairs Division."

Due to the current limitations of the Press Council being confined to newspapers and news agencies, in the context of the widespread expansion of electronic media—that is, television, radio, and online portals—the Council does not influence journalism much. The intention of using the word "press" for all journalism media may have been there when the Council was drafting the law, which is why news agencies also fall under the Council's purview. However, despite the rapid development of electronic media, the institution's current structure does not have the capacity and power to play the necessary role in protecting independent journalism.

5.6 Contempt of Court Act, 1926

In absence of a clear definition of contempt of court, the media faces hesitation in preparing reports on the judiciary or the judicial system. Frequent use of contempt of court orders or their threats on charges of "scandalizing the court" has created fear among the media in reporting on court proceedings and analyzing judgments and orders. The application of the Contempt of Court Act for publishing allegations of judicial corruption is by no means justifiable. However, such instances have occurred in our country, which has hurt journalism.

5.7 Review of Laws Related to Incitement

The existing law regarding "hurting religious sentiments" has been misused against journalists and others, especially against people of minority communities. Even in cases where no individual has been directly harmed, the right to freedom has been curtailed by applying this law.

5.8 Right to Information Act, 2009

Although the Right to Information Act of 2009 is a notable positive law, its practical benefits have remained limited. It has been politically influenced by appointing individuals and former bureaucrats loyal to the ruling party. There are also practical problems due to bureaucratic reasons. There is no obligation to provide information to journalists within the shortest possible time on issues of urgent public importance, so journalists do not benefit much from this law. Moreover, many government and non-government organizations, including constitutional bodies, still create obstacles in providing information. The Election Commission's reluctance to publish the annual accounts of political parties submitted to it regarding their funding is a significant example. Ultimately, the applicant citizen organization Sujon had to take refuge in the court, where the court recognized the applicant's right. Besides, taking advantage of some ambiguity in explaining national security and foreign relations, many organizations express reluctance to disclose information.

5.9 Blocking or Removal of Information-Content

Various existing laws give BTRC, the Ministry of Home Affairs, NTMC, unnamed government agencies, and regulators broad powers to block or remove information content on Bangladeshi servers, curtailing the freedom of the media.

5.10 Review of the National Broadcast Policy, 2014

Besides laws, the government has imposed restrictions on various media through policies contrary to independent journalism. The National Broadcast Policy has not been an exception to this. Through this broadcast policy, some restrictions have been imposed on radio, television, and online media. Advertisements that "undermine the state," "hurt religious or political sentiments," content that "distorts the historical dignity of Bangladesh," and programs or advertisements that are "not consistent with law, culture, and heritage" (Articles 3.2.1, 3.6.5, 3.6.7, 4.1.1, and 5) are noteworthy in this regard. The specification of terms like "anti-state" and "hurting religious or political sentiments" has ample scope for misuse in light of political perspectives.

5.11 Review of the National Online Mass Media Policy, 2017

This policy gives the government broad powers to formulate regulations without a law for online mass media (Article 2.1.4). As a result, the government has created an environment of unequal competition in the online mass media sector by taking biased measures for political reasons. By mentioning the application of the broadcast policy on broad issues like "history" and "cultural and religious sentiments" (Article 4.1), the freedom of expression and the press have been curtailed.

This policy mentions forming a Broadcast Commission whose functions include monitoring operations (Article 3.1.1), recommending legal measures to the government, and imposing fines for publishing misleading information in broadcasts (Article 3.1.4).

5.12 The Printing Presses and Publications (Declaration and Registration) Act, 1973

Although this Act was amended several times between 1976 and 1991, it is not up-to-date. The emergence of countless unknown newspapers in the last three to four decades has given rise to various problems. Many of these problems could have been avoided if the government had given due importance to sub-clause 2(Q) of section 12 of the said Act in granting declarations for newspaper publication. This sub-clause mentions the satisfaction of the District Magistrate regarding the publisher's necessary financial capacity for the regular publication of the newspaper. Allegations exist that this sub-clause is not given much importance in granting declarations. According to sources at the Department of Information, currently, showing a bank balance of only Tk 10 lakh is enough to get a newspaper declaration. The financial solvency (bank solvency), amount of investment, source of funds, and proof of tax payment of anyone applying for newspaper publication should be checked. The relevant Act needs to be amended for this purpose.

5.13 Journalism Safety Act

Journalists often become victims of physical and legal attacks at various times for their freedom of speech and the practice of objective information dissemination. The government and various non-state actors and vested interest groups threaten, intimidate, and legally harass journalists (such as filing false cases even before news publication) to obstruct their professional work. These illegal activities by state agencies, activists-supporters loyal to politicians, and various interest groups patronized by political powers seriously hinder independent journalism. In the incidents of such threats and attacks by members or influential figures of the ruling party, law enforcement agencies often provide no protection. And where members of various state or law enforcement agencies are involved, the administration plays a silent spectator's role, and no remedy or protection is found in the courts. Most of the families of journalists who have been victims of murder have not received justice. Non-trial of the much-discussed Sagar-Runi murder case for more than a decade has created a public perception that nothing happens if journalists are killed.

In the 15-year rule of the Awami League, journalists have been attacked, harassed, arrested, and jailed in false cases in various ways for their online and offline reporting. Investigative journalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol, journalist-researcher Mobassher Hasan, journalist Golam Sarwar, and several other journalists have been victims of forced disappearance for various periods. Besides this, the right to personal privacy of journalists has been seriously violated due to the use of surveillance technology and digital tools.

To stop all these abuses that create obstacles in the professional work of journalists, the issue of legal protection is now being taken up in many parts of the world. The European Union's Media Freedom Act is noteworthy in this regard. This law protects against surveillance, especially the use of spyware and intrusive or targeted communication, against the media, journalists, and individuals professionally associated with the media and journalism. In the new media policy that the post-uprising government in Sri Lanka is adopting, the right to protection and a safe environment for journalists from physical, sexual, mental, verbal abuse (slang), and legal

harassment has been recognized. In Pakistan, the Media Freedom Protection Act is awaiting passage in Parliament after being finalized.

In light of global best practices, a Journalism Safety Act has become indispensable in Bangladesh to protect the freedom of the press. The objective of this Act is to ensure that the state protects journalists/media organisations from harassment through the use of force or any other means of obstruction, intimidation, physical attacks, or misuse of laws by any state or non-state actors, vested interest groups, or institutions against the professional work of journalists/media organizations. This Act will also impose a duty on government authorities to protect the right to keep the identity of news sources confidential and to restrict intrusion into the personal communication of journalists/media organizations through surveillance and electronic means. However, the benefit of this protection will certainly not be available in cases of misuse of journalistic identity and any profession-related criminal activity.

Public Perception and Expectations about Mass Media

In recent times, a significant portion of the media has been operating under the control of leaders and supporters of the ruling party. Many high-ranking journalists in these institutions have disregarded professional ethics and acted as party propagandists. On the other hand, those who have tried to remain independent and neutral have failed to fulfill their responsibilities properly due to various forms of intimidation. The impact of this was seen during the July student protests, where the role of a section of the media fueled public anger. As a result, several media outlets became targets of attacks by angry students and the public. In this context, the Media Reform Commission conducted a national-level public opinion survey to know the opinions of readers, viewers, and listeners.

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) conducted this survey as the first national assessment regarding media usage. The survey was conducted from January 1 to 7, collecting data from members over 10 years of age from 45,000 families in 64 countries. Among the participants, 23,145 were women and 21,900 were men. This survey revealed important information regarding media expansion, changes in news consumption habits, people's trust in media, and the importance of media freedom.

According to the survey results, 67.67% of participants want to see the media as independent. The expectation of a neutral or impartial media is held by 59.94% of people. Besides, 32.68% want a media free from government influence, 37.39% free from political influence, 17.26% objective, 30.57% capable of meeting the demands of the general public, 16.16% free from biased journalism, 9.31% free from commercial influence, and 9.58% free from financial influence. However, 38% of survey participants believe that the country's media is not independent. Among them, 15.31% believe the media is not independent, and 23.64% believe it is somewhat or barely independent. 24.18% of respondents think the media is largely independent, and 17.29% think it is entirely independent.

Why is the country's media not independent? In response to this question, 79.46% of participants mentioned political interference, 71.50% mentioned government interference, and 50.14% mentioned the interference of influential individuals. 31.36% believe journalists' interests are responsible for this. Besides, 24.17% mentioned the commercial interests of owners, and 12.45% cited the pressure of advertisers as reasons. 2.80% of respondents said "don't know," and 1.37% did not want to state a reason.

In the survey, 47.22% of participants mentioned the limitations of journalists in publishing objective news, while 30.68% held the opposite view. Regarding the reasons for this, 76.6% mentioned political interference, 66.63% government interference, and 46.94% the interference of influential individuals. 26.39% cited journalists' interests, 22.71% the commercial interests of owners, and 12.15% the pressure of advertisers as reasons. 2.13% of respondents did not want to state a reason.

The survey shows that people read news online instead of printed newspapers on mobile phones. Television is still the primary medium for collecting information during national disasters or crises, but radio use has decreased significantly. Survey participants expected an independent, neutral press free from government and political influence. However, most believe the government should control Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar.

People's dependence on mobile phones for news is higher than on traditional media as a source of information. Overall, people's trust in the media has not decreased, but political, government, and influential individuals' interference is the main obstacle to objective news publication. In the survey, 73% of participants said they do not read printed newspapers, with 46% stating they do not feel the need for it as the main reason. In the case of television, this rate is 53%, but 65% of people watch television. Radio usage is the lowest, with 94% of people not listening to it, among whom 54% believe there is no need for it, and 35% mentioned the unavailability of radio sets.

The survey shows that 59% of people read online newspapers on their mobile phones, and 2.5% read on computers, laptops, or tablets. Overall, 88% of people use mobile phones for media consumption, while computer usage is 7%. Among social media, 31% of people rely on Facebook and 16.5% on YouTube for news. To gain knowledge, 42% of people trust teachers.

The State Broadcasting Media

7.1 Bangladesh Television (BTV)

Historically, Bangladesh Television (BTV) has been used as a propaganda tool by the ruling governments at various times. During the regime of military ruler General Ershad, BTV became known as "Saheb-Bibi-Golam's Box." News about President General Ershad, First Lady Raushan Ershad, and their ministers was the main content during this period. During the mass uprising of the nineties to restore democracy, public anger against BTV and Betar reached a fever pitch during the movement to restore democracy. In the outline of the combined movement of all opposition political parties in the country, known as the "Three Alliances' Outline," the autonomy of these two institutions was demanded. The demand for independence of state broadcasting media, Betar and Television, has been repeatedly raised in various movements, which proves that independent and autonomous television and radio free from government control are our national aspirations.

Even before the nineties, in response to the movement by officials, employees, and artists of Betar and BTV, the government of General Ershad formed a broadcast commission on February 18, 1990. This commission, formed under the leadership of former Cabinet Secretary Mujibul Haque, submitted its report to the new government on September 30, 1991, but it never saw the light of day. The Mujibul Haque Commission was formed due to the failure of the "National Broadcasting Authority Ordinance" issued in 1986 to integrate and establish a unified national broadcasting authority by combining radio and television under the military government's administrative reorganization and reforms process.

The Ershad government argued that bringing Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar under the same authority would reduce administrative complexities and increase the efficiency of the institutions through joint resource utilization. However, the experiences of employees working at that time reveal that various conflicts arose in the unified institution. Disputes between cadre and non-cadre services reached an intolerable level, and the unification process was ultimately cancelled. The television's recruitment policy as a creative sector was virtually abolished after unification. Cadre service officers who passed the BCS examination were appointed to radio, while appointing non-cadre service personnel to BTV through recruitment examinations continued, creating an uneasy situation. Moreover, cadre service officers were posted on deputation in these two institutions, which led to a decline in creativity and artistic merit. This trend in the appointment process is still prevalent, and cadre service officers have expressed unease in discussions about autonomy, which is virtually a euphemism for expressing dissatisfaction.

The demand for autonomy of Betar-TV was raised again when the opposition parties in Parliament, including the Awami League and Jamaat-e-Islami, started a movement for the implementation of the caretaker government system during the 1995-96 election period. Subsequently, after the Awami League came to power, a commission was formed on September

9, 1996, under the leadership of former Secretary Asafuddowlah, to formulate the autonomy policy for Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television.

The Asafuddowlah Commission submitted its report to the government on June 30, 1997, the outcome of which was similar to that of the Mujibur Haque Commission. However, although the then government shelved the issue of autonomy for the two state broadcasting media as per the commission's recommendations, it opened up the broadcasting sector to the private sector for the first time. The commission's recommendations included granting permission to run radio and TV channels under private ownership. At that time, permission was also given for three private TV channels. The way the Awami League, after forming the government for the second time, distributed licenses for television channels in the private sector among party supporters indicates that, alongside the state-owned broadcasting media, there was a plan to expand a partisan influence in private sector broadcasting as well.

The Media Reform Commission has reviewed the public perception and the actual situation regarding these two state-owned broadcasting media through exchanges of views with various stakeholders, current and former officials, employees, artists, and representatives of different classes and professions in the BTV and Bangladesh Betar societies. Alongside this, it has considered the national consensus seen in political history regarding the autonomy of the two institutions. Furthermore, the policies and rules followed by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the management of these institutions in the operation of the two institutions have also been intensely scrutinized.

The existing problems, weaknesses, errors, and complexities as observed by this commission has are not very different from those noted by the previous commission 28 years ago. The report submitted by the Asafuddowlah Commission in 1997 stated: "Among the reasons for the current state of Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television that the commission has identified are limitations of administrative and financial powers due to complete government control, flawed recruitment and promotion policies, lack of old equipment, lack of necessary technical facilities and physical infrastructure, low quality of programs due to not applying proper and transparent policies in artist selection, incompatible artist remuneration with the cost of living, corruption of some individuals involved in program production, nepotism and favoritism, biased policy in news broadcasting, lack of objectivity and neutrality, absence of a conducive environment for the development of professionalism and creativity in program planning and presentation, and lack of accountability and discipline, etc."

Even more surprisingly, on July 17, 2001, the then Awami League government, a few days before the end of their term, passed a law called the "Bangladesh Television Authority Act, 2001." According to the provisions of this law passed in Parliament, "As soon as possible after this Act comes into force, the Government shall, by notification in the official Gazette, specify the date on which this Act shall come into force." The government has not published that notification in the Gazette to bring the law passed in Parliament into force in the last 24 years. As a result, no authority called "Bangladesh Television Authority" has been established through another Gazette notification as per the provisions of that Act. The Act also mentions that "the Authority shall be a statutory body." The Act has not yet been repealed. However, the caretaker government 2007 issued an amendment to that Act, which was subsequently not introduced in

Parliament, or the amendment expired. However, after the Awami League returned to power in 2009, the law was forgotten.

Section 5 of the Bangladesh Television Authority Act 2001 talks about the composition of the Authority: The Authority shall be constituted by the following members:

- (a) A Chairman;
- (b) 3 (three) members, including one woman appointed under sub-section 6(1); and
- (c) The Director-General, ex officio.

The Act mentions that the government will appoint the Chairman and members from among persons having experience in education, culture, journalism, administration, television broadcasting, or management. And among the functions of the Authority specified in section 8, the notable ones are: proper operation of Bangladesh Television's programs, reviewing and evaluating its programs; improving the standard of news broadcasting and other program broadcasts; following and implementing the national broadcast policy approved by the government; constructing and developing necessary physical infrastructure to ensure the technical and qualitative standard of programs; and arranging for the determination and collection of license fees for television sets with prior approval of the government.

From the sections of the Act, it is clear that it was enacted to provide limited autonomy to Bangladesh Television. That Authority was vested with the power to spend the necessary funds to construct and develop physical infrastructure to improve the quality of programs. Even the power to take loans with the government's approval was given to this Authority. However, due to the Act not being effective even after its enactment, the current management of BTV has to remain dependent on the Ministry. An example of dependence on the Ministry is that the Act states, "The Authority may appoint the required number of officers and employees for the proper discharge of its functions, and regulations shall determine their conditions of service." However, even in 2016, the policy for appointing district correspondents was finalized in the Ministry, and the Information Minister approved it.

7.1.1 From State Media to propaganda machine

Bangladesh Television (BTV), once the country's only television channel, was a center for entertainment, education, and social communication. BTV's journey began in 1964 as the Dhaka center of Pakistan Television. After independence, it adopted the name Bangladesh Television. It was an essential medium for national culture, education, and information dissemination.

Dhaka Television operated as an autonomous institution in its early years. In September 1972, the Bangladesh government, through an ordinance, transformed Bangladesh Television (BTV) from an autonomous institution to a government organization. After the arrival of private TV channels in 1997, it failed to compete and its role increasingly became that of a government-dependent propaganda tool instead of independent journalism.

From 2007-08 onwards, it virtually became a one-sided propaganda instrument, where dissenting opinions were suppressed entirely and party propaganda was given priority. To illustrate the nature of party propaganda, a BTV producer revealed that instructions were given to refer to development programs on BTV as "Awami League government's development" instead of just "government development." In news broadcasting, editorial decisions were replaced by directives that news should be arranged in order of priority: first the Prime Minister, then the President, the party's General Secretary, the Speaker, and the Information Minister. One of the former Directors-General, M. Hamid, recounted his experience, stating that all governments follow the same policy regarding news, which is that BTV will only broadcast government news. He faced consequences for showing a picture of an opposition leader at the Shaheed Minar on February 21, 1997.

- Current officials also believe that BTV's organogram is flawed.
- There has been a decline in in-house program production, and producers have mainly become unmotivated. Before 2009, program planning was in the hands of BTV's management, and producers could make decisions. However, later it went to a third party. Although there is a need for independent and self-governing producers to work in national broadcasting media, transparency and fairness policies have not been followed there. Low-quality programs by politically favored individuals have received priority.
- Without checking whether the content and quality of programs are consistent with BTV's policies, the obligation to purchase and broadcast programs and dramas produced by party supporters has been imposed. One of the former Directors-General, Abdul Mannan, stated that a former Agriculture Minister directly intervened to give an agriculture-related program to an outsider. Another former Director-General, Sohrab Hossain, revealed that 70-80 individuals outside BTV, all party members, used to produce programs under the name "Planner." Their programs were regularly aired due to political pressure. These party-affiliated producers often had to be pay exorbitant amounts outside BTV's policies.
- Many unnecessary appointments have been made under political pressure, which has increased expenditure. The acting Director-General of BTV during the last days of the previous government, Md. Jahangir Alam stated that he found about 250 people being maintained at BTV appointed without reason. Many political individuals were appointed solely for looting.
- Self-imposed censorship is prevalent. Government censorship and the fear of harassment in service create obstacles to creativity and independent expression in program production and drama. Allegations of hurting sentiments and tarnishing the alleged dignity of the profession have also been raised in this regard. In this context, the rule of prior approval for using law enforcement uniforms in dramas is a significant obstacle.
- BTV often faces unequal competition with private television, especially in talk shows, artist remuneration, and advertising.
- There was no fairness and transparency in giving opportunities to enlisted artists. Artists faced harassment and deprivation due to organizations and movements of artists. Artists have cited the incident of stopping the eight-year-running program "Smritimoy Gaan Gulo" as an example.
- Artist remuneration is much lower than the cost of living and not equivalent to private channels, negatively impacting quality, and many professional artists are turning away from state broadcasting media. This remuneration has not been increased since 2012.

- With the change of political regimes, the practice of blacklisting artists in state broadcasting institutions has had a seriously negative impact on national art and culture.
- Efforts are made to limit training opportunities, especially higher training abroad, to cadre service officers, so that the institution's artists and performers cannot acquire skills.
- Although artists' artistic practice is lifelong, they face financial insecurity and uncertainty in their retirement due to contract-based work. They lose focus on creativity without arrangements for artists' retirement benefits, pensions, or one-time grants. Many artists are harmed due to the excessive income tax deduction from artists' remuneration.
- A large portion of the program budget allocated for artists is spent on non-artist staff of the institution, such as gardeners, cleaners, cooks, drivers, and office assistants.
- Due to government rules, BTV can never offer the same discounts on advertising as private television. As a result, advertising revenue has decreased.
- There is a record of no promotions for two decades. As a result, there is no question of inspiration in creative work.

Bangladesh Television has two full-fledged television centers and 14 relay centers. BTV World was launched in 2004 for worldwide broadcasting via satellite. Last December, it was transformed into a 24-hour news channel named BTV News. Besides, Bangladesh Television has a channel called Sangsad TV, which directly broadcasts the proceedings of the National Parliament.

BTV broadcasts terrestrially for 18 hours and via satellite for 24 hours from its two centers and 14 sub-centers. Despite the obligation to use the Bangabandhu-1 satellite, BTV uses foreign satellites to broadcast nationally important programs from different spots due to a lack of signal access. BTV had only four OB vans, but none are currently operational as their equipment became unusable and damaged on July 18, 2024. The current approved number of posts in BTV is 1908, against which 1083 are working. Among them, the approved number of posts in the news department is 48, but only 26 are working. There are 39 guest producers/translators/monitors based on temporary artist remuneration.

In the fiscal year 2024-25, BTV's total operating budget allocation is Tk 320.88 crore, and the revised budget allocation, including a special allocation of Tk 60.00 crore due to damage, is Tk 377.3024 crore.

Excluding television license fees, Bangladesh Television earned Tk 1 crore 39 lakh 91 thousand 301 in the fiscal year 2023-24, and it increased to Tk 1 crore 60 lakh 89 thousand 996 in the fiscal year 2024-25. Revenue from operators' license fees alone was Tk 7 crore 70 lakh 99 thousand 960 in 2023-24 and stood at Tk 8 crore 86 lakh 64 thousand 958 in the fiscal year 2024-25. BTV's revenue from advertising in the fiscal year 2023-24 was Tk 11 crore 99 lakh 61 thousand 747.

7.1.2 Bureaucratic Influence

The functioning of BTV is severely hampered due to various bureaucratic complexities in following government policies. The financial autonomy of the Director-General and General Managers is so limited that they cannot release necessary funds even for urgent needs of any

program or broadcast. Purchasing digital equipment for BTV, creating roaming units for news gathering, and arranging the required number of vehicles depend on the Ministry. Even the management running BTV's news department cannot determine the policy for appointing district correspondents. The Information Minister approved this policy in 2016.

Looking at the current state of BTV's news section, it feels like a relic of the last century. While private TV channels and newspapers have used computer network-based modern content management systems for over a decade, these are absent in BTV. A meeting between the commission and producers revealed that BTV is forced to use footage from private channels in their news broadcasts due to the lack of cameras and vehicles. The issue of updating the news section depends on the Ministry of Information, in which case, professional news management is almost impossible.

7.1.3 Corruption and Lack of Transparency

Allegations also exist that corruption and a lack of transparency in financial management hinder the functioning of BTV. Although accusations of irregularities and nepotism in the recruitment process of Bangladesh Television are old, partisan nominations have been added to it, where merit is not evaluated. Due to the lack of proper and transparent competition in the recruitment process, BTV lags in attracting creative and talented individuals. Many BTV officials are recruited through the government's Public Service Commission. Still, their contemporaries who join the administration receive rapid promotions and can advance financially and socially much more than those working in BTV. This hurts professional development.

7.2 Bangladesh Betar from the Concept of Public Service Broadcaster

The journey of the state radio organization, Bangladesh Betar, began in 1939 in old Dhaka's Nazimuddin Road as "Dhaka Sound Broadcasting Center." Later, it was known as the Dhaka Center of Radio Pakistan during the Pakistan period. The new journey of Bangladesh Betar began in 1971 through the broadcast of the declaration of Bangladesh's independence from Kalurghat, Chittagong. During the Liberation War, it operated as the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra (Independent Bangladesh Radio Center). From its temporary location in Kolkata, West Bengal, India, it started functioning as Bangladesh Betar on December 6, 1971. From 1975 to 1996, it was known as Radio Bangladesh. Currently, Bangladesh Betar broadcasts programs through 14 centers. Its programs are broadcast on AM and FM transmission bands.

The role of Bangladesh Betar as a broadcasting medium for providing information in the public interest and welfare, as well as for the promotion and dissemination of education and national culture, is vital. Bangladesh Betar is supposed to play the role of a public service broadcaster. However, the declared vision of Bangladesh Betar states, "To inform the audience about the government's policies, programs, and development plans and to involve the general public in their development activities by inspiring them to accelerate the national development programs." This vision reflects the mindset of considering Betar as a government propaganda tool. The recognition of pluralism and diversity, an indispensable condition of democracy, is absent in the vision of Bangladesh Betar. However, as an objective, it is stated, "To provide education to

improve the living standards of the audience by providing them with objective information and to provide entertainment through cultural practices in the continuity of their heritage."

From an essential public service perspective, Bangladesh Betar is the primary medium for broadcasting weather news, agricultural information, and various health advisories. Besides, traffic news and announcements from various government service organizations are broadcast through Betar. However, due to the lack of balance and neutrality in broadcasting dissenting opinions and the positions of those opposing the government on issues of history, culture, and politics, the audience's trust in Betar has been negatively affected. Moreover, a lack of diversity and a monotonous tone are seen in various programs; the main reasons are recruitment policies, lack of transparency, corruption in artist selection, not providing reasonable remuneration, and political interference.

Regarding remuneration, it can be mentioned that in Betar, the fee for one news item a day is Tk 300, for a package it is Tk 400; sending 10 packages is mandatory, otherwise, for daily news, one will receive a maximum of Tk 12,000 per month. No transportation allowance (conveyance allowance) is provided. Journalists and officials working in Betar and BTV have informed the commission about all these issues. Despite this meager remuneration, excessive income tax deduction significantly reduces their earnings.

7.2.1 Farce regarding Betar's autonomy law

It has already been mentioned that the experimental initiative of General Ershad's military government to run Bangladesh Betar by merging it with BTV under a single authority failed. There is not much disagreement about the reasons for the failure of that initiative, which included the recruitment process and the inability of the then government to understand the distinctiveness of Betar-TV as a creative and artistic medium.

Like Bangladesh Television, on July 17, 2001, the then Awami League government passed the Bangladesh Betar Authority Act 2001 in Parliament towards the end of their term. The Act passed in Parliament states, "As soon as possible after this Act comes into force, the Government shall, by notification in the official Gazette, specify the date on which this Act shall come into force." The government has not published that notification in the Gazette to bring the law passed in Parliament into force in the last 24 years. As a result, no authority called "Bangladesh Betar Authority" has been established through another Gazette notification as per the provisions of that Act. The Act also mentions that "the Authority shall be a statutory body." The Act has not been repealed either. Possibly, there was no provision to repeal a law enacted by Parliament without Parliament. The law was also forgotten after the Awami League returned to power in 2009. Similar to the Bangladesh Television Authority Act 2001, Section 5 of the Bangladesh Betar Authority Act talks about the composition of the Authority: The Authority shall be constituted by the following members:

(a) a Chairman;

(b) 3 (three) members, including one woman, appointed under sub-section 6(1); and

(c) The Director-General, ex officio.

The Act states that the government will appoint the Chairman and members from among persons having experience in education, culture, journalism, administration, television broadcasting, or management. And the list of functions of the Authority in Section 8 includes: proper operation of Bangladesh Betar's programs, reviewing and evaluating its programs; following and implementing the national broadcast policy approved by the government in news broadcasting and other program broadcasts; constructing and developing necessary infrastructure to ensure the technical and qualitative standard of programs; and arranging for the determination and collection of license fees for Betar receiver sets with prior approval of the government.

From the sections of the Act, it is clear that it was enacted to provide limited autonomy to Bangladesh Betar. That Authority was vested with the power to arrange necessary funds for the construction and development of infrastructure to improve the quality of programs and the power to spend money. Even the power to take loans with the government's approval was given to this Authority. What the result would have been if the Betar Authority had the opportunity to operate independently through the implementation of the Act is now undoubtedly a meaningless question.

Bangladesh Betar broadcasts programs through 14 regional centers. Through 12 units, Betar conducts various programs such as commercial broadcasting, agricultural service, transcription service, population, health and nutrition cell, and external broadcasting programs. Eighty-two daily news bulletins are broadcast on national and regional levels in Betar. The approved workforce of Betar is 1708, against which 833 are working. Besides, there are 765 irregular artists and newsreaders on a contract basis.

The budget of Bangladesh Betar for the fiscal year 2024-25 is Tk 209 crore 35 lakh, and the latest revised budget allocation is Tk 205 crore 38 lakh.

7.2.2 Irregularities in the Recruitment Process and Political Interference

In the exchange of views that the Media Reform Commission held with the management, senior officials, and artists of Bangladesh Betar, the irregular recruitment process was discussed with considerable importance. A general opinion emerged that creative work does not yield the desired results under directives. It seems that the Ministry directs all the work of Bangladesh Betar. Producers are not independent in program production. The news section also rarely gets the opportunity to operate with editorial discretion.

The obligation to arrange news according to the hierarchical order of government officials was imposed during political regimes, instead of the importance of news value. The news section of Bangladesh Betar is not as resourceful as the news sections of any private media outlet. The system of appointing news correspondents is mainly dependent on political influence. These appointments are made on the recommendation of Members of Parliament or Ministers. Moreover, their appointments are entirely contractual, where remuneration depends on their work. The remuneration for each report is often insufficient, even for travel expenses. In a

meeting of former Directors-General of Betar, the opinion of running BTV and Betar under a joint broadcasting authority emerged.

Several examples of the extent to which political control had reached during the last 15 years of rule are frightening. The fear of losing livelihood in government jobs has forced many to compromise, and self-censorship has become pervasive. A producer was temporarily suspended, and seven to eight employees were given various punishments for broadcasting the patriotic song "Prothom Bangladesh Amar Shesh Bangladesh" (First Bangladesh My Last Bangladesh). As a result, one official lost mental balance. The problems in program production and broadcasting in Bangladesh Betar are similar to those in BTV. The artists' budget includes the monthly salaries of office assistants, gardeners, and cleaners. The system of artist auditioning and grading is flawed. Auditions are even taken on special directives. Artist remuneration is very low. There is no system to protect artists' interests. Staff artists are also neglected. Monthly contract-based artists also face future insecurity.

Betar officials have stated that for the Mujib Year celebrations, Bangladesh Betar has been obliged to broadcast special programs for two and a half years. During the exchange of views with media stakeholders at the regional level, Commission members visited regional centers and saw how the extent of damage caused by the wrath of angry mobs. To establish Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as a deity, an amphitheater was constructed at the entrance of the Khulna regional center of Bangladesh Betar, part of which included a 20-foot-long sculpture of him and five permanent garbage bins underneath. The budget allocated for the project was more than Tk 12 crore, which is 10 times the annual budget of the Khulna regional center.

Bangladesh Betar currently broadcasts programs in five languages as part of its external broadcasting program. It broadcasts entertainment-based programs such as news, news analysis, and magazine programs in English, Hindi, Arabic, Nepali, and Bengali. These programs are broadcast on shortwave and FM transmission bands in and around Dhaka. However, there are no longer listeners of shortwave transmission bands worldwide. Although Betar has launched a special app to attract new listeners, no account of how many people are using that app has been found. It is also not certain whether anyone has heard of this app in the external world. It is necessary to re-evaluate whether this external broadcasting program of Betar has any utility anymore.

One historical aspect of Bangladesh Betar is its indigenous language-based programs. Besides programs on the art and culture of various small ethnic groups, Betar also broadcasts news bulletins in Chakma, Marma, Tripura, and Santali regional languages. Entertainment-based programs on the life and culture of the border districts of West Bengal in India have also gained some popularity. These Betar programs have become even more attractive because of live streaming on social media.

7.3 Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS)

A few days after the establishment of independent Bangladesh through war, on January 1, 1972, the Dhaka bureau of the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) was transformed into the national news agency of the new state. The new organization was named Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha-

BSS. Besides APP, Pakistan also had another privately owned news agency called Pakistan Press Association, which later adopted the name Pakistan Press International (PPI). The Dhaka bureau of that PPI was also permitted to operate as Bangladesh Press International (BPI). However, within a short time, BPI was also merged with BSS.

It was run by a managing director appointed by the president's order. After operating this way for almost a decade, in 1979, BSS was given the status of a corporate body through an ordinance, for which the government formed an 11-member board of directors. (According to the First Press Commission Report 1983 the ordinance for constituting the board of directors was mentioned as 1982.) The Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha Act, 2018, refers to the 1979 ordinance. However, this board was formed with the editors of news outlets receiving services from BSS, representatives of the Ministry of Information, Finance, and Telecommunications. The government used to appoint a chairperson to the board of directors without remuneration. The executive head of the organization was the Managing Director, who also served as the Chief Editor. The board of directors was empowered to formulate the policies of the organization.

The First Press Commission Report shows that in 1983, BSS in Dhaka had one Chief News Editor, three News Editors, three Shift-in-Charges, and nine Assistant Editors, as well as three special correspondents and 11 reporters for news gathering and processing. Outside of this, there was one bureau in Chittagong, three reporters, and about 40 correspondents appointed nationwide. Besides important national and local news, BSS also covers international news. The primary sources of international news were reports from various global, regional, and national news agencies, including Reuters, AFP, UPI, and PTI, which were regulated through multiple agreements. Besides, BSS had its correspondent appointed in Delhi. News transmission used to be done through teleprinters and telecommunications.

In the seventies and eighties, besides newspapers, various government and non-government organizations were clients of BSS. Apart from Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar, among the state organizations, the central bank and several financial institutions used to receive services from BSS. Several foreign embassies and international organizations based in Dhaka were also their clients. In contrast, currently, BSS has no service exchange agreement with any international news agency other than AFP. Even BSS's agreement with the Indian news agency PTI expired several years ago.

The number of local clients of BSS is currently only 45, all of which are media outlets. Local TV, radio, and newspapers rely on BSS to get government versions of statements from the President, Prime Minister, armed forces, and various government organizations verbatim. However, this responsibility is primarily carried out by the information/public relations officers of different ministries and departments of the government. Apart from publishing government handouts/press notes, there is not much value addition from BSS's side. However, BSS has a network of correspondents across the country up to the district-sub-district level. BSS also has a correspondent post in Delhi. Although there is an opportunity to provide valuable services from BSS for newspapers that have not appointed or are incapable of appointing local correspondents across the country, the organisation's success in meeting expectations is minimal.

Efforts are underway to bring some dynamism to the functioning of BSS after the fall of autocratic rule. However, no initiative for organizational restructuring has been reported yet. The government's allocation for BSS in the current fiscal year is Tk 38 crore. In contrast, the organization's income is approximately Tk 60 to 70 lakh. BSS does have a prime commercial building, the asset value of which could be more than a hundred crore taka, and former and current managers claim that it is possible to make the organization permanently profitable by constructing a multi-storied commercial building there.

7.3.1 More Non-Journalists in BSS

Although the number of BSS clients has not increased as expected, the number of unauthorized personnel has increased. A former Managing Director stated that although the approved number of personnel was 145, more than double that number is employed there. However, the current Managing Director noted that the authorized number of personnel is 199, of which 99 are journalists and 100 are non-journalists. According to him, reporters and sub-editors are hard to find in the organization because most are appointed as special correspondents or in exceptional grades. He described this as an organization like an "inverted pyramid."

Most commented that their recruitment process is responsible for the current situation. Although the board of directors is supposed to determine the recruitment rules and process, it is essentially done according to the Ministry's wishes and the sole authority of the Managing Director. According to one Managing Director, journalistic unions affiliated with political parties consider BSS a rehabilitation center for loyal journalists as soon as the government changes. It is also considered a fertile ground for employing leaders' relatives. Two former Managing Directors said that people have to be appointed under pressure from ministers and MPs. One of them informed that a former Information Minister had sent letters to appoint 13 people.

A widely prevalent perception among media journalists is that, being a state organization, implementing the government-declared wage board in BSS is 100% assured. As a result, compared to any other organization, there is a kind of pressure within the union for jobs in BSS.

The opinion that the Chief Editor or Managing Director does not follow any merit-based criteria in recruitment has also emerged in the words of working journalists and former Managing Directors. It is also perceived that the combination of the organization's editorial leadership and management responsibility creates obstacles in the editorial leadership. In the words of a former Managing Director, even during democracy, BSS has only been able to publish as much criticism of the opposition party as the government tolerates. However, he also mentioned that the absence of democracy is the biggest obstacle to overall independent journalism.

Little reflection of diverse creativity is seen in BSS journalism outside of the government program's news. Journalists working in BSS have told the commission that self-censorship operates due to the fear that the government will be upset if they report public grievances, administrative failures, or weaknesses of any service organization or government office. The organization also lags in in-depth investigations on public grievances, corruption, and various inconsistencies in state and social life, or in gaining expertise in news and analyzing art, literature, culture, or sports.

The observation has emerged from working journalists and journalistic union representatives in the organization that publishing and disseminating advertisements of the government's Press Information Department, or PID, has become the main job of BSS. Avoiding rather than accommodating dissenting opinions has become the editorial policy of the organization. In the words of a former Managing Director, everyone in the organization believes they cannot go beyond the government's wishes.

7.3.2 New Challenges

The organization needs major reforms to become a contemporary news medium in light of the transformation occurring in the media world driven by new technology. According to current and former managers and journalists of BSS, there is a severe lack of competence and efficiency in the organization. That desired change is virtually impossible in the current management system dependent on the government, i.e., the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. BSS has launched a news portal for the general public alongside providing exclusive services to its clients. Initiatives have also been taken to transform this news portal into a multimedia portal. At the same time, they plan to establish an audio-visual unit to provide video report footage service to client organizations. The Tk 42 crore project is currently under implementation.

In the age of the dramatic rise of 24-hour television and online news, the traditional distinctiveness of news agencies is now virtually stagnant. The responsibility that news agencies had to deliver news quickly or instantaneously across the country in an era dependent on daily newspaper news no longer has relevance. Even the duties and functions of this organization, as stated in Section 5 of the 'Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha Act, 2018', only mention 'collecting news from home and abroad, including international organizations, and disseminating it with the help of mass media' and 'taking measures to broadcast national news internationally.' Nothing among these is unique or separate from other mass media.

The country's only private news agency, United News of Bangladesh (UNB), provides similar services to its clients. They have also launched a news portal for the general public alongside exclusive services for clients. UNB management has stated that they do not receive any government patronage. Their workforce and expenditure are less than one-tenth of BSS's budget.

7.3.3 Experiences from Other Countries

Very few countries in the world have state-owned national news agencies. Especially in most Western countries, the concept of state ownership in the media has been abandoned in the free market system. However, the national identity of several countries is invariably highlighted alongside the organizations recognized as top news agencies in the international arena. The Associated Press (AP) of the United States, Reuters of Britain, and AFP of France carry a national identity.

Even without being state-owned, the Press Trust of India (PTI) enjoys the status of a national institution. The trust of PTI is managed by representatives of Indian newspapers who are members of the trust. PTI collects news and distributes it among clients by appointing its correspondents in various districts and remote areas of all states across the national landscape

and in the capitals of several important countries. Since many newspapers cannot appoint such a large number of correspondents individually, their needs are met through this collective investment. Britain also has the Press Association for collecting and distributing news from various remote areas nationally.

It is essential to transform BSS from an inefficient, nepotistic, and party politics-ridden organization dependent on the government into an independent and powerful contemporary organization. The Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha Act 2018 talks about forming the organization's board of directors, which will make the organization even more dependent on the government and increase government control. Therefore, the law needs to be changed.

Advertising Standards, Misuse, and Market Control Attempts in Mass Media

Advertising is the primary source of income for mass media. Previously, newspapers and roadside hoardings were the only media for advertising. Later, radio and television also joined the advertising world. Gradually, as radio and TV reached households, these two media became important in the advertising market. Among radio and television, television's ability to show visuals increased its popularity in advertising. However, digital media or online platforms have surpassed all these old media, and experts believe this trend will continue. As a result, the advertising market for newspapers, radio, and television is gradually shrinking.

The presence of many mass media outlets in Bangladesh has created a complex situation in the market. To get advertisements, many media organizations are taking them at lower prices than their competitors. Not only is there competition to reduce prices, but under pressure from advertisers and their agents, media outlets are breaking rules by forcing readers to see excessive advertisements on newspaper pages, radio, television, and online portals. Ignoring the basic rule of separating news and advertising, product or brand names are being inserted into news reports. Separating news and advertising has become difficult. Reading a single line or watching a one-second video without advertisements is impossible on television and online platforms. Despite accepting all these conditions of advertisers and their agents, very few media organizations are financially successful. Although government policies stipulate a 60:40 ratio of news to advertising on newspaper pages, it is not followed. On television, this ratio is supposed to be 12 minutes per hour. There, too, it is often ignored.

There are allegations of a lack of fair and transparent competition in the advertising distribution system. Serious allegations of secret understandings and cartel-like dominance are also heard here, which cannot be ignored. Public relations (PR), advertising, and media buying have all become one. There are allegations that a multinational company has been able to impose its determined advertising rates solely through secret understandings. Previously, agencies in the advertising industry worked on a commission basis, but now they contract on a fixed fee basis. As a result, they pressure the media to broadcast advertisements at lower costs. They would not have had the opportunity to exert such pressure without a commission-based relationship. From the written statements of representatives of PR agencies, leaders of advertising organizations' committees, and large advertising companies like Asiatic 360, the picture that emerges of this industry indeed suggests the need to establish a regulatory body to improve standards and ensure fair and transparent competition in the advertising sector, and to establish and enforce a relevant code of conduct for this industry. Besides this, the need for client advisory policies in the case of PR agencies has also emerged here.

The threat of advertising bans to obstruct the publication of negative news in the media is a significant obstacle to the independence of the press. Many reports of irregularities in the financial sector, including the banking sector, could not be published due to such threats. It is seen that immediately after allowing self-defense, before publishing news of allegations of an organization's irregularities or corruption, a request, then a warning, and finally a threat of an advertising ban is issued by the PR agency or advertising agency on behalf of that organization.

There are also counter-allegations that blacklisting is done for advertising, which usually happens more with unknown or lesser-known organizations.

In the case of digital advertising, especially advertisements on social media platforms, they are managed offshore from outside the country. As small entrepreneurs sometimes arrange to advertise their products or services through intermediaries, money goes abroad through hundi, or less foreign currency comes as remittances. Measures must be taken to force such organizations to appoint local agents and conduct financial transactions through government channels.

There is no reliable institutional system for the necessary data and research to determine where, when, and what type of advertising will yield the most effective results. The system running in the name of Television Rating Point or TRP is so flawed that damage suits can be filed against the government organization Bangladesh Satellite Company Limited (BSCL) for that rating. In the case of newspapers, although the audited circulation figures of the Audit Bureau of Circulations are shown in the DFP media list, most are false.

The advertisement-free or clean feed policy has not been effectively implemented in broadcasting programs for foreign satellite channels. Although the government agreed to this in the past, it has not been fully implemented. The domestic advertising industry and trade-commerce can benefit if the clean feed policy is followed.

It has also been seen in the case of advertising that multinational companies mainly broadcast advertisements made in India by dubbing them in Bengali. This is not helpful for local talent, art, and culture; its impact is negative. The practice of following such commercial tactics should be stopped entirely.

Alongside the government, corporate organizations also use their financial power to influence news and opinions, creating significant challenges for media owners. Numerous business groups have launched newspapers, TV stations, and online portals to protect their commercial interests and harm their rivals. It has become difficult for journalists working in these group-owned or commercially driven media to practice impartial journalism. Some businesses use advertisements to prevent the publication of information that could hurt their business. Unfortunately, despite the promise of making the powerful accountable to people, the media in Bangladesh is incapable of fulfilling that responsibility.

Government advertising has always been used to reward loyalty. This has increased over the past decade and a half. Corruption of influential political leaders has been associated with it. Besides this, since 2013, the previous government had advising private business organizations (even if not officially) not to give advertisements to some newspapers. Bengali and English newspapers like Prothom Alo and The Daily Star have become the primary victims of this prohibition due to publishing reports of government corruption and human rights violations by law enforcement agencies. Allegations of interference in the advertising of private business organizations against several government intelligence agencies had emerged. Sadly, multinational companies also followed this unwritten directive of the government, even though, according to international policy, they commit not to assist in any work that involves human rights violations.

Attempts to Create a Climate of Fear in the Mass Media

Among the various problems the media has faced, the Digital Security Act is notable, one of the country's most draconian laws. According to Prothom Alo, since the Digital Security Act came into effect in December 2018, an average of three cases have been filed daily under this law.

According to human rights groups, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, at least 80 cases have been filed against journalists under the Digital Security Act. Among them, two were killed, 70 were injured, and at least five were forcibly disappeared at various times. Additionally, the authorities used the century-old Official Secrets Act against investigative journalist Rozina Islam. Photojournalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol was detained for 53 days and then imprisoned. Similarly, Chittagong journalist Golam Sarwar disappeared. Not only leaders and activists of the ruling party, but also officials responsible for public administration, have harassed many journalists by abusing their power. Among them, the brutal torture of Kurigram journalist Ariful Islam Rigan sparked nationwide outrage. Under the direction of Deputy Commissioner Sultana Pervin, he was arrested by breaking down the door of his house at night under the guise of a mobile court and tortured.

Many news editors have reported that they are most afraid of "unofficial" advice given to them over the phone. This is more terrifying than written directives of the past because they come from intelligence agencies rather than the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and leave no written evidence. As a result, there is no opportunity to challenge it in court. Yet, ignoring this directive can lead to harassment, business disruption, and personal safety risks.

During autocratic rule, threats of physical harm also increased significantly. Freedom House, an international research organization monitoring global developments in media, human rights, and civil liberties, stated in their 2021 annual report, "In 2020, journalists faced physical assaults, arbitrary arrests, or defamation suits by security forces in uniform. During the 2018 parliamentary elections and the 2019 local elections, journalists were arrested or attacked for reporting on issues related to the 1971 war and electoral irregularities. A culture of impunity for attacks on media workers persists."

Self-censorship has become a common phenomenon in the media due to the prevailing climate of fear in the country. Reporters without Borders, a leading international media rights organization, stated in their 2021 annual report, "Editors do not want to risk jail or the closure of their media, so self-censorship has reached unprecedented levels." Explaining the reason for self-censorship, they further noted, "Incidents of violence against journalists by police and civilians have increased alarmingly." The report also stated that the government has created a special judicial weapon to silence journalists—the 2018 Digital Security Act, which provides for up to 14 years in prison for "negative propaganda."

Influential circles, including state intelligence agencies, government agencies, and institutions, have tried to control the media to serve their interests and the government.

As Sheikh Hasina became increasingly authoritarian through several one-sided and controversial elections, the free flow of information was increasingly obstructed and controlled. The role of journalism or the media in Bangladesh before the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government can be divided into three main categories:

1. The largest segment was those who directly took a pro-government stance and engaged in propaganda for the government and against its opponents. This was essentially the primary function of these media outlets, which they did willingly.
2. Many media outlets were forced to do this unwillingly due to various pressures and fears. Although these two types of media outlets propagated the so-called development narratives of the Hasina government, they covered up or only published the government and its agencies' versions of ongoing injustices, atrocities, corruption, disappearances, murders, and human rights violations. The role of the media concealed the truth on one hand and legitimized these injustices and crimes on the other.
3. Outside these two categories, a few media outlets tried to conduct independent journalism by resisting all pressures and fears. It was mainly because of them that journalism survived in Bangladesh, and the public was able to learn at least something about the injustices, atrocities, and impunity of the Hasina government.

However, the issue that all media discussed or were forced to discuss was the highest level of self-censorship. That is, not publishing information with news value and that the public has a right to know, even though such information exists.

Many media outlets have become overly self-regulated willingly, while others have done so out of fear and to avoid government wrath. As a result, despite many media outlets in the country, getting accurate information or knowing the truth has become difficult. This situation continued until the eve of Sheikh Hasina's departure from the government on August 5, 2024. From that evening, all media in the country were freed from the clutches of autocracy, creating an opportunity for independent journalism and the free flow of information.

How is Media Sustainability Possible?

In the era when newspapers were the primary news medium, the government used to supply newsprint produced in government mills at subsidized rates. Newspapers' postal, air, and rail transport was financed, and discounted rates were provided for telephone and telegraph charges for sending news. But newspapers have passed that era. Due to vast technological changes, there has been a fundamental shift in information gathering, publication, distribution, and processing systems. The development of mass media in Bangladesh has occurred through the private sector. Two or three daily and one weekly newspaper owned by trusts and published with government funds have been shut down. Currently, the government's presence in Bangladesh's mass media means only one television channel, radio station, and news agency.

Across the globe, the mass media are now facing an existential crisis. The readership of printed newspapers is decreasing, and although online readership is increasing, the expected revenue from subscriptions is not growing. The primary source of income for radio and television channels is no longer listeners or viewers. The advertising revenue on which the development of mass media was based is now under threat. A significant portion of private advertising is going to social media platforms. Like a tsunami, this shock has overwhelmed the mass media in Bangladesh. Media owners, editors, and journalists have expressed concern and anxiety to the Media Reform Commission about where revenue will come from, how to survive in the face of expenses, who will invest, and how that investment will be profitable. They have discussed ways to survive and emphasized finding a suitable business model. In this context, they have also highlighted the necessity of government support.

Getting a clear picture of the financial condition of the mass media in Bangladesh is difficult. The main reason is the lack of up-to-date information about their economic status. From the limited information available, it can be said that most mass media are incurring losses. That is, very few mass media are making a profit.

10.1 The Profit-Loss Scenario

Records of media companies obtained from the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies show that most organizations do not regularly submit their audited financial statements. And even among those who do, many do not fully disclose information about their income, expenses, and profits or losses. According to the Companies Act, every registered company is obliged to submit audited annual accounts of income and expenditure, and failure to comply can result in fines or the removal of directors from their positions. However, it remains doubtful whether this law is applied to mass media organizations. Due to the absence of basic information in many financial statements, the actual figures for their annual total income, total expenditure, and net income are unavailable. Looking at some financial statements, it is clear that they have been prepared to their convenience. In such cases, there is a tendency to conceal the actual data. Some media outlets' assets and other financial matters contain errors, but their total profits are higher than their annual turnover. Again, in some cases, net profit is higher than gross profit. Such incidents are unusual in business as a measure of profit and loss. However, a few media outlets have

provided sufficient information, from which a good understanding of their financial condition can be obtained. Based on the information obtained from the audited accounts submitted to the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies, the mass media organizations that still appear to be profitable are:

Radio	Newspaper	Television
Radio Dhwani	Dainik Ittefaq	Channel 24
Radio Bhumi	Samakal	Mohona TV
Radio Amar	Prothom Alo	Duronto TV
Jago FM	Dainik Kalbela	Gazi TV
Dhaka FM		Channel 9
		Maasranga TV
		Somoy TV
		Banglavision
		Channel i
		Ekattor TV

From the 2022 audit report of Ittefaq Group of Publications Limited, it is known that the newspaper's profit for that year was Tk 667,000. On the other hand, Samakal of Times Media and Channel 24 earned a profit of Tk 16.63 crore in the financial year 2022-23. Somoy TV earned a profit of Tk 96.7 million in the same financial year, and Maasranga TV earned 24.4 million. However, according to Prothom Alo's 2021 accounts, their profit was Tk 320 million. On the other hand, The Daily Star incurred a loss of slightly more than Tk 28.9 million in the financial year 2023-24, although their pre-tax profit was Tk 32,000. This means that although the organization earns revenue, it faces a significant loss after paying taxes.

According to data from Multimedia Productions Limited, the organization, including ATN Bangla, incurred a loss of more than Tk 19 million in the financial year 2019-20. Among FM radios, Radio Dhwani earned Tk 320,000 in 2018, Radio Bhumi Tk 630,000 in 2012, Dhaka FM Tk 4.67 million in 2016, and Radio Amar Tk 200,000 in 2019. Among these, Radio Amar's net income is higher than its gross income, which is unusual. A notable issue is that many mass media have not closed down despite incurring losses year after year. Some are incurring significant losses every year. As businessmen, continuing a business after such losses is not reasonable. Therefore, the question naturally arises: Why have mass media owners tolerated financial losses for so long? The question also arises whether they have any special interests or purposes behind this. If other benefits or advantages can be obtained even after losses, then it is reasonable to keep the media running.

It is known that several mass media organizations have been incurring losses of more than crores of taka every month for several years, even for more than a decade. But they have kept their media running. Large industrial groups that own multiple mass media are also incurring losses year after year. Still, these mass media have not closed down, and no initiatives for internal Reform are visible. For example, Basundhara's East West Media Group makes the most losses. According to the 2023 accounts, this group lost almost Tk 250 million annually. S Alam's News24 TV is also incurring significant losses. According to the 2023 accounts, this channel incurred a loss of Tk 90 million. Several reasons work behind keeping the mass media running

despite incurring losses. The first advantage of having a mass medium is that it acts as a shield for the owner (his own, family, and business); it is used for the promotion of his own, family, and business organizations, illegal benefits can be extracted, and tax evasion is easier in specific sectors. Besides this, with a media at your disposal, no one easily messes up with you; propaganda can be made against opponents, and it can also be used for threats. There are many such examples before us.

10.2 Political Influence and Group Interests

The widespread development of mass media over the past three decades has mainly occurred through the private sector. Capital has been invested in newspapers, television, and radio, and mass media modernization has occurred. However, the sources of investment in mass media have not been adequately questioned. Whether taxes have been paid on the invested money, or whether anyone accused of loan defaults is establishing mass media by taking new loans from banks, the government has not sought the answers to these questions, nor have the investors clarified the matter. Yet, worldwide, citizens are now considering the ownership of mass media to be of great importance. Laws have been enacted in the European Union to ensure the transparency of mass media ownership. In Bangladesh, the process of issuing licenses or permits has been conducted behind closed doors, through political connections.

Consequently, political influence has significantly permeated the mass media. Especially in the last decade and a half, television channel licenses have been issued at the whims of the ruling party, without even assessing market demand. Corporate investment has also come into newspapers. Allegations have arisen that many business groups have used mass media as a shield to protect their businesses and have exerted influence on editorial policies to shape news coverage in support of the government party. Multiple newspapers, televisions, radios, and online platforms are being run under the ownership of the same groups, through which attempts are being made to concentrate power of influence. This has hindered a healthy competitive environment in the mass media; overall credibility of the mass media has decreased, and the commercial foundation of mass media organizations has weakened. Participants in exchange of views meetings have highlighted such observations. They have also said that although some have succeeded in the mass media sector in Bangladesh, independent mass media have not developed overall. No government in the past has smoothed the path for the development of healthy media, but the level of irregularities has increased significantly in the last decade and a half.

10.3 What are the Ways Forward?

The most emphasized recommendation for the mass media to survive is to make the mass media financially self-reliant. Only by standing on its own feet can the mass media find the path to operate independently. For this, just as policy support from the government is needed, so is the transparency of ownership. It is essential to separate editorial policy from the ownership of mass media. Owners will ensure the institution's financial security but will not interfere in daily operations. Similarly, an explicit declaration is necessary if the owner's commercial interests are involved in any published news or opinion. It is not as simple that anyone can invest in the mass media just because one has money. Social responsibility, investment of clean money driven by patriotism, the noble purpose of public welfare, and transparency are needed. If the transparency

of investment and purpose is ensured, the misuse of the power of mass media will stop, and dishonest entrepreneurs will naturally withdraw. This will significantly reduce the interference of the government and owners in the mass media. Objective and independent journalism will flourish, the mass media will be powerful, and the institutions will survive.

At least three owner-editor-publishers have mentioned the benefits of joint ownership over single ownership. According to them, this keeps editorial independence intact, which is the main reason for their success. Besides, several other recommendations have been given from the stakeholders' side:

- Encouraging registration in the stock market and limiting the shareholding of entrepreneurial directors like that in financial institutions. Listing on the stock exchange will ensure transparency and accountability in managing entrepreneurs' businesses.
- Making it mandatory to give ownership shares to journalist-news workers in all mass media companies, similar to Indonesia.
- Prioritizing joint ventures of multiple individuals or groups over single individuals or business groups for new ventures.
- Financing non-profit mass media organisations within the scope of corporate social responsibility of various industries and corporate organisations, including banks.
- Clarifying the mutual relationship between owner companies, publishers, editors, and journalists.
- Declaring newspapers a completely tax-free industry.
- Making bank loans readily available at low interest rates on easy terms similar to those special schemes of the central bank targeted at various industrial and service sectors.
- Giving tax rebates on investments in this industry.
- Increasing the rate of government advertisements by at least 10 times.
- Providing assistance to build a fact-checking system.

The Proposed National Media Commission

11.1 Bangladesh Press Council

The Press Council of Bangladesh exists to protect the independence of newspapers, improve standards, and address complaints and grievances of those affected by violations or irregularities in the code of journalistic ethics. It was established through the Press Council Act of 1974. The Press Council also has the power to resolve appeals against the decisions of the District Magistrate/ Deputy Commissioner regarding the issuance or cancellation of newspaper declarations. This power was granted to the Press Council through an amendment to the Printing Presses and Publications Act. On the other hand, the proposed Broadcast Commission, for which the government has shown reluctance to form, is supposed to handle these tasks for broadcast media.

Dissatisfaction exists in all quarters regarding the effectiveness of the Bangladesh Press Council, established in 1974. Despite the declared objectives of protecting the independence and improving the standards of print media, this institution has not been able to play a very effective role in preserving the freedom of newspapers, the people's right to information, the safety of journalists, and redressing grievances regarding defamation caused by published news. In response to the Commission's inquiry, the current Council stated that they have resolved 410 cases, and nine are pending.

The legal authority of the Press Council is limited and essentially confined to issuing "censure." The Council does not have the power to take strict action against repeated offenders. In December 2022, the Press Council took the initiative to create a database of journalists working nationwide and published an advertisement announcing online registration. The ad also specified the minimum educational qualifications for journalists. However, the latest annual report for 2023-24 did not provide any information on how many people have registered so far. In exchange for views meetings, field-level journalists, administration officials, and even high-ranking Ministry of Information and Broadcasting officials have strongly demanded a reliable central database of journalists working nationwide. The Press Council had also formulated a 'Code of Ethics' for print media, although they have not been able to ensure its implementation.

In the exchange of views meetings held by the Media Reform Commission in Dhaka and divisional centers, the opinion emerged that mass media should establish their accountability and responsibility by introducing self-regulatory mechanisms and strict adherence. Due to the direct and indirect influence of the government, the need to form a truly independent supervisory body, rather than the Press Council, which has tended to become a partisan institution over the past decade and a half, was discussed. Although the Press Council has no visible contribution to the promotion of the independence of newspapers or journalistic standards, it organized seminars in Cumilla and Gopalganj during the Mujib Centenary celebrations. It implemented a program to distribute books related to Bangabandhu and the Liberation War in 22 district press clubs.

As a large part of the mass media, broadcast media, and online media are outside the legal jurisdiction of the Press Council, a proposal has been made to bring all journalists and news workers of all mass media under a unified supervisory framework. This unified supervisory body is believed to play a role in protecting the rights of free journalism on the one hand, and on the other hand, it will build an effective system of professional accountability, where a 'Code of Ethics' will be formulated and followed, and action will be taken against intentional or unintentional violations.

11.1.1 Broadcast Policy and Authority

After television and radio channels were opened in the private sector electronic media rapidly expanded in the country. Here, too, allegations of issuing licenses to individuals and groups under political influence without considering demand and the advertising market have arisen. As a result, on the one hand, most television and radio stations have not been commercially successful. On the other hand, allegations have been raised against some television channels for playing the role of a one-sided propaganda tool for a particular party. Several television channels became targets of public anger after mass uprisings. During movements, the principal office of the government-owned BTV was set on fire, and the offices and studios of several private channels were attacked. Although the FM radio stations in the private sector did well in the first few years, they have lost their relevance. Although a broadcast policy mentions a broadcast commission, it has not yet been formed. Even though the policy contains conditions of objectivity, impartiality, and pluralism, it has not been followed correctly in the electronic media.

11.1.2 Media Responsibility and Regulations: Examples of Global Best Practices

In international law and developed democracies, any regulation or control of the news media is viewed with suspicion, especially if the government has any role in it which creates a path for control by the authorities. Despite that risk, the need for registration remains in countries like Bangladesh that are transitioning to democracy after a long period of authoritarian rule. Independent and responsible journalism has not yet developed in these countries as it has in Western countries. Therefore, initiatives are being taken in various countries to build an institutional framework for healthy journalism by reforming existing legal structures, which is worth considering in the case of Bangladesh.

European Media Freedom Act

The European Union has enacted a new Media Freedom Act to introduce new rules for protecting media pluralism and independence in member states. This law came into effect on May 7 last year, and its full implementation must be ensured from May 8 of the current year. Besides ensuring that the government and private media in the EU member states can operate beyond borders without hindrance, the other notable issues it will provide include:

- Protecting editorial independence;
- Ensuring the right to confidentiality of journalists' sources, including taking measures against the use of spyware or surveillance technology against them;
- Ensuring the effective independence of public service media;

- Increasing transparency of media ownership;
- Protecting media from arbitrary online removal of news or content by large online platforms;
- Ensuring transparency in state advertising for media and online platforms;
- Evaluating what kind of impact the centralization of media in the core media market of member states has on media pluralism and editorial independence; and
- Increasing transparency on a user scale for media providers and advertisers.

This law also mentions the formation of a new independent European Board for Media Services, composed of representatives from the national media watchdogs of the member states, which started operating last February.

India

The Press Council of India is not dependent on government funds. Section 16 of the Press Council Act, 1978, outlines the funding sources. According to this section, a levy is collected from registered newspapers and news agencies at a rate determined by circulation. Additionally, the fees the Council receives for its various services are also added to its fund. The government, however, provides an annual grant with the approval of the Parliament. This financial self-reliance of the Press Council of India has strengthened its independence. Furthermore, the government has not nominated the chairman of the Press Council. The Speaker of both houses of Parliament and a Council member nominated by the Press Council jointly elect the Chairman.

Indonesia

In Southeast Asia, the 'Independent Press Council of Indonesia' was formed in 2016, comprising elected respected journalists from national-level intellectuals and media organizations. According to the country's Independent Press Council Act, the decisions of this Council are binding on all news media. The Press Council of Indonesia can largely resolve media-related disputes outside the courts. Established under the Press Act of 1999, this Council comprises journalists, media company officials, and communication experts, from whom the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council are elected. This Act includes a 'Code of Ethics,' procedures for filing complaints, rules for responding to complaints, and guidelines for the legal protection of journalists. Subsequently, in 2024, the Press Council also accepted the responsibility of resolving defamation complaints related to 'student journalism' and their publications, so there is no need to send such complaints to the police or courts.

Financial independence is necessary for independent functioning, which the Indonesian Press Council Act ensures. It states that media organisations and corporate owners (press corporations) will fund the Press Council. However, the government and other organizations can also give unconditional grants. Regarding the responsibilities of the Press Council, it is stated: to protect the independence of the media from interference by others, to conduct research on the development of the media's stability and professional standards, to monitor the formulation and implementation of the code of journalistic ethics, to resolve public complaints about published news, and to create a database of owner organizations. The Press Act mentions the scope of 'freedom of the press'. It views the freedom of the press as a symbol of the people's sovereignty

based on democracy, justice, and the rule of law. This Act prohibits censorship or obstruction to news dissemination in the national media. It protects the right to keep sources confidential (right of refusal) and preserves the right of reply for concerned individuals to respond to allegations in published information. The obligation of the news media to correct erroneous information is also added to this.

The scope of media work is also broadly outlined in this Act, stating that, alongside fulfilling responsibilities as a medium of information, education, entertainment, and social control, news media will also function as “economic institutions”. Besides fulfilling the people's right to know, the media will also provide analysis, criticism, and suggestions for solutions on issues of public interest, based on accurate information to form public opinion. Journalists are required to adhere to the Code of Ethics. And every journalist is free to join professional organizations under this Act. According to the Indonesian Press Act, any citizen of the country can form a media company, which will be registered under the country's law as a press corporation. However, press corporations must incentivize journalists and other employees, including ownership (shares) and profit sharing. This Act also keeps the path open for bringing foreign investment into media companies, but it must be done through the stock exchange.

Sri Lanka

The media situation in the South Asian country of Sri Lanka has considerable similarities with the media in Bangladesh. In that country, business groups close to the ruling party have also obtained broadcast licenses and established a monopoly of influence, obstructing independent journalism. With the ownership of multiple news media concentrated in the hands of the same groups, the political influence of the ruling party and the interests of business groups have become dominant in the country's news media. As a result, the people's right to objective and impartial news has been curtailed.

After the fall of a decade-long authoritarian regime through the 2015 elections, the 'Media Reform Secretariat' was formed to find ways to make the country's media independent, pluralistic, and diverse, which prepared a detailed report. The report, titled 'Rebuilding Public Trust,' proposed policy, legal, and structural Reform for the country. Its main objective was to create a business model so that mainstream media could survive financially, hold those in power accountable, and pave the way for democracy by presenting objective and impartial information to the people. At the same time, recommendations were made on various issues, including the safety of journalists and news workers, and the integration of newly emerging digital and web-based platforms with existing mainstream media, which are primarily relevant in Bangladesh.

A recommendation was made to establish an independent body, maintaining international standards, for issuing and regulating broadcast media licenses, which would be accountable to the country's people through Parliament. Clear legal frameworks were proposed to ensure the body can operate transparently and responsibly. Due to the absence of an independent and autonomous body, the country's Ministry of Media remained burdened with policy-making, regulation, and at the same time, the management of state-owned broadcast media. The ministry also had no responsibility to encourage pluralistic opinion. Civil society and rights activists' demands to transform state-owned broadcast media into truly public service broadcasters were ignored in that country.

The recommendation to establish an independent media council for the media has also been raised in Sri Lanka. The responsibility of this body would be to ensure the editorial independence of the news media. It was proposed that a self-regulatory mechanism for media organizations based on professional ethics be created and implemented. The editorial policy must clearly state the separation of editorial and commercial activities.

Sri Lanka had already decriminalized defamation as a criminal offense, the first in South Asia. Although the country's Ministry of Media prepared a 'Code of Ethics' for the media, it was later abolished. A 'Code of Professional Practices' was prepared by the country's editors' guild, which is currently in effect.

Accountability and Self-Regulation

In Europe, more emphasis is placed on ensuring accountability through professional ethics rather than legal frameworks. In this context, self-criticism within the media is now gaining importance. Journalists critique the work of other journalists, and one media outlet points out the errors of another. The aim is to establish accountability by holding each other accountable and increasing acceptability. In short, to sustain their existence. Although this shows a professional aspect, in countries where political influence in the media is high, journalists are often reluctant to criticize the work of other journalists publicly. This is because it will be viewed from a political perspective and given a different meaning. A similarity can be found here with the culture of our country. Political identity often outweighs professional identity. As a result, impartial professional criticism regarding the role of the media is not usually seen here. However, in adverse times, especially amidst unequal competition with various media, some researchers consider media self-criticism the 'fifth estate' to sustain their existence.

The media profession is increasingly scrutinizing the critical reactions of readers and viewers online. Young journalists and those working in online or digital media especially openly accept these criticisms. In many cases, even offensive comments come on Facebook and X. Yet, from this feedback, the likes and dislikes of the audience can be gauged, which is helpful in content planning. On the other hand, mainstream news media and established regulatory bodies also become the target of such harsh online criticism. This trend is seen in the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, and Italy. However, such criticism is less prevalent in Finland because people have a lot of trust in the established media in that country.

The Press Council has already failed to show any notable success in protecting the independence of newspapers and improving journalistic standards. Moreover, as an institution for redressal for those affected and aggrieved by newspaper errors, it has also failed to gain public trust. Furthermore, the burgeoning electronic media—television, radio, and online journalism—are not under their jurisdiction. Although the previous government talked about forming a broadcast commission for these media, it did not do so. In this reality, the amalgamation of the responsibilities and powers of the Press Council and the Broadcast Commission into a permanent Media Commission has been discussed among stakeholders. This can undoubtedly be an effective alternative, provided it is an independent regulatory body free from government control.

Eligibility to be a Media Owner, Editor, and Journalist

Due to the unprecedented and complex development of mass media in Bangladesh, the standard of journalism is gradually becoming questionable. The lack of ethics and social responsibility, disregard for democratic values, excessive focus on individual or group interests, and hyper-politicization are generally causing the standards of journalism to decline. Along with this, the spread of biased hyper-partisanship has somewhat tarnished the journalism profession through pseudo-journalism and the misuse of mass media. In the exchange of views meetings held by the Media Reform Commission in various regions of the country, the call for restoring professional dignity was heard almost everywhere. Demands were raised to determine the eligibility of publishers, editors, and journalists, and proposals were made to create a national-level register or database of journalists to prevent the misuse of professional identity.

The first Press Commission Report had some observations on the mindset of journalism professionals, which may still be relevant. It stated that a tendency to be seen as a special class in society is noticeable among journalists. However, journalists often fail to meet the high expectations of the people due to their failure to maintain objectivity in news coverage. A gradual decline in moral values, ethics, and educational standards is responsible for this. There is an allegation that once journalists gain a foothold in the mass media, they think they are sufficiently responsible and do not need to prove their responsibility anew. Comparing the professional ethics of journalists in Bangladesh with those in Europe, the report stated that in developed countries, under no circumstances, no matter how urgent the news gathering may be, are they allowed to adopt any irregularity.

However, here journalists are accustomed to a culture of breaking rules. The constitution does not provide for any special dignity or privilege for journalists. The tendency of journalists to show off their special status is somewhat indicative of the weakness of the social system here. Journalists will earn praise through their truthfulness, dedication, and hard work—this was said in that report.

The aims and objectives of this profession should be written down and consciously pursued without any compromise, stated the 1984 Press Commission Report, which was mainly done keeping print media in mind. However, its relevance exists for all fundamental matters in mass media. It stated that the journalism profession aims to contribute to building such a secure social system where economic and political justice will prevail. According to that commission, the discussion of responsibility is closely related to the debate on freedom of expression and journalism for the welfare of society.

12.1 Editorial Institution

The 1984 Press Commission report also stated, just as modern newspapers require substantial investment in advanced technology and a skilled workforce, it is also essential to maintain the independence and dignity of the editorial institution by determining the relationship between management and editorial policy. Undeniably, the owner or founder has the right to see the

reflection of their thoughts and ideals in their newspaper. But that does not mean that the editor will descend to the role of an agent for the owner or entrepreneur. The responsibility of maintaining the policy and ideals of the newspaper will certainly rest with the editor. The editor's appointment letter or contract should mention the general policy of the paper, so that the editor's independence is protected. The editor must be independent in deciding on any ethical matter not mentioned in the contract. It is necessary to have a provision in the agreement or appointment letter to go to a mutually acceptable third party for resolution if a conflict of opinion arises or if a situation of dismissal from the appointment occurs. This will provide a dignified path for the editor in case of the eventual termination of employment.

That commission categorized the editor's profession is a full-time responsibility. They are fully responsible for whatever is printed or published. At the same time, they will have absolute authority over the entire institution. They should step aside if they cannot devote their time to it. While fulfilling responsibilities to maintain an independent position, they must be above all kinds of bias, prejudice, or personal interests. On the question of the newspaper owner becoming the editor, the commission's opinion was that they can only take on that responsibility if they can fulfill the editorial responsibilities full-time. The tendency of business people to become part-time or nominal editors, which is still seen, is by no means commendable.

In this country's early days of newspaper development, there was no well-organized standard in journalist recruitment. Long-term experience in related work was necessary. However, with time, the need for newspaper recruitment policies was realized, and opportunities for education and training also began to expand. The 1984 Press Commission emphasized formulating a detailed recruitment policy in that context. While failing to reach a consensus on determining minimum educational qualifications, the importance of higher institutional education for professional journalism was mentioned. At the same time, it was also said that having higher education, professional degrees, or university diplomas does not make one a good journalist. A capable journalist can emerge through dedication to work, integrity, a sense of dignity, and rigorous training in the workplace.

However, considering the nature of work and the sense of responsibility in the journalism profession overall, the Press Commission felt that only those individuals who possess extraordinary talent, a strong foundation of higher education, and professional training should be considered for this profession. Alongside this, the importance of adherence to rules and intellectual qualities for this profession was also emphasized.

However, without specifying any standards, the first Press Commission recommended forming committees comprising representatives from the government, professional organizations, newspaper owners' and editors' organizations, and training institutions to formulate journalist recruitment policies. The commission also mentioned conducting eligibility tests for recruitment.

12.2 The Question of Journalists' Eligibility

No government has formulated such recruitment policies. Editors' organizations have not taken any institutional form, and no attempt has been made to develop a national-based policy by accepting guardianship of the journalism profession. No such demand has come from journalist

unions either. Each mass media organization recruits journalists and employees according to its policies or rules. One must pass a rigorous selection process in some organizations to excel in merit-based competition. In contrast, in some organizations, the recruitment process involves poaching people from other organizations or hiring people through personal connections without any tests or selections. The justification for hiring people without tests or selections is that they can learn everything after starting work. Most organizations do not have any training programs. In this process, less educated employees may learn from mistakes, but the standard of journalism in publication or broadcasting deteriorates alarmingly.

Given the large number of newspapers, the decline in standards, and the widespread allegations of misuse of newspaper declarations or licenses as tools for obtaining political, commercial, and illegal financial benefits, a recommendation has emerged from stakeholders to work out an acceptable and recognized code of conduct to determine who can be the owner, editor, and journalist of mass media. This recommendation has come strongly, especially from mass media journalists outside Dhaka. They say that many are becoming journalists without any professional eligibility. There are also questions about the educational qualifications of many of them. Allegations have surfaced in almost all divisional and field-level meetings that media identity cards are being used to influence various government and non-government offices or commercial centers and obtain illegal financial benefits. There are more allegations of issuing identity cards without recruitment or salary security against private television and online portals. Allegations have been raised against them at the local level for protecting the commercial interests of owners and their illegal financial gains by exerting influence.

This is alarmingly deteriorating the overall image of the mass media. They say that many organizers are now afraid to invite journalists to any event because they have to deal with a crowd of uninvited journalists at any event, including countless online-based 'journalist' identity card holders. District-level administrative officials have given similar opinions. In the advertisement that the Press Council published in 2022 for the registration of journalists, the minimum qualification for journalists was stated as a bachelor's degree. A proposal has been made to raise it to the postgraduate level. However, the number of those willing to take up journalism after obtaining a postgraduate degree outside Dhaka is also very low.

12.3 Editor with reasonable qualifications?

The government's Newspaper and Periodicals Media Listing and Monitoring Policy 2022 has determined the eligibility of an editor, stating that five years of experience as a journalist using a continuously accredited card will be required. How using an accreditation card continuously five years of as a journalist can be the sole prerequisite for eligibility to become an editor is difficult to understand. Especially given the serious irregularities in the use of this card that have been publicly reported, it can be confidently said that many have obtained this card in the past without practicing journalism. And the Press and Publication Act mentions 'possessing logical educational qualifications or sufficient training in journalism and a specified number of years of experience' in the case of an editor's eligibility. Although this seemingly liberal Act has opened the door for newspaper publication, there are also allegations of its misuse.

12.4 Conditions for Media Ownership

The prerequisite for becoming a newspaper publisher, online portal, or owner of a broadcasting organization is entirely unclear. In these matters, Bangladesh's media laws seem very liberal. Regarding becoming a publisher of a newspaper, the Press and Publication Act of Bangladesh states that anyone who is not a minor, not declared unsound by a court, not convicted of a moral turpitude offense in the preceding five years, and has the necessary financial resources for regular publication can become the publisher, printer, and owner of a newspaper. There is no mention of any such conditions in the case of television.

Experience shows that becoming a media owner mainly depends on the intelligence agency's vetting report and financial capacity. In reality, there are significant loopholes in both of these unwritten conditions. That is why licenses have been obtained even while keeping the source of investment in mass media shrouded in secrecy. Except for one or two exceptions, in almost every television channel license application, the entrepreneurs wrote that they would invest in the organization from their assets and bank loans. They did not have to disclose whether those assets were earned from tax-paid income, nor did they have to submit tax payment certificates. Those now on everyone's lips as loan defaulters also mentioned so-called own assets (which may have originated from self-sourced bank loans) and new bank loans.

There is no obligation to disclose the source of investment in the case of newspaper publication. Only proof of a certain amount of bank deposit must be given. The government's policy states that the government can revise this deposit amount from time to time. Government records show this was last determined by issuing an SRO on July 29, 1984. Five lakh taka for dailies published from Dhaka, Chittagong, and Khulna, and two lakh taka from other cities. Needless to say, not only in the current market, but even in those days, that amount would not have covered a daily newspaper's publication and operation costs for three months. Due to such easy conditions from the financial liability side, hundreds of dailies have exploded, most of whose sole purpose is to secure a share of government advertisements. Over the past few decades, some such newspapers have been published with great fanfare, attracting promising and creative youth to journalism, only to throw them into unemployment quickly.

This trend has now become widespread in the case of online news portals as well. The entrepreneurs, editors, and journalists of online portals have mainly expressed concern about the lack of regulation. They have called for an effective code of conduct and a regulatory body. Although the government talks about financial transparency in the online policy and its amended policy, it has ambiguity. No obligation to invest a specific amount has been added.

New Initiatives

Alongside mainstream or legacy mass media, some new initiatives are noticeable now, whose main objective is journalism in the public interest. Inspired by international experience (Al Jazeera) and especially some exceptional mass media, many refer to as 'Excel Media' (such as The Net News), such new initiatives have started. Based on crowdfunding, several mass media (Caravan, The Print, and The Wire) in neighboring India have created a niche for exceptional

journalism in the public interest. However, they have not yet become alternatives to the mainstream.

In the light of discussions in various stages of exchange of views meetings and global best practices, some proposals have emerged that the Media Reform Commission can consider:

- Convicted of criminal offenses and loan defaulters will be ineligible to be publishers and editors.
- To be an editor, at least 10 years of experience in mainstream newspapers will be required.
- Minimum educational qualification for journalism to be set at the graduation level.
- After joining the profession as a trainee, the appointing organization will ensure their professional training.
- A central database of journalists working nationwide will be maintained by the proposed National Media Commission.

The Government Training and Research Institutes

13.1 Press Institute Bangladesh (PIB)

The report of the first Press Commission of Bangladesh (1984), formed with prominent editors, stated regarding the professional excellence of journalists that the ultimate goal of mass media can only be achieved through comprehensive professional excellence, the basis of which is an environment of objective and responsible news and opinion analysis. This depends on the appropriate institutional education and proper professional training of journalists, whether acquired at home or abroad, before or after starting work. At that time, only the Mass Communication and Journalism Department of Dhaka University (since 1962) and the Press Institute Bangladesh (established in 1977) regularly provided graduate and postgraduate degrees, diplomas, and short-term training in journalism. Many journalists also came with journalism and photography training from various countries, including the United Kingdom, the United States, the former Soviet Union, Eastern European countries, India, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka. Besides, foreigners also came to Bangladesh with the assistance of the United States and provided training. The 1984 commission report recommended increasing opportunities for advanced training in the country to create an adequately trained workforce in the journalism profession. Repeating these words now would be an understatement. Instead, the lack of efficiency and the shortage of training are now acutely felt.

Over the past two to three decades, the mass media's unprecedented expansion, spread, and transformation in Bangladesh have been largely unplanned. It is an uncoordinated attempt to keep pace with global realities, which has caused the political motives and short-sightedness of authoritarian regimes to tarnish. The shortage of necessary skills and experience is acutely felt in the country. Instead of improving the quality of journalism, a gradual decline is observed. The training institutions built in state management are inadequate compared to the need and are not sufficiently rich in quality. Among the institutions that have grown under state initiative, the Press Institute Bangladesh (PIB) is prominent.

PIB is an autonomous institution under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Its main tasks are research, publication, and training journalists across the country to improve professional standards in journalism. PIB was established through a resolution on August 18, 1976. Subsequently, the Press Institute Bangladesh (PIB) Act 2018 was passed in the National Parliament and published in the Gazette on July 29, 2018.

The Press Institute Bangladesh (PIB) Act 2018 states the objectives of the institution as: "to establish an institute for conducting professional training, certificate, diploma and degree courses, research and publication, providing seminars, and for the development and enrichment of the journalism profession and to make it up-to-date." However, although the Act mentions training, research, and professional development in journalism, the responsibilities and functions of the government's public relations officers and mass communication workers have also been assigned to them. The duties and functions of the institution are mentioned on their website as follows:

- Providing in-service training and refresher facilities to public relations officers in various ministries or departments, or under any statutory body or local authority, journalists, information and media workers, development and communication workers, and media-related personnel.
- Providing training to journalists and certificates to trained persons.
- Conducting certificate, diploma, and other degree courses in journalism and awarding degrees.
- Preparing necessary course designs, curriculum, and syllabus for conducting training or courses.
- Adopting and implementing necessary programs, including building technological facilities for training or course conduct, research and publication, and for developing and enriching the journalism profession.
- Providing special honor to any person for an exceptional contribution to journalism.
- Establishing interactive websites with data-based units built with the help of modern information technology, digital museums, digital archives, libraries, and reading rooms, as well as building mass media reference and information centers.
- Providing advisory and consultancy services to initiators and organizers of newspapers, news agencies, radio, television, information centers, and mass media organizations.
- Providing opinions or advice in favor of the government or any other authority regarding the formulation of codes of conduct related to journalism in the mass media.
- Conducting research programs related to journalism, mass communication, and mass media at national and international levels and preparing and publishing related data, information, and reports.
- Collecting 'fees' at rates fixed and approved by the Board for all services and activities conducted by the Institute.
- Establishing liaison with national and international organizations on matters related to the scope of work of the Institute.
- Organizing and conducting national and international workshops, seminars, symposiums, and conferences on matters related to the scope of work of the Institute.
- To perform any other duties and functions assigned to the Institute by the government from time to time in furtherance of the objectives of this Act.

At the time of the establishment of the Press Institute, the prominent editor community of the country was at the forefront of the institution's leadership, among whom the names of Abdus Salam, Tawab Khan, ABM Musa, Shahidul Haque, Amanullah, and Ahmed Humayun are notable. However, at various times, government officials have also held top positions in the institution. Possibly for that reason, along with the journalism profession, public relations techniques for government information officials have also been included in the institution's curriculum or training programs. It is unknown whether the institution has any surveys or research on what kind of training is most in demand in the mass media industry and what kind of skills shortage exists. This commission's meetings with field-level stakeholders have repeatedly discussed the need to simplify the institutional structure of training and its expansion. As the institution is mainly Dhaka-centric, its capacity to meet the training and skill needs at the local level is limited.

The annual report of PIB for 2022-23 shows that a total of 1782 training courses have been organized for journalists from 1976 to 2023. That is, an average of 38 training courses have been organized per year. Since the beginning of the current century, PIB has been conducting a postgraduate diploma program in journalism under the National University. Alongside, e-learning courses are also ongoing. The institution publishes a periodical called 'Niriksha', of which 245 issues have been published. At one time, all national dailies, weeklies, and some regional newspapers of the country were archived in the institution. However, it has narrowed to preserving only 24 national dailies and 10 domestic and foreign weeklies in the last decade. The PIB library has a collection of about 14 thousand books on mass media, journalism, mass communication, and other related subjects.

Most of the training programs of PIB are spent on novice and mid-level journalists. While it is logical to prioritize basic training for beginners, there is a need to create awareness among newsroom managers and those responsible for editorial duties about the rapidly changing realities of the news world and to help them acquire the necessary leadership skills for change. The institution can also play a role in the regular review and evaluation of the functioning of the news media. The institution has not played much of a role in comprehensively developing this sector by involving the leadership of all mass media in this process.

Like other government, semi-government, statutory, and autonomous institutions, PIB has also come under the influence of partisan politics. Recruitment of those who follow partisan ideologies and removing those with different opinions have become common due to political reasons. There is a perception that the institution's attention and resources have also been spent on political motives. A separate project has been undertaken to collect and publish news, editorials, sub-editorials, and opinions related to the speeches, statements, and work of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in newspapers from 1949. In the fiscal year 2022-23, 'Bangabandhu in Newspapers, Volume Seven: 1970' has been published. On the 25th anniversary of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord, 'Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord: Reflection in Newspapers' has been printed in two volumes.

13.2 National Institute of Mass Communication (NIMC)

The National Institute of Mass Communication (NIMC, formerly National Broadcasting Academy) started its journey in 1980 as a project of the Government of Bangladesh with the assistance of UNDP, UNESCO, and ITU. It is a directorate under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and Bangladesh's only government training institution for information services and electronic media. This institute provides professional training in radio and television programs, technical aspects, and information services.

According to NIMC's latest annual report, the institution has conducted 1457 training programs, including workshops, in which 28,453 trainees have participated. In the fiscal year 2023-24 alone, 18 training courses were conducted, in which 375 people participated. The same report states that one-third of the institution's trainees from 2009 to 2024 were women. From the list of training courses published in the report, it can be inferred that some of its subjects are extremely important. However, some subjects are only applicable to government information officials. Questions remain about how logical it is for such a specialized training center. It is essential to

mention here that the Commission invited the top officials of the institution to an exchange of views meeting for detailed information about NIMC. However, they did not appear on the scheduled day despite having time and did not feel the need to inform the Commission of the reasons for their inability to maintain their schedule. This was an exceptional indication of non-cooperation in the work of the Media Reform Commission.

The institution's website mentions that various private, semi-government, and autonomous institutions and individuals involved in electronic and mass media can receive related training here. The main objectives of the National Institute of Mass Communication are to improve broadcasting, film, and mass communication activities by enhancing the skills and technical knowledge of broadcasting and communication workers working in Bangladesh Betar, Bangladesh Television, Film Development Corporation, Department of Film and Publication, Department of Information, and Department of Mass Communication. The primary responsibility of this institute is the timely development of electronic and film media in Bangladesh through training and objective research. Making development communication more dynamic and objective is another critical task.

The institution has claimed that various private TV and radio channels have also joined the institution's activities. However, their annual report does not contain specific information on how many private TV and radio stations have joined NIMC's activities, or how many news workers and technicians from private sector broadcast media have received training from the institution.

The details of their activities provided by the institution are:

- A. Overall development of broadcasting activities of the Department of Mass Communication, Department of Information, Bangladesh Open University, Department of Film and Publication, Bangladesh Television, and Betar through in-service training for program, technical, and news personnel.
- B. Organizing workshops and seminars and providing training for development broadcasting, development communication, and film studies, including Betar and Television.
- C. Conducting research programs on electronic media and film, and publishing findings and reports.
- D. Providing consultation, advice, and services in Betar, Television, and Mass Communication.
- E. Organizing discussion meetings, workshops, and motivational programs related to development, broadcasting, and communication.
- F. Arranging and organizing joint development, communication, and training-related curricula with international organizations, including UNICEF.
- G. Liaison and coordination with other organizations (national and international) in conducting similar programs.

H. Establishing a data bank rich in video and audio tapes and instructional materials.

I. Providing consultation and services related to development communication and development broadcasting through Bangladesh Betar, Bangladesh Television, and mass communication.

J. Performing other duties to assist in improving the standards of electronic and film media in Bangladesh.

K. Conducting audience-listener research programs.

L. Providing training and cooperation to private organizations, individuals, and regional and international sectors through electronic media.

13.3 NIMC's Scopes of Works

The National Institute of Mass Communication (NIMCO) has arrangements for various levels of specialized curricula in radio and television programs' planning, presentation, production, and technical aspects. Providing training to the officials of the Department of Mass Communication, Press Information Department of Film and Publication, Bangladesh Film Development Corporation, Bangladesh Open University, and other related institutions is another of its responsibilities. These curricula are designed according to the training needs of three levels of employees: those who-

1. Perform duties under supervision (Level-1)
2. Perform duties independently (Level-2)
3. Work at the supervision and management level (Level 3)

The list of training programs provided by NIMC includes:

Radio and Television Program, Radio and Television Technology, ENG/EFP for Television, Development Communication, Education Broadcasting through Radio and Television, Program Presentation for Radio and Television, Radio and Television Drama, Agricultural Extension Programs and Documentaries through Radio and Television, Script Writing for Radio and Television, Population Communication Programs in Radio and Television, Television Art Direction and Graphics, Camera Operation and Lighting, Digital Photo Journalism, Information and Library Management, Correct Bengali Pronunciation and Spelling, Field Broadcasting, Media Management, Computer Training, Mass Communication and Interpersonal Communication, Training Methodology, Film Studies (Script, Direction, Cinematography and Sound Recording), Broadcasting Management, Audience-Listener Research and Program Evaluation, Non-Linear Editing, Video Program Production Techniques, Digital System, Broadcasting for Rural Women, News Reporting Writing, Reading and Editing, Interviewing Techniques, Trainers' Training, Women and Child Development Communication, Verification and Evaluation of Training Outcomes, English Language: Speaking, Writing Style and Professional Use and Misuse.

Besides its training and research programs, the National Institute of Mass Communication also organizes various training programs in collaboration or joint initiatives with AIBD, ESCAP, UNESCO, UNICEF, RTI, multiple universities of Bangladesh, and other international organizations.

Although the list of training programs is long, it is not certain from NIMCO's annual report whether the curriculum is in line with the needs of the private sector broadcast media. It is unknown whether any needs assessment or survey has ever been conducted to determine the extent of the skills gap in the private sector and what specific programs need to be taken to fill it. If strong communication could be established with private sector broadcasting organizations, much of the weakness or crisis seen in television and radio program production/presentation could be overcome.

13.4 NIMC's Research Program

The description of the research program available in NIMC's latest annual report states, "Research evaluation programs and reports have been conducted and published since the organization's inception based on audience-listener feedback on broadcasting communication-related issues. Research programs are conducted annually on two notable and important topics." However, the list of published research on NIMC's website contains only three research reports, and it cannot be said that they are very comprehensive.

13.5 Bangladesh Film and Television Institute (BFTI)

The Bangladesh Film and Television Institute (BFTI) is a recent training and research initiative to improve mass media art standards. It was established as a statutory body in 2017 through the Bangladesh Film and Television Institute Act of 2013. The Act states regarding the institution, "It is necessary to establish the Bangladesh Film and Television Institute to conduct research-based activities in related fields, including providing degree and technical training on related subjects for creating skilled and capable producers and technicians in film and television program production."

This institute's main objectives are to increase the skills and make film and television producers and technicians capable, especially in various visual capture/production techniques, editing, and other technological aspects. This visual aspect has special importance in TV and online multimedia journalism. However, since there is a big difference between traditional film and television program production and news report preparation, the training needs are also naturally different. From that perspective, BFTI's connection with mass media organizations involved in journalism is quite limited. There is also no mention of journalism in the institution's responsibilities and functions list.

The Act states, "The Institute will be a statutory body." However, the provisions regarding the composition of its governing board make it essentially a subordinate institution like other directorates or departments of the Ministry of Information. As a result, the opportunity for BFTI to play a role in developing independent mass media and strengthening it outside the government's will and directives is limited.

Financial Security and Labor Laws for Journalists and Media Workers

The financial security of journalists and media employees has emerged as another critical issue in the recent exchange of views meetings of the Media Reform Commission. In their opinion, fair, courageous, objective, and independent journalism is impossible without ensuring journalists' financial security. Moreover, the issue has received special importance in the recommendations received from across the country on the Commission's website.

The financial security of journalists and media employees mainly depends on the financial condition of their media organization. Therefore, the economic stability of these organizations is equally important. In the five decades of mass media development in Bangladesh, not much attention has been paid to the financial security of journalists. Most media organizations are owned by business groups, politically influential individuals, or corporate entities. However, very few have considered fair salaries and benefits for journalists.

Although the labor law of Bangladesh stipulates ensuring the financial security and professional safety of workers in all professions, it has not been possible to implement it in the case of media employees in the last 54 years. The main reason is that the labor law has been applied to other professions to some extent, but it is almost non-existent in the case of journalism. Even in the case of newspapers, the Newspaper Employees (Conditions of Service) Act 1973 provisions have not been adequately implemented. Moreover, the Press Council has also not been given any role or jurisdiction regarding the welfare and livelihoods of journalists.

Although wage boards have been formed at various times to ensure the financial security of journalists and employees, there are widespread allegations of irregularities and corruption in their implementation. Some newspapers still follow the salary structure of the Fifth Wage Board, while some first-tier newspapers provide more benefits than the structure determined by it. Although the Ninth Wage Board was announced, it has only been fully effective in BSS and partially in the Financial Express and few others. Its implementation has been in a lawsuit filed by the Newspaper Owners' Association for the last six years. Moreover, the owners' organization (NOAB) has brought allegations of unfair competition due to corruption in implementing the Wage Board.

False implementation promises are being made, but journalists and employees are not receiving the benefits. Allegations have arisen that DFP officials, the owners' side, and some individuals from various unions are involved in the wage board implementation process. Journalists outside Dhaka have complained of being neglected by the wage board.

The financial security and job security issue for journalists has not only been unresolved in the last 54 years. However, journalists did not have economic security even during the Pakistan era before independence. The report published by the Pakistan Press Commission in 1959 stated that journalists working at the sub-divisional, district, and divisional levels in the category of 'mufassal' (rural) journalists received very low salaries and allowances. Even after the independence of Bangladesh, many first-tier newspapers did not provide any wage board to their

'mufassal' journalists, as mentioned in the report of the first Press Commission of Bangladesh. According to the wage board, a district correspondent received only 150 taka honorarium monthly. For each column inch of printed news, only 40 paisa was given. Of course, at that time, 'mufassal' journalists were considered part-timers.

In the wage board announced in 1986, a somewhat acceptable salary structure was recommended for journalists outside Dhaka (the capital) for the first time. This wage board recommended a monthly retainer allowance of 500 taka for journalists in district towns, 1 taka per column inch for printed news, 50 taka per photograph, 75 taka monthly medical allowance, 100 taka monthly transport allowance, festival allowance equivalent to the retainer allowance, and reimbursement of actual postal expenses and telephone bills.

Currently, the actual wages of journalists and employees have not increased proportionately to Dhaka's soaring cost of living due to inflation and other reasons. In 1963, the minimum salary of journalists in the lowest grade was equal to that of a Class1 government officer. But there is no such parity in the current salary structure. Again, although the cost of living is lower in 'mufassal' towns than in Dhaka, the salaries and allowances given to journalists in 'mufassal' towns are completely inadequate regarding the current cost of living. In many cases, correspondents outside Dhaka are not given any salary. If their reports are published, they are given a small honorarium, which is irregular. In reality, the journalism profession in 'mufassal' is no longer part-time. To meet the 24-hour news demand of Dhaka, journalism outside Dhaka has to face various challenges.

There is no well-defined law regarding the professional recognition, financial security, and social welfare of journalists in Bangladesh. However, it is still regulated by the labor law. During the previous government, a draft of a new law titled 'Mass Media Employees Act' was prepared. However, there was no public opinion survey or sufficient discussion with stakeholders. In the draft of the Mass Media Employees Act, it is seen that, except for a few minor issues, most of the labor law sections have been copied verbatim. Experience shows that due to the reluctance of the authorities to enforce the labor law effectively, the legitimate rights of journalists and employees in the newspaper industry have been gradually violated. Moreover, the mass media industry has now expanded far beyond newspapers. But so far, no national policy has been formulated for the mass media employees in that sector. As a result, a large number of mass media employees are regularly being exploited and are not getting redress.

Even though private television developed in the country in the nineties, no well-defined salary structure or provisions for benefits have been created for journalists and mass media workers working in government television, radio, private television, and radio. There is a wide disparity in the salary structure of journalists in newspapers and private television, radio, FM radio, or community radio. Moreover, Bangladesh Betar, Bangladesh Television, Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS), and other news organizations pay very low salaries and allowances to journalists outside Dhaka.

Over the past few decades, a new wave of mass media has emerged worldwide with the development of technology and the expansion of the internet. Print newspapers have decreased. There has been modernisation and digitalisation of newspapers (online, multimedia, IPTV,

internet radio). As a result, countless online-based mass media have entered the market. Numerous people have been self-publishing their works online with or without registration. The number of journalists has also increased dramatically, many of whom do not have professional qualifications. Again, many are using fake identities. Along with that, numerous allegations regularly arise such as demanding money in the name of journalism for not receiving proper salaries, pseudo-journalism, yellow journalism, spreading false information, harassing individuals and organizations, extorting money, seeking favors, maliciously campaigning against opponents for personal gain, protecting the illegal businesses of one's organisation, and being used as pawns of political leaders or parties. Large industrial groups come under administrative pressure for involving journalists in various irregularities or to gain special benefits. A district administrator has requested the Commission to stop these industrial groups' ownership of mass media organizations.

Various skills have become essential in current journalism. A journalist has to simultaneously write reports, take pictures, create and edit videos, and work on online publishing. Tragically, the copyright of content created by journalists is almost always violated. Many media outlets, even established mass media, copy news extensively without crediting the original reporter. Even established media houses do not take any measures to prevent copyright infringement. Although it is necessary to use anti-copying software and take legal action against offenders, these organisations are completely indifferent.

So far, no well-defined pricing for news, photos, or multimedia content created by online journalists has been determined. Most mass media do not pay for online news, although some organisations have started this practice. Most news in newspapers is now printed in digital format, which has decreased the honorarium of journalists for online news by almost half. This is financially harming freelance journalists.

Although the government formulated the National Online Mass Media Policy (amended in 2020) in 2017, the issue of the financial value of content created by journalists was overlooked in it. Moreover, there is no national policy to give journalists a share of the digital revenue earned by online mass media through their content. Journalists are being deprived in this case as well.

Most video journalists working in newspapers, online portals, or television do not receive fair salaries and allowances alongside news reporters. Many do not have appointment letters, and wages remain due month after month. Equipment is also not provided, which is why many video journalists are forced to work using their personal cameras or mobile phones. It becomes difficult for photojournalists, video journalists, or multimedia journalists to support themselves with their salaries. Most mass media in district towns pay visual journalists only 2000 to 5000 taka per month, and often no honorarium is given. The Bangladesh Labor Act has explicit appointment letters, identity cards, and minimum wages provisions.

Due to the lack of a specific salary structure for journalists and employees working in online mass media, media houses determine their employees' salaries according to their own (often without any policy) rules. A huge disparity is seen in the salaries of editors, executive editors, news editors, chief reporters, and senior officials in administration and field-level employees.

Recently, serious allegations have arisen against many mass media in Dhaka; some well-known newspapers, television, and online portals are also allegedly employing 'mufassal' journalists in exchange for money. Allegations have arisen that these journalists are rarely paid any salary or allowance; instead, they have to pay a certain amount of money to some media houses in Dhaka every month.

Currently, the mass media that employ journalists monthly and year after year without any appointment letter, identity card, or monthly salary violate the existing labor law. But there is no appropriate forum for journalists to seek redress. In the provisions of appointment and conditions of service of the Bangladesh Labor Act 2006, it is mentioned that no owner can employ any worker without providing an appointment letter, and every employed worker must be provided with an identity card with a photograph. Service books must be provided. Yet, countless journalists work without appointment letters in Dhaka and nationwide.

Although the cost of living is increasing daily, many mass media companies do not provide regular employee promotions. Even though regular and irregular promotions and increments are given to journalists in Dhaka, many 'mufassal' (rural) journalists of mainstream media do not receive any promotion or increment even after working for 10 years or more. They are not given retirement benefits, provident funds, or gratuity facilities at the end of their service, which their colleagues in Dhaka receive. Allegations have arisen in the Commission's exchange of views meetings that they are sent home empty-handed at the end of their service, even after working for many years.

Whatever little salary and allowances they are given, most media houses do not pay them regularly. Sub-section 2 of section 122 of the Bangladesh Labor Act states that regarding regular salary payment, "No wage period shall exceed one month." Section 123 of the Labor Act states regarding the time of wage payment, "The wages of every worker in respect of the wage period for which his wages are payable shall be paid before the expiry of the seventh working day next following the last day of the wage period."

There are allegations that media organizations use working journalists as advertising agents for their commercial interests. Journalists are given this work on the condition of receiving extra commission. The centrally distributed advertisements of government, semi-government offices, local government institutions, and various autonomous and semi-autonomous organizations from Dhaka, which existed earlier, were decentralised a few decades ago. Since then, local correspondents have collected advertisements from the regional administration and various organizations. As a result, competition for advertisement collection is increasing among local journalists more than competition for news. Many media houses are setting targets on how many advertisements need to be given in a month instead of setting conditions on how many news items need to be given. Even at the time of the appointment, conditions regarding advertisements are being mentioned. As a result, independent journalism is being harmed across the country. The possibility of using advertisements as weapons in cases of corruption, irregularities, and anti-public interest news publication has increased manifold.

In most cases, the responsibilities imposed on employers in the labor law regarding ensuring safety at the workplace are being violated. Especially outside Dhaka, most employing

organisations do not fulfill their duties regarding providing safety equipment to local-level journalists, personal safety training, risk allowance, and legal assistance. Whereas, statistically, local correspondents are the most victims of physical attacks and legal harassment. At least two-thirds of the journalists who have lost their lives in 54 years were journalists working outside Dhaka.

Currently, journalism has become very important even on university campuses in Bangladesh. While campus journalism in other countries means working for the university's newspaper or radio, in Bangladesh, campus journalism is equivalent to professional journalism. Because of the country's extreme confrontational partisan politics are prevalent on the campuses, clashes and violence have become almost regular occurrences, which often turn fatal. As a result, the level of risk in campus journalism is also significantly high. Even during last July-August, many campus journalists performed their duties at the risk of their lives. Many have been injured, expelled, and harassed. However, mass media organizations do not pay regular salaries and allowances to campus journalists. Many organizations only end their responsibility by giving an identity card. Many campus journalists have informed the Commission that they are paid nominal salaries and allowances. They are often not provided with safety equipment to cover risky events. They also do not receive much cooperation in case of attacks or lawsuits.

In many organizations in Bangladesh, there is no specific working hour limit. Journalists are often made to work beyond stipulated hours without overtime pay. Many journalists have also complained that they have to work even on weekly holidays. No financial benefit is given in exchange, and the earned leave accrued later cannot be enjoyed at other times. However, the labor law mandates that a worker should not work more than 8 hours a day and 48 hours a week. If work is done beyond the scheduled time due to extreme necessity, there is a condition for providing extra remuneration for it. On the other hand, although labor law offers workers one to one and a half days of leave per week, many mass media organisations do not abide by it. There are allegations that local correspondents do not follow it at all.

In various exchange of views meetings of the Commission, many journalists have stated that they do not have minimum job security. Employers dismiss journalists at any time without notice if they wish. In many cases, unfair conditions are added to the appointment letters as well. Journalists often wake up to find out through a message on their mobile that they no longer have a job. Many times, after returning from an assignment, journalists find that they have been fired. Meanwhile, labor law stipulates termination, dismissal, or discharge from service provisions. In that case, there is a provision for prior notice and compensation to the journalist, which most mass media violate.

Section 20 of the Bangladesh Labor Act-2006 states that, "An employer may terminate the service of a worker due to redundancy, provided that if a worker has been in continuous service for not less than one year under the same employer, s/he shall be given by the employer, in case of termination of her/ his service, one month's notice in writing indicating the reasons for termination, or wages instead of such notice; s/he shall be paid by way of compensation thirty days' wages for every completed year of service or gratuity, if payable, whichever is higher."

In exchange for views meetings, many female journalists have told the Commission that many mass media do not want to provide maternity leave or salary allowances. Many times, they are dismissed from their jobs during maternity leave. However, Chapter Four of the Labor Act discusses ensuring maternity benefits, leave, or prenatal facilities. Although festival allowance for workers has been made mandatory in the labor law, many mass media do not give any festival allowance to the mass media employees. Many times, journalists have to work compulsorily even on their festivals. Journalists working online during festivals have to work long hours. In the amendment brought in sub-section 3 of section 118 of Act No. 42 of 2006 (Labor Act), it has been stated that, "A worker may be asked to work on any festival holiday, but in lieu thereof, s/he shall be entitled to one day's compensatory holiday and double the rate of her/ his ordinary wages for that day."

Many of the mass media in the country that provide festival allowances offer it to employees of all religion during Eid, instead of their respective festivals. Many journalists have informed the Commission that this creates problems for mass media workers of other religions during their respective religious festivals. However, a new section has been added in the draft law prepared by the government in 2018 for further amendment of the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006. This new section states, "'Festival allowance' means the prescribed festival allowance payable to the workers working in any factory or establishment on the occasion of their respective religious festivals."

Besides, although the Bangladesh Labor Act talks about prescribed leave, allowances, and the formation of future funds for the treatment of workers, most mass media do not ensure these facilities. Moreover, there are specific policies in the labor law for any termination, dismissal, or removal, which are regularly being violated in the mass media industry.

Actions Required to Achieve Gender Equality in Media

For building an egalitarian society, gender equality in news media must be considered necessary. The role of news media is vital to ensure a dignified position for women in society, establish equality and justice, and stop oppression and violence.

In the National Women's Development Policy adopted in 2011, section 40 that dwells with mass media and women's issues, mentions taking the following steps:

40.1 Promote the correct image of women through mass media, ensure their increased participation, and remove disparities in participation;

40.2 Arrange for publicity to stop derogatory, harmful, stereotypical portrayals of women and violence against women;

40.3 Create equal opportunities for women in the management and production training of various mass media;

40.4 Integrate gender-sensitive coordination in the media code of conduct.

There are two aspects to achieving this equality:

Firstly, from the perspective of participation, and secondly, from the perspective of content creation.

Viewing news media as a workplace, equal participation of women here is essential from a human rights perspective. It is also crucial because news media influences the mindset of the audience-viewers-readers, and news workers create this world. Without equal participation of women, news will become one-sided, contrary to accurate information. Research in different countries shows that when women participate in journalism at a higher rate, they can bring different perspectives.

When women are marginalised in the newsroom, there is a tendency not to give importance to their perspectives. We can see this marginalisation of women's participation even in journalists' forums and unions.

Analysis of news media content shows gender disparity in language and presentation style. The style of news presentation is also male-dominated and opinionated, which reinforces the unequal position of women. Moreover, in news reporting, men are mainly presented as the main characters, and women's voices often become secondary or marginalised.

Suggestions that have emerged from discussions with various stakeholders:

To eliminate this situation and create a gender-equitable environment, attention can be paid to the following issues:

- A. Eliminate gender discrimination in recruitment, promotion, and training to ensure the participation of all genders at all levels of mass media;
- B. Each mass media must prepare a gender-sensitive code of conduct and arrange for information provision, discussion, training, and monitoring for the effective implementation of the code of conduct; ensure infrastructure (such as separate toilets, childcare centers) for the smooth participation of all genders;
- C. Give priority to women's needs and exercise utmost caution in the safety and security of journalists with gender sensitivity; arrange transport for safe commuting.
- D. Form a complaint redressal cell in each mass media office as per the High Court's directives on sexual harassment prevention (2009);
- E. Take measures for mental health care to cope with various types of pressure in journalism.
- F. Ensure that women receive proper maternity leave and do not face discrimination upon returning to work after leave.
- G. Formulate clear guidelines and rules on how women will be presented; prepare policies on not publishing and disseminating derogatory, hateful, or contemptuous attitudes towards women, or creating obstacles in their smooth movement in all areas.
- H. Highlight women's multifaceted roles and participation in society; pay attention to whether women's voices and perspectives are highlighted in any news/feature.
- I. Prepare clear guidelines for language use so that there is no direct or indirect humiliation of women through words or descriptions.

Creating Equal Opportunities for Indigenous and Disabled Groups

Individuals often face discrimination due to their ethnicity, religion, language, physical or social differences. The relationship between mass media and minority groups and people with special needs can be positive or negative. By highlighting clear images of them, mass media can increase empathy and mutual respect, just as biased, one-sided, and negative portrayals can reinforce negative stereotypes and exacerbate discrimination.

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities on 18 December 1992. Among its main provisions is "Persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities (hereinafter referred to as persons belonging to minorities) have the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their religion, and to use their language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination" (Article 2.1).

Article 16 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)-2007 clearly states that:

A. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish their media in their languages and access all forms of state media in a non-discriminatory manner.

B. States shall take adequate measures to ensure that state-owned media duly reflect indigenous cultural diversity.

Therefore, what can be done in mass media in this regard?

1. Inclusion of issues ensuring the freedom of language, culture, and opinion of indigenous communities in the mass media code of conduct;
2. Setting a minimum broadcast time limit for indigenous communities in mass media;
3. Giving priority to the presentation of news and programs in indigenous languages in mass media published/broadcast in indigenous-dominated areas;
4. Simplifying the registration of media that have grown through their initiatives and funding of indigenous people; also, providing necessary assistance so that indigenous people's media can develop further.
5. Preparing guidelines for the proper representation of indigenous communities in mass media to ensure appropriate and dignified representation of indigenous communities in mainstream mass media;
6. Incorporating 'Indigenous Studies' in journalism education and training;
7. Providing fellowships for indigenous journalists/journalism students and giving priority in recruitment;

16.1 Disabled and Special-Needs Groups

The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has guaranteed equal rights, human dignity, fundamental human rights, and participation in social equality for all citizens, including persons with disabilities. The Persons with Disability Welfare Act 2001 was passed in Parliament to protect the rights of persons with disabilities and their welfare and development. Bangladesh signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) on 9 May 2007 and ratified it on 30 November. In light of the international instrument on disability, UNCRPD, the Persons with Disability Welfare Act enacted in 2001 was updated to 'Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013' and 'Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Rules 2015'.

However, even after this, persons with disabilities in Bangladesh face physical infrastructural barriers, limitations of social perspectives, policy irregularities, or discrimination. Amidst these adversities, mass media can emerge as a powerful tool to help raise awareness, influence policymakers, and create equal opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Creating Awareness and Changing Perspectives

The most significant power of mass media is its ability to shape public opinion. When television, newspapers, or social media do not view persons with disabilities only through the lens of pity, but highlight their stories of empowerment, then a change comes in the perspective of society. When the image of the everyday lives of persons with disabilities is highlighted through positive portrayals such as cinema, drama, or news reports, ordinary people start to see them as collaborators. In place of pity, a sense of respect and equal rights is created.

The role of Mass Media for Policymaking and Advocacy

When investigative journalism and reports highlight discrimination, disability, and legal loopholes, it is a strong message for policymakers. The mass media can play a direct role in ensuring accountability to the government. The contribution of news media is immense in creating public opinion in favor of disability rights, creating pressure on government and non-government organizations, and becoming vocal in demanding necessary policy Reform. For example, due to the lack of accessibility, persons with disabilities lead an isolated life from society. The media can prepare an investigative report by talking to government organisations related to accessibility.

Giving Voices to Persons with Disabilities

Mass media becomes truly inclusive when persons with disabilities can participate as journalists, columnists, TV presenters, or content creators. It becomes more credible and influential when they tell the stories of their lives themselves. Moreover, ensuring their representation falls under the responsibility of the mass media.

Ensuring Accessibility and Increasing Inclusion

A significant responsibility of mass media is to become disability-friendly itself. By using Bengali sign language during news on TV channels, adding captions to videos on social media, and ensuring screen-reader accessibility on websites, mass media information becomes equally accessible to all. Only BTV and Desh TV use Bengali sign language, which is also true in news bulletins. But there is a need to use this language in entertainment or other discussion programs, which is not being done—even there is no discussion in the media about this.

Fighting Discrimination and Stigma

Often, viewing persons with disabilities only through the eyes of pity or turning their life struggles into 'stories of inspiration' has a detrimental effect. It portrays them as powerless and obscures the real problems. It must be ensured through responsible journalism that there is proper representation of persons with disabilities and that reports are prepared focusing on their rights.

Providing Assistance in Emergency Situations

People with disabilities face special challenges in getting information during natural disasters, epidemics, or any emergency. News media must ensure that this group receives necessary information correctly and efficiently. At the same time, mass media can highlight whether they are easily receiving government or non-government assistance. Mass media can also play a role in policy change by highlighting the lack of accessibility in disaster management.

Strengthening Grassroots Movements

News media can further amplify the voices of organizations and activists working to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. When disability rights movements organized at the local level find space in mass media, they gain importance not only nationally but also on the international platform.

Corporate Responsibility and Job Creation

Mass media will not only stop at creating awareness, but it can also create pressure on corporate organizations and government offices so that they create job opportunities for persons with disabilities. It is possible to highlight the importance of inclusive policies in job creation, education, and transportation through special reports or campaigns.

16.2 Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Mass Media

For mass media to be truly inclusive, it is not enough to publish reports about persons with disabilities; rather, it is essential to actively include persons with disabilities in the workplace, in content creation, and policymaking. How can this be done?

- Ensure that job advertisements are screen-reader friendly and written in simple language; ensure necessary assistance during interviews (such as sign language interpreters, flexible evaluation methods); recruit persons with disabilities in journalistic, editorial, production,

and technical positions; arrange for mentorship and skill development training for persons with disabilities.

- Ensure accessible offices (ramps, lifts, disability-friendly restrooms);
- Arrange for assistive technology (screen readers, speech-to-text software).
- Provide flexible working hours and remote work facilities.
- Highlight the stories of the abilities and contributions of persons with disabilities instead of only viewing them as objects of pity or inspiration; regularly include persons with disabilities as journalists, commentators, and panelists.
- Include closed captions and sign language interpreters in television news; provide written transcripts or audio descriptions for radio programs for the visually impaired.
- Use simple language, alt text, image descriptions, and Braille-friendly formats in online news and social media.
- Provide training on reporting on disability issues; have guidelines for respectful language use when reporting on persons with disabilities.
- Design websites to comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1); create screen-reader compatible news apps; arrange for news publication in audio, Braille, and large print.

The mass media are not just a medium for providing information; it is a powerful tool for social change. If used correctly, it is possible to create a more inclusive, just, and equitable society for various groups of people. We need responsible, ethical, and inclusive mass media that becomes the voice of all sections of society, highlights their struggles and successes, and inspires society and policymakers for change.

The Risk of Disinformation/Misinformation

Spreading misinformation through false news, fabricated or inaccurate information, rumors, etc., is not new in Bangladesh. We have had horrific experiences of widespread violence and loss of life due to false and malicious propaganda, such as hurting religious sentiments. Following the fall of the Awami League government in July, a flood of unreliable information and falsehoods started pouring in both within and outside the country, especially from neighboring India, ranging from fabricated books. There has been a continuous effort through various social media to distort student movements, incite alleged militants, and portray the Biden administration and alleged deep-state conspiracies as reasons for the downfall of the Sheikh Hasina government, and this is also being observed in the mainstream media of India.

Earlier, Facebook shut down nine pages and six accounts in the run-up to the 2018 elections in Bangladesh, and around the same time, Twitter announced the closure of 15 fake accounts. Various types of propaganda using counterfeit identities have also happened around the January 7, 2024, elections. Digital platforms have become a fertile ground for spreading such falsehoods and fake news. Global social media companies are irresponsibly facilitating the spread of falsehoods and fake information in the name of so-called free speech. After Elon Musk, a proponent of so-called absolute free speech, unilaterally took over Twitter, the mandatory verification of all types of facts on that platform was abolished. Moreover, one can use another person's identity as a verified account. As a result, information is often spread in the name of powerful and influential people, which, even if harmful, becomes viral before those individuals can clarify their position. Last November, after President Trump was elected in the US elections, Facebook also decided to abolish its fact-checking system. In 2020, Facebook banned then-President Trump after various claims were proven false during the fact-checking process, which has now been lifted after his re-election.

Globally, concern is growing about the malicious propaganda and ignorant and unintentional spread of false news or fabricated information. False or misleading information originates from various sources, ranging from satirical writings, memes, or parodies to dangerous conspiracy theories. Attempts to conceal or deny inconvenient or harmful truths and promote falsehoods as truth for political purposes have existed. However, the main reasons for its increased spread are the ubiquity of the internet and social media. In the Oxford Dictionaries' review of 2016, 'fake news' was the most talked-about word of the year. In 2017, the word was also at the top of the list of most discussed words in President Trump's vocabulary. Ironically, he often dismissed news reports about the scandals of President Trump or his family and close associates as fake news. Conversely, his staunch right-wing followers relentlessly use fabricated information against opponents on various social media platforms to conduct propaganda.

More than half of the world's population now use the internet, and according to UNICEF, 69 percent of young people rely on the internet to get information, share it with others, and for social interaction. Almost all smartphone users in Bangladesh are accustomed to using various social networking sites. Due to the algorithms that prioritize and make easily accessible information that attracts the attention of users on social media, even if it is misleading or false, it

reaches people very quickly. The process of publishing, spreading, or disseminating this information is complex and multi-layered, not limited to any specific boundary, and can manifest in various forms.

Experts have not yet reached a consensus on a clear definition of misinformation and false information because its scope is vast. Fake news, hoaxes, propaganda work using computer software, content that can harm others through online means, hateful or discriminatory content, and online abnormal behavior—all of these are being identified as tactics for spreading propaganda or misinformation. These occur through pictures, videos, audio, text, cartoons, graphics, and content created by humans or through computer artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-generated content (deep fakes). The way AI can now clone anyone's pictures, voices, and content has increased the danger manifold.

How misinformation or false information is generally spread is as follows:

- Satire or Parody: Can fool people or cause harm even without any harmful intent.
- Misleading Content: Misuse of information to frame an issue or person.
- Imposter Content: False information using the identity of a genuine source.
- Fabricated Content: 100% false content designed to deceive and do harm.
- False Connection: When headlines, visuals, or captions do not match the content.
- False Context: Presenting baseless information and context using genuine content.
- Manipulated Content: Genuine information or visuals are manipulated to deceive.

17.1 Bangladesh Scenario

It is generally believed that the risk of being misled by misinformation and disinformation is higher in Bangladesh than in other countries. The two main reasons are mainstream news media's lack of credibility and readers' excessive reliance on social and digital media. According to various surveys, people in Bangladesh now rely most on television channels as the primary news source. Online media follow this, and newspapers are in the third position. Recently, some mainstream media outlets have been publishing or quoting the misinformation, half-truths, or manipulated information of various individuals known as social media influencers as news, which is misleading the general public.

The ignorance of the general public about news media and their working methods, as well as the owners' consideration of commercial interests, also raises doubts about the credibility of news. These surveys show that people resort to multiple media for correct news and become sure about its truthfulness only after finding the same information in various media. This reflects the severe crisis of trust in mainstream news media.

There is certainly more than one reason for the crisis of trust in mainstream news media. Due to various regulatory measures of the government on the news media, many news media do not publish correct information due to the lack of an environment to work independently and impartially, or they refrain from publishing complete or fragmented information. Secondly, pro-government business groups control many news media outlets and do not publish information that is against political and group interests. Moreover, they publish biased news. The line

between information and opinion is almost disregarded, and political rhetoric is presented as information.

Due to the numerical dominance of news media, an unhealthy competition for rapid information dissemination has become intense. As a result, without checking the accuracy of information, false information, manipulated information, and even rumors are often being spread in the news media, creating a dangerous trend. Of course, this tendency is most evident in electronic media—television and digital media online portals. Due to the proliferation of various politically and commercially motivated media and unhealthy competition, sometimes there are significant disruptions in the flow of information, which creates deep confusion among people and generates profound distrust towards news media. An example of such a trend is the controversy developed, centering on using pictures and quotes in a report on Independence Day on March 26, 2023, to highlight the depth of the country's economic crisis. Multiple pro-government TV channels and online media raised allegations of using fabricated quotes against the leading Bengali daily Prothom Alo, which gave birth to a significant political controversy and created doubt in public opinion.

Following the same trend of changes happening in mass media worldwide, in Bangladesh, mainstream media—television, radio, newspapers, and online portals—have taken initiatives to engage social media. As a result, almost every news article is now being published in brief on social media at the earliest opportunity, and the effort to attract readers to the leading publication has become a regular practice. This work has now become part of the professional responsibility of all journalists. This work is mostly not part of any editorial process. As a result, the risk of creating confusion and publishing wrong news arises due to minor verbal errors. This editorial weakness is becoming prominent as news media face declining advertising revenue and work with a limited newsroom workforce.

Due to the weakness of mainstream news media, people eager to fill the void increasingly rely on social media for news. Data from a 2021 assessment by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) states that about 80 percent of people in Bangladesh have reported negative impacts of content on social media. The assessment also reported that 80 percent of respondents share information received through social media. More than one in three respondents reported not trying to verify information obtained through social media. And among those who try to verify information, four out of every ten consider the information true after seeing others' 'likes'. According to data from the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), the number of mobile phone users in the country is more than 160 million, and the number of internet users is more than 100 million. Data from other surveys states that 80 percent of internet users use social media.

Organized political propaganda against the few news media or organizations that have gained recognition as reliable has also increased alarmingly in recent times. Attempts to spread misinformation and create doubt about journalists, and especially news media, by labeling them as 'anti-state', 'anti-democracy', or agents of foreign countries are becoming prominent from time to time. Earlier, they tended to label them as 'anti-development' or 'anti-liberation war'.

The purpose of spreading misinformation/false information in Bangladesh is mainly to undermine communal harmony and achieve political interests. Besides, there is a trend of spreading malicious and false information online to promote religious militancy. However, this has been possible to control due to various anti-terrorism resistance and security measures. In many cases, proper and impartial investigations into the incidents of propaganda or false information spread to destroy communal harmony remain incomplete. In many incidents, it has been seen that content considered religiously offensive has been spread from sources impersonating others. The deadly violence in Brahmanbaria, centering on an alleged offensive comment about Islam from the Facebook ID of a Hindu youth, was later found in the investigation to have been done by someone else using his identity. Evidence (dismissible) has been found that baseless rumors spread on Facebook played a role in the anti-Ahmadiyya violence in Panchagarh in March 2024. There are allegations of group interests or political motives behind these.

The rate of publishing recently edited videos and content using manipulated information on social media has increased noticeably. Edited and misleading content is created using short manipulated clips from Facebook Reels, TikTok, and YouTube. Many of these show the location, context, event, arrangement, speaker, or main characters as accurate or honest. Still, the speech is edited or manipulated so that it is not the original speech of the main event.

The incident of spreading fake news on social media using the logos and pictures of established international and domestic news media has already reached an alarming level. Another source of phony information is various groups outside the country. In some cases, the direct involvement of foreign states or state institutions is behind such misinformation or malicious manipulation of information. The kind of propaganda and false information that is being spread in Indian media following the student protests in Bangladesh, the removal of Sheikh Hasina's effigy, and her taking refuge in India, can take a dangerous turn. Although the Bangladesh government officially expressed concern to the Indian government, spreading misinformation/false information has not stopped.

Earlier, after the US visa restriction policy was announced against those obstructing fair and impartial elections, some opinions were published in the media of a neighboring country, initially calling on Delhi to support the Awami League government in Washington. Then, before Prime Minister Modi visits Washington, news was published without citing any source. In discussions with President Biden, a request would be made not to take any steps that would disrupt stability in Bangladesh. No government source mentioned any such debate before or after that meeting. Before the Sylhet city elections, a person from London published a fake opinion poll in the name of a fictitious organization, claiming that the Awami League-nominated candidate, who had returned to the country from expatriate life in London, would win by a large margin of votes. The country's major newspapers published that survey as news without verifying its authenticity, which Disinformation Watch later investigated and found was not a reliable survey from any professional organization.

Towards the end of May 2023, six US Congressmen wrote a letter to President Biden on the issue of elections and human rights in Bangladesh. Although the letter was published on social media, the news media in Bangladesh did not publish it for four days. The letter was published

online on Friday afternoon. Then, due to a three-day holiday combining the weekend and Labor Day in the US, Bangladeshi journalists had to wait three days to verify the statement's authenticity from those Congressmen's offices. Due to the time gap, it was finally published in Bangladeshi news media after four days. It may be recalled that a similar statement was circulated on social media in 2014, which was a fabricated statement about seeking asylum in Malaysia. In light of past experiences, newsrooms adopted increased caution in 2023.

A 2020 national survey by the media research organization MRDI showed that 64 percent of people in the country have experienced fake news at least once. This experience was 76 percent for men and 51 percent for women. It is assumed that this may be due to men's greater interest in news. The same survey also showed that the rate of fake news reaching rural areas is slightly higher than in urban areas.

Actions to Promote Media Literacy in Bangladesh

For a desirable media culture necessary for democracy in any country, having media-literate citizens is essential. Over the past three decades, alongside mass media, other types of media (such as social media) have also expanded; citizens' tendency to use media has also increased. Their movement is growing in the internet-based 'cyber' world. Print media, audio-visual media, telephone, and interactive media have taken place in our daily media consumption list. Just as there is diversity in media, differences are observed in understanding media literacy. Among the prevalent concepts, mass media literacy, computer literacy, cyber literacy, internet literacy, network literacy, digital literacy, e-literacy, information literacy, etc., are widely used. Although they are often used synonymously, each has a different level of meaning.

These differences must be considered when formulating any media literacy policy. Many define mass media literacy as the user's access to information or content of various media types, the ability to analyze, evaluate, and create content. Again, the ability to identify fake news and rumors and having sufficient knowledge about cybercrime and the Information Technology Act also fall under media literacy. In this context, based on our observations, experiences, and the findings of various research, it can be said that the level of media literacy of people in different classes, professions, genders, ages, and geographical locations in Bangladesh (those who use various types of media and those who will in the future) is not satisfactory. Some actionable recommendations in this regard are mentioned below.

Misuse of Media and Unethical Journalism

Throughout Bangladesh, the powerful elite have consistently sought to control the mass media for their interests. Individuals with party affiliation and close ties often receive priority in media registration and licensing. As a result, business people, journalists, and even political leaders close to the government benefit from this privilege. Those who do not obtain media ownership are often intimidated into working in favor of the government. Even during the BNP and Awami League governments from 1991 to 2006, despite the emergence of new daily newspapers and television channels, the freedom of the press remained limited under both administrations.

However, during the recent Awami League government, issuing media licenses based on partisan and political considerations initiated unhealthy competition in the industry. Overlooking objectivity, professionalism, journalistic ethics, and morality, the tendency to misuse media for familial, commercial, and political interests has increased. The media is even used as a tool for propaganda against the opposition. For many industrial enterprises, the media has become a shield to protect themselves and their businesses.

During Sheikh Hasina's decade and a half in power, numerous television channels, FM radios, newspapers, and online news portals have been licensed. Particularly, with uncontrolled proliferation, many online news portals operate, allowing individuals and groups to publish various news, pictures, and videos of their interests. These mushrooming portals have begun to be used as tools for fake news, misinformation, and propaganda. A similar eagerness is observed in some mainstream media as well. Government agencies are often involved in this. An information pandemic was created during the coronavirus pandemic, where it became difficult to distinguish between truth and falsehood.

Rumors and fake news were spread on notable events, including the January 7, 2024, national parliamentary elections, and anti-government student movements. The same trend is observed during the period of the interim government about minority communities. Some mainstream Indian media have also played a role in this.

Although propaganda and information manipulation are not new, in August 2006, the Jugantor newspaper of the Jamuna Group published two reports about Shah Alam, the chairman of the Basundhara Group. The headline of the report published on August 2 was "Mafia Don Shah Alam's Indulgence in Beautiful Women and Narcotics," and the headline of the August 3 report was, "Who is this Mafia Don Shah Alam?" It was alleged that Jugantor published these reports because of a conflict between Jamuna Group's chairman Nurul Islam Babul and Basundhara Group over a road near Jamuna Future Park. This conflict between the two industrial groups created further examples of unethical journalism in Jugantor. Journalistic ethics and objectivity were disregarded in this case. Even when the Basundhara Group sent rebuttals to these news items, they were not published in Jugantor. Later, the Basundhara Group published rebuttals in various newspapers as advertisements. The matter went to court. Shah Alam filed a defamation case in the lower court against six people, including the then editor of Jugantor, Golam Sarwar, and publisher Salma Islam. The court issued arrest warrants against them. However, they

obtained bail from the High Court. The situation changed after the Basundhara Group's Kaler Kantho, Bangladesh Pratidin, Daily Sun, and banglanews24.com entered the market in 2010. The Basundhara Group emerged as an influential group in the newspaper industry. In 2012, the Basundhara Group started publishing reports against Matiur Rahman, the editor of Prothom Alo, and Prothom Alo itself through all their media outlets. Reports were published under various headlines such as "Those Roles of Matiur Rahman and Prothom Alo" on January 11 of that year, and "The False Campaign of Prothom Alo's Conspiracy" on January 12. No journalistic code of conduct was followed in these reports. Fabricated information and sources were used in these reports. There was also a reason behind publishing such reports. Prothom Alo had previously published many reports on various illegal activities of the Basundhara Group, including land grabbing and the Sabir Hossain murder case. Although those reports were fact-based, Basundhara did not take them well.

After the launch of this group's media outlets, a reflection of vindictiveness was seen in various reports and articles of the Basundhara Group media outlets. Meanwhile, in 2016, the Basundhara Group received permission for another media outlet. When their television channel, News24, started broadcasting that year, their dominance in the media world further increased. They have used these media outlets to promote and protect themselves and other businesses. Although their main target is Prothom Alo and its editor Matiur Rahman, who the Transcom Group owns, many other instances of using these media outlets exist. Despite being reprimanded by the Press Council for unethical journalism against Prothom Alo, they did not refrain from this practice.

After the rape and murder case of college student Mosarat Jahan Munia, on one hand, no news was published about this in any media outlet of the Basundhara Group. On the other hand, various one-sided reports portraying Munia and her family in a hostile and conspiratorial light were published. Allegations have been raised against the media outlets of the Basundhara Group for engaging in unethical journalism for 15 years, disregarding ethics, morality, and objectivity in this way. Even after a regime change on August 5, their eagerness did not stop. By manipulating information, continuous reports are being published against Prothom Alo and Matiur Rahman in their media. Some examples of this are "Prothom Alo Turns Even a Standing Twig into a Militant" on December 4, 2024, "Prothom Alo's Job Was to Stage Militant Drama," and "Prothom Alo, the Mastermind behind Planting Bombs" on December 5. Besides, on January 4, reports were published in the newspapers of the Basundhara Group under the headline "Prothom Alo Spreads Militant Drama under the Guise of Progressiveness."

There are allegations that Basundhara has allegedly invested in a number of proxy media outlets despite having its own media platforms. As a result, similar patterns of misinformation are seen in some other media as well. For example, several media, including Desh Rupantar, Somoyer Alo, Alokito Bangladesh, Amader Shomoy Dotcom, Dhaka Times24, and Ajker Khobor, were involved in propaganda against Munia. Desh Rupantar published a report titled "Munia, the Forest Dweller," and Somoyer Alo published "Munia Changes Boyfriends like Clothes."

There are also allegations about the role of two newspapers of the Transcom Group, Prothom Alo and The Daily Star. Especially, allegations have been made against them for fixing the political agenda during the 1/11 government. A central allegation of Sheikh Hasina and her party

leaders is that many believe that Prothom Alo and several other dailies played a role in the attempt by the caretaker government in 2007 to bring about a change in the top leadership of the country's two major political parties. Sheikh Hasina has repeatedly alleged, "When the emergency occurred in 2007, two newspapers went down to play a dirty game." Another reason behind such allegations is an editorial report titled "Two Leaders Will Have to Stand Aside," written by editor Matiur Rahman in Prothom Alo on June 11, 2007, during the 1/11 caretaker government.

After the editor of The Daily Star, Mahfuz Anam, confessed in a television interview in 2016 that "I made a mistake by publishing information given by the DGFI without verifying it during the 1/11 caretaker government," a fierce debate and discussion started across the country. Following a defamation case filed by a party official of the prime minister, 83 defamation cases and 16 sedition cases were filed against him across the country. Bdnews24.com published some reports centering on this incident, which many consider to be motivated. They suspect that the aim was to create pressures on Mahfuz Anam and his newspaper. The media outlets of the Basundhara Group also published similar reports against The Daily Star at that time.

In March 2023, Shamsuzzaman Shams, the Savar correspondent of Prothom Alo, was arrested for publishing a picture of a child with a report on price hikes on Independence Day. A case was also filed against the editor. Later, Ekattor TV and Somoy TV broadcast baseless news against Prothom Alo. These two channels were seen taking the side of the ruling Awami League government in various incidents. Even Somoy Television ran propaganda regarding some news from BBC Bangla. Many believe that those news items were uncomfortable for the government. In the past few years, when some media outlets, including Somoy News, criticized the government, other media outlets have published retaliatory news. Several organizations monitoring misinformation have identified Somoy TV as being at the forefront of spreading fake information.

There are many more examples of media owners influencing and determining the content of propaganda to diminish their influence. During protests against the tuition fee hike at Bangladesh Liberal Arts University during the COVID-19 pandemic, two students were arrested. However, Dhaka Tribune and Bangla Tribune, owned by the Gemcon Group, refrained from publishing this news. Kazi Anis Ahmed, the chairman of the Gemcon Group, is a member of the trustee board of that university. This clearly shows intentional interference in their editorial process regarding news publishing. Most media owners do not disclose conflicts of interest regarding news or articles related to their commercial interests, resulting in the taking of undue advantage. This is especially seen in influencing government policy formulation.

The political interests of media owners also influence news content. In the 2024 parliamentary elections, as the owners of several television channels were candidates, they sent many reporters to cover their election campaigns. Despite the obligation to maintain impartiality and balance in election coverage, they disregarded it. Earlier, in the 2018 elections, due to the rivalry between the owners of Jamuna and Independent Television channels, one candidate, using his greater power, had the broadcast of the rival's television channel suspended.

When conflicts arise among business people, they often use the media. Such incidents have recently occurred between **Rangs** and Basundhara. As a result, the media of these two business groups launch propaganda campaigns against each other using their respective media outlets.

Overall, most of the country's media, in one way or another, are serving the interests of owners or taking the government's side, playing a biased and unethical role. The publication of fake and misleading news has increased alarmingly. Many mainstream media outlets regularly and intentionally engage in this unethical work. They use headlines that seem realistic to readers and viewers. In many cases, information is also published after manipulation. To attract more readers and viewers, the media adopts unhealthy tactics, which hurt the journalism profession and erode the media's credibility.

Accountability and Questionable Journalism

The ultimate accountability of the media rests with its audience: readers, viewers, and listeners—the actual consumers of information. The Constitution of Bangladesh and various international instruments recognize freedom of expression and the right to information as fundamental human rights. These rights, along with the freedom of thought and conscience, only truly flourish when individuals have access to accurate information. The media, as a cornerstone of democracy, enables people to access reliable information and, consequently, form informed opinions. A framework of laws and regulations exists to support the media in this vital role, complemented by institutions designed to enforce them. However, these legal and institutional structures often act as regulators rather than facilitators, hindering the media's natural growth. This dynamic risks transforming the media into a largely one-way propaganda tool, susceptible to the whims of the government and private investors. When this happens, the media fail to uphold their responsibilities, and the public is deprived of objective information. However, responsible media are indispensable for fostering democracy and a pluralistic society.

With the advent of new technological innovations and transformations, people now have access to many alternative sources of information beyond traditional or legacy media. However, information from these newer platforms is frequently presented in a fragmented, decontextualised, or distorted manner. The unchecked spread of misinformation, fake news, malicious information, and resulting political, economic, and social instability has become a regular concern. Consequently, journalistic professional responsibility and ethics questions have gained unprecedented importance. To maintain their relevance and survive in this new reality, media outlets must firmly establish themselves as reliable sources of objective, neutral, and responsible information. Ensuring accountability at every stage, from licensing and news distribution to mitigating subsequent impacts, is now crucial for developing a healthy media landscape.

This demands a robust legal framework, the adequate performance of regulatory and supervisory bodies, and the establishment of the media's internal accountability mechanisms. Upholding the constitutional and civil rights to freedom of expression and access to information requires political will emanating from the ruling government, all political parties, and institutions. Additionally, the active and responsible participation of institutions tasked with media oversight, media owners (both corporate and individual), and especially publishers, editors, journalists, media professionals, and related organizations is essential.

Despite constitutional guarantees and many laws and regulations, media freedom, objectivity, and accountability remain elusive in Bangladesh. While several institutions are tasked with media oversight, there's an apparent lack of proper law enforcement and a deficiency in the effectiveness of these bodies. This has led to an uncontrolled proliferation of media outlets. A significant portion of the media has become biased due to investments driven by political and business group interests, subsequently diminishing the overall credibility of the media.

The rapid advancement of information technology has fundamentally altered how people consume and interact with information, already putting traditional news media on the defensive. Adding to this pressure, the direct and indirect influence or interference from various government agencies and owners erodes the professional neutrality of print, electronic, and online news media. Political and business interests increasingly dictate editorial policies. There are also allegations of unwritten pressure from certain government entities, leading to a rise in self-censorship within news organisations.

As a result, readers, viewers, and listeners are deprived of diverse perspectives, the viewpoints of opposing parties, and objective information. Moreover, victims of malicious or false information often find themselves without recourse. In contrast, developed Western democracies have institutionalised freedom of expression and the free flow of information through sustained democratic practice. Their supervisory authorities have successfully fostered media responsibility by rigorously applying media-related policies. Media outlets in these nations now practice self-regulation, individually or collaboratively, and actively strive to correct their mistakes through self-criticism. They've understood their accountability lies with the consumers of information, not the government or ownership. In this digital age, survival is impossible if readers, viewers, and listeners turn away.

Conversely, countries in the process of democratic transition lag in establishing media freedom and accountability. These nations are also taking steps to ensure media freedom and responsibility by reforming media-related laws and enhancing the capabilities of their oversight and support institutions. In Bangladesh, stakeholders also recognise the necessity of such initiatives. This understanding has been particularly reinforced in the wake of the student-public mass movement in July-August 2024, amid accusations of partisan political stances by certain media outlets and their alleged provocative roles during the then-government's repressive actions.

The Press and Publication Act of 1973 is in place for print media. Broadcast media, which has developed over the past few decades, is governed by a multitude of laws and policies, including the National Broadcasting Policy, the Policy for Establishment and Operation of Privately Owned FM Radio Stations, the Policy for Establishment and Operation of Private Television Channels, the Policy for Establishment, Broadcasting and Operation of Community Radios, the National Online Media Policy, the National Telecommunication Policy, the Cable Television Network Operation and Licensing Guideline, and the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulation Act. Additionally, the century-old Wireless Telegraphy Act and Telegraph Act remain in effect.

Under these laws, several institutions are responsible for media registration, circulation verification, spectrum and frequency allocation, and overall oversight. Their primary role is to monitor compliance with registration and approval conditions, ensuring media organizations' accountability. The Department of Films and Publications (DFP) plays a significant role in this process for newspapers. This responsibility is supposed to fall to the Broadcasting Commission for television, radio, and online media. However, the government failed to establish the Broadcasting Commission for several decades, leading to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting exercising these powers. As commercial entities, media organizations must register

with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms (RJSC) and submit annual audit reports of their income and expenditure. Yet, most of these organizations fail to comply, and despite having the legal authority, the RJSC takes no action against them.

20.1 The way journalism became questionable

The widespread corruption in Bangladesh's economy, the competition for looting state money and resources, and the way the mafia system has gripped the economy have cast a dark shadow over the media as well. Black money has infiltrated the media, taking advantage of opportunities for flattering the powerful and patronage. Instead of promoting the free flow of information and healthy democratic debate with multiple perspectives in the public interest, the media has become a tool for protecting the interests of individuals, families, groups, and political parties.

In a democratic system, questioning power is one of the primary responsibilities of journalism. But in Bangladesh, journalists have almost lost that moral courage. Flattering or appeasing the powerful, dismissing dissenting opinions, and tarnishing opponents seem to have become the main work of the media. The press conferences of the ousted Prime Minister are a symbol of this cruel reality. These editors and journalists of equal status were not only eager to project themselves as subservient to the government, but they had also become accustomed to receiving various kinds of favors from the government. As a result, the ethics and morality of the profession have been largely banished.

Just as government or state pressure to suppress the media reached an unprecedented level, allied business people and sycophants also became collaborators. Many enthusiastically collaborated in the rise of fascism; many indirectly encouraged it. And the rest surrendered to fear. Various state institutions, all military and civilian security agencies, party muscle power, and criminal groups enjoying political patronage were used to suppress freedom of expression. Unfortunately, the judiciary also failed to provide legal protection; in some cases, it collaborated with the government. The contraction of freedom of expression has become an obstacle to revealing the truth and has called into question the credibility of the media and the dignity of the journalism profession. Added to this is the political division and disunity within the journalistic community. On the one hand, the media have become accustomed to self-censorship due to the fear of harassment from the government. On the other hand, they have been forced to compromise due to the owners' business interests or the media organizations' financial crisis.

Over the past two decades, the media sector in Bangladesh has undergone unprecedented changes. Alongside technological development, the number of media outlets has also increased uncontrollably. Large commercial companies have invested in this sector. However, due to a lack of necessary skills and qualifications, the ethical development of journalism has not occurred; instead, there has been an alarming decline. Sufficient training has not been provided to meet the shortage of skilled workforce, and journalists and media workers have been hired without adequate educational qualifications. Many organizations have taken advantage of the high unemployment rate in the country to hire media workers at nominal wages, and in some cases, even without wages, which has contributed to the spread of corruption and failed to produce the required number of skilled news professionals. Besides journalism, there is a deficiency in creating attractive and quality creative program producers for the media.

The Awami League government has permitted 46 television channels, 28 radio stations, and hundreds of newspapers and online portals to demonstrate media plurality simply by number. In granting permission for television channels, the broadcast policy or the policy for the establishment and operation of privately owned television channels was not followed. In this case, party identity and unconditional loyalty to the ruling party were the sole considerations. Upon reviewing the objectives and goals mentioned in the application forms of the approved television channels, it is seen that their mission statement has been presented as simply being devoted workers of the Awami League, promoting the ideals of the Awami League, and the development activities of the Awami League government.

It's not just political leaders (Members of Parliament) who have used their party identity to obtain licenses in their names or the names of their dependents; several leading journalists and businesspeople have also received private TV channel licenses by leveraging political identity and influence. Despite not having the financial capacity, these journalists obtained licenses, found investors, and became owners of assets worth hundreds of crores of taka without any investment. Some business groups have become accustomed to using media influence to cover up crimes such as looting state resources through intentional loan default, forming cartels out of greed for unethical, excessive profits, or establishing monopolistic business control in the market, land grabbing, and money laundering.

It is even seen that some industrial groups use the name and logo of their owned media organizations on their vehicles to gain unfair advantages from traffic police when transporting factory goods. There are also allegations of using journalists to lobby the administration for crimes like river grabbing, land grabbing, allocation of *khas* land, or manipulation of fake documents. Among the observations the commission received from the Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO), the association of private television channel owners was that pressure from 'business syndicates' are the number one reasons cited for hindering editorial independence.

Many business people against whom there are allegations of unethical and criminal activities in their businesses have acquired permission and control of newspapers and television channels by using journalists as a shield. Primarily, they adopt this strategy because the law prohibits the transfer of newspaper declarations or television licenses. Again, many journalists have been given licenses based on their loyalty to the ruling party, even though they are not supposed to have the financial capacity to obtain such licenses. As a result, in some cases, they have turned to investors who face various allegations of financial irregularities and criminal activities. The dominance of capital acquired through dishonest means has reached such a level in the media that many are forced to sacrifice editorial independence, mudslinging against rivals for business interests, and broadcast praise for powerful politicians or state officials.

Influential capitalists own most media organisations in Bangladesh. Although many face allegations of land grabbing, bank looting, or forming market syndicates, their wives, brothers, or family members are directly involved in politics. As a result, an unhealthy cycle has been created where business, politics, and the media world are intertwined, making independent journalism almost impossible.

A Deputy Commissioner, frustrated by the pressure from certain unethical business groups to obtain unfair advantages at various times, informed the Media Reform Commission that permission or licenses for media should be stopped for such dishonest business groups. The commission received many complaints during its exchange of views with stakeholders that although journalists and media employees (technicians, technologists, general staff, or press employees) were hired at high salaries for the launch of new newspapers, TV channels, or online portals with considerable fanfare, within a short period, their salaries and allowances were reduced, they were laid off, or even the institutions were shut down. This happens because the other business or political advantages intended by leveraging media influence have already been achieved, or there is no prospect of achieving them. As a result, widespread unemployment has been created in the media, leading to job uncertainty or insecurity. Due to the government's inactivity or reluctance to enforce existing labor laws and other laws and policies regarding recruitment and salaries, a kind of uncertainty and frustration has been created among journalists and other workers in the media.

The commission has received numerous complaints from field-level publishers, editors, journalists, teachers, and administration officials that several media organizations appoint correspondents in districts and sub-districts simply by issuing identity cards, who do not receive any salary or allowance. They are forced to collect money for the appointing organization by collecting advertisements or disseminating news, and must pay a regular amount. Allegations have even been received of collecting lakhs of taka separately for appointment letters or identity cards. As these field-level journalists lack financial security and job certainty, they become involved in various irregularities and corruption.

In some cases, the same correspondent works for three to four media outlets simultaneously, which, on the one hand, negatively impacts their professional field and deprives readers and viewers of diversity. This severely undermines journalistic ethics and the profession's dignity, eroding the credibility and trust in the media. In many cases, a journalist has to simultaneously perform the additional responsibility of collecting advertisements and increasing newspaper circulation, which questions the profession's integrity.

Given the unprecedented expansion of the media in the interest of individuals, families, and groups' political and economic interests instead of the public interest, there is a severe shortage of a skilled workforce in the country that can keep pace with this growth. Although journalism, media, and mass communication are taught in various curricula at universities in the country, the commission does not have any survey or research data indicating whether it is consistent with the actual demand of the media industry. Outside universities, only two or three government institutions provide training on journalism and media technology and various technical aspects, which is very insufficient compared to the need. Media organizations also generally do not have their own in-house training arrangements. Consequently, discussions with stakeholders make it clear that a severe lack of knowledge and skills in journalism and creating creative programs or content is felt in the country's media. The large number of media outlets has also created unhealthy competition.

Journalistic ethics are often neglected in the rush to provide breaking news or generate reports and discussions around topics that go viral on social media. The lack of training, skill, and

experience is also primarily responsible. Several unacceptable errors in providing breaking news can be mentioned here.

To establish absolute political control over the media and at the same time create a facade of democracy and plurality, the former autocratic government granted a vast number of licenses or permits for the establishment and operation of media outlets to party loyalists and sycophants, which has created an anarchic situation in this industry. While a few business groups have tried to establish monopolistic control in various ways and tactics, small or weak institutions have created a negative situation in the market by offering abnormal discounts on private advertisements to survive. At the same time, these institutions have become dependent on the government in various ways for government advertisements and supplements. However, despite adopting these strategies, their revenue has not increased significantly, and incidents such as layoffs, salary cuts, or irregular employee payments are occurring in these institutions. This opaque and weak business model is gradually narrowing the scope of independent and objective journalism.

Over the past few decades, political division and conflicts of interest have become prominent among journalists. Journalists' rights organizations, unions, have been divided, resulting in the formation of splintered organizations like the Reporters' Unity, a separate organization for reporters, the Sub-Editors' Council, an organization for sub-editors, and an organization for columnists. Subsequently, various beat-based associations were formed, and later those beat-based organizations also became divided. Press clubs, intended as recreational and social gatherings for journalists, have similarly become a cause of disunity. Outside Dhaka, in districts and sub-districts, it has even been observed that four press clubs have been established in a single upazila.

In many cases, the identity of a press club creates opportunities for extraordinary influence and status. In some cases, after obtaining government property allocated in the name of a press club, various commercial establishments or income-generating facilities have been created, leading to conflicts of interest and leadership struggles. Accepting money or patronage from collaborators of the fallen autocrat and corrupt business people for building construction, awarding journalists, and undertaking various activities has not only failed to enhance the professional standing of journalists but has also tarnished it. Unfortunately, these activities are causing serious harm to the protection of journalists' professional rights and dignity instead of safeguarding them. In many places, politicians and bureaucrats are taking advantage of these conflicts to assume the chairmanship of these institutions, negatively impacting journalism.

In almost all exchange meetings at the field level, journalists have expressed concern regarding this matter. Administration officials have also raised allegations of unethical demands for favors and lobbying by press clubs and various identity-holding (such as beat-based) journalist organizations. Press clubs are supposed to be managed or overseen primarily as social associations under the Department of Social Services or the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies under the Companies Act. However, the administration considers press clubs the central representative institutions of journalists. This confusion also negatively impacts professional work.

20.2 News Presentation Style and the Mental Health of Readers and Viewers

Across the world, the style of news presentation and the mental health of news readers, listeners, and viewers have become a cause for concern. Just as a good picture can make a reader feel good, a painful picture can also cause prolonged mental distress for a person. Currently, how mainstream media outlets (newspapers, television, online, multimedia) compete with social media and present headlines, pictures, information, and videos on social media often harms the mental health of viewers, listeners, or readers. This issue has been seriously highlighted in academic research in various countries. But unfortunately, most media outlets are avoiding the problem of the news recipient's mental health.

Regardless of the socio-economic and political situation in the country, media outlets must remember that they have different types of readers, listeners, or viewers, each of whom may have different needs. Various studies show that continuous harmful or sensitive news can create mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and even Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among readers, listeners, and viewers.

Research shows that negative news, such as reports of violence, disasters, unchecked increases in market prices, mass layoffs, and political instability, is increasing the levels of mental stress and anxiety among people. As social media has become a significant source of news consumption, it continues to put additional pressure on mental health.

Observing the online versions of Bangladeshi media outlets, it is seen that whatever topic is discussed more on social media in the country at any given time, newsrooms continuously broadcast that topic throughout the day; this has a detrimental effect on the mental health of many. For example, if the country has a political conflict, only the news is continuously broadcast. When a specific type of crime occurs more frequently in the country, news of that type of crime is published more often. The type of headlines, images, information, and videos used to attract the attention of readers and viewers frequently violates the editorial policies of their respective newsrooms. In these cases, the mental health of sick, elderly citizens, children, and adolescents is often not taken into consideration.

The Commission's Recommendations

Media Ownership

The issue of media ownership has become critical in various countries worldwide, and reforms have begun regarding media concentration through single ownership and the acquisition of multiple media outlets. Decisions to approve or reject new projects or applications of media organizations are made based on the percentage of viewers or readers who are consumers of a particular media outlet. The commission, led by Aatur Rahman Khan, mentioned the necessity of broadening ownership (diffusion of ownership) instead of single ownership in its report.

In Indonesia, any citizen has the right to launch a media outlet; however, that media must operate as a corporation, meaning it will be a public limited company where ordinary people can also hold shares. At the same time, the country's Media Act has imposed the obligation to provide shares to journalists and employees. Most large media companies in developed countries are also listed on the stock market. Due to stock market listing, the entrepreneurs or managers of a company have to be accountable to the shareholders at least.

The matter of people's trust or faith is intrinsically linked to information. The credibility of information is comparable to public deposits. However, while listing banks and financial institutions on the stock market is mandatory considering bank deposits as public deposits, the same has not been done for media organizations in our country. In the banking sector, no individual, institution, company, or members of the same family as entrepreneurial directors can hold more than 10 percent shares as a family, and there can be no more than three directors from the same family on the company's board simultaneously. But there is no such obligation in media institutions. Therefore, change is needed in this regard.

21.1 The commission deems it appropriate to set a deadline for medium and large media companies to release shares to the public and be listed on the stock exchange in the first phase. It is necessary to limit the shareholding of entrepreneurial directors, individuals, institutions, companies, or members of the same family to within 25 percent and to make distributing shares among the institution's employees mandatory. The maximum limit for employees' shareholding must be restricted to five percent so that entrepreneurs cannot establish complete control over the institution's operation in conjunction with employees.

2. Showing shares to small media company employees can be made mandatory.

3. To prevent the same company/group/person/family/entrepreneur from owning multiple media outlets simultaneously, cross-ownership (a television owner cannot be a newspaper owner, or a newspaper owner cannot be a television channel owner) has been prohibited in many countries around the world. It has even been banned by law in the United States. In Britain, a television owner cannot hold more than 20 percent shares in a local newspaper under a similar law. A bill of this kind is awaiting debate in the Indian Parliament. In our country, a decision and notification were issued when granting permission for private sector television channels, as

stated in the written statement submitted to the Media Reform Commission by the then State Minister for Information, Professor Abu Sayeed. However, that notification could not be found in the ministry. Governments have not followed that policy.

4. The global best practice is to prevent media concentration. The commission believes that we must adopt similar steps soon. An ordinance can be issued prohibiting cross-ownership, and for cases where it exists, a specific deadline for making changes should be set, to restructure their businesses as defined. This can happen in various ways.

Companies/groups/institutions/individuals/families that own television and newspapers can sell the ownership of one medium, keeping the other. Alternatively, they can merge the journalists, officers, and employees of two media (television and newspaper) to operate a more powerful and larger media outlet (a television channel or a daily newspaper).

5. The system that disrupts the environment of fair, transparent, and healthy competition in the media needs to be abolished. Owning multiple daily newspapers or television channels in the same language under a single ownership harms the competitive environment. At the same time, it centralizes the influence of the media for self-interest. For this reason, this system needs to be abolished. A swift solution to this existing system must be found. Just as marketing the same soap in multiple packages disrupts market competition, having various daily newspapers in the same language under the same ownership disrupts media competition, and readers are harmed. The same applies to television. Implementing the "one entrepreneur, one media (One House, One Media)" policy is the best way to prevent concentration in the media.

6. Measures are needed to ensure transparency in media ownership so that people can make informed choices based on their knowledge. Furthermore, this will discourage the infiltration of black money into the media. Media organizations must make their financial accounts public every year to ensure the transparency of their income.

7. Journalists' unions, associations, or societies are independent in conducting their activities. However, numerous journalists' organizations have been formed for various reasons and purposes, in addition to journalists' unions. Multiple press clubs have been established in the same district or upazila. Similarly, division and area-based journalist associations have been established. There are also allegations that some organisations are engaged in flattering power to gain patronage and financial benefits from politicians. The situation created by this background is unpleasant for journalism and a significant obstacle to independent journalism. Therefore, the government or any other institution has the right not to recognize organizations other than unions as representative bodies of journalists. Consequently, these associations or societies are not entitled to any state benefits. The commission expresses hope that editorial institutions can also play an effective role.

8. The advance tax levied on the honorariums of media columnists, contributors, artists, and guest presenters/discussants is equivalent to taxing creativity. This advance tax should be abolished.

21.2 Bangladesh National Media Commission

(Instead of the Press Council and the proposed Broadcasting Commission)

The suggestion to bring all types of media under the purview of a single oversight or regulatory institution has emerged from most exchange meetings. The Bangladesh National Media Commission can be formed by combining the currently active Bangladesh Press Council for newspapers and news agencies, and the Broadcast Commission proposed by the previous government for broadcast media and online platforms. This institution must be established as an independent body, free from government control. This institution needs to be built based on the experience of methods and institutions playing an effective role in media self-regulation in various countries worldwide.

For it to work independently, the institution must be financially self-reliant. Relying on government funds means being influenced by the government in one way or another. Therefore, the expenses of this institution can be met by determining a fixed contribution rate from the income of media organizations. The Press Council of India collects a proportional levy from each newspaper. They also accept government grants. The Media Council also receives government assistance in Indonesia, but it must be unconditional. In Bangladesh, there should be an opportunity for the proposed National Media Commission to receive government assistance, but it must be an unconditional grant.

The responsibilities that the Bangladesh National Media Commission will perform as a media regulatory body include:

- a. Determining the qualifications and disqualifications of publishers and editors so that those convicted of criminal offenses and loan defaulters cannot be media owners/editors.
- b. Determining minimum educational qualifications for journalism.
- c. Journalists nationwide will be registered with the National Media Commission, and the commission will maintain a database of them.
- d. Formulating a code of conduct for journalists and ensuring its compliance.
- e. Recommending the issuance of licenses for broadcast media (TV and radio) and online portals, and ensuring compliance with their conditions.
- f. Redressal of complaints from individuals, institutions, or groups affected by false or motivated news. If this is possible, a significant advancement will be achieved in establishing the institutional accountability of the media, and the media will be able to earn people's trust.

(A draft law for establishing the proposed National Media Commission is attached at the end of the report.)

21.3 Journalism Protection Act

The Media Reform Commission has attached a draft ordinance for a Journalism Protection Act to this report, based on a few examples of best practices worldwide. It proposes taking steps to issue it quickly. Furthermore, it deems the following steps appropriate regarding the incidents of misuse of various laws over the past 15 years:

- a. Cases filed against journalists under various applicable laws, including the Penal Code, Information and Communication Technology Act, Digital Security Act, Cyber Security Act, and Contempt of Court Act, must be identified and reviewed. Based on the information obtained after the review, the concerned government prosecutor must take appropriate steps to withdraw the cases or have the police submit the final report.
- b. If evidence of false cases is found upon review, legal and just action must be taken against the concerned authorities.
- c. Arrangements must be made to compensate affected journalists and their families.
- d. Affected media organisations must be provided with reasonable compensation.
- e. Incidents of illegal intrusion, surveillance, and eavesdropping into journalists' communications and lives must be investigated, and arrangements must be made to punish the culprits.

21.4 Law Reform for Freedom of Journalism

An amendment to Article 39 of the Constitution is necessary so that reasonable restrictions on the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press regarding national security issues and relations with foreign states apply only in a state of war.

Several countries worldwide have separate and specific provisions regarding the freedom of journalism in their constitutions. For example, the Constitution of Switzerland has ensured the right of journalists to express themselves freely, protect the confidentiality of sources, and not violate the personal privacy of journalists. The Constitution of Sweden also provides a similar guarantee of freedom of the press. In our constitution, too, it is appropriate to specifically include the question of the guarantee of journalistic independence, identical to the Constitution of Switzerland.

21.4.1 Criminal Defamation

All laws related to criminal defamation, such as Sections 499, 500, 501, and 502 of the Bangladesh Penal Code of 1860, and Section 29 of the Cyber Security Act of 2023, should be repealed. Along with that, a system can be introduced to entrust the regulatory body, the proposed Media Commission, with offenses related to defamation involving journalists.

The power given to the government to forfeit newspapers under Sections 99A and 99B of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, is contrary to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Therefore, it should be repealed.

21.4.2 Cyber Security Act

The concerns raised by journalists, human rights activists, legal experts, and stakeholders regarding the provisions of the proposed Cyber Security Act must be addressed.

21.4.3 Official Secrets Act, 1923

Section 5 should be amended to emphasize only national security, and a provision for legal protection in the public interest should be added for investigative journalism.

21.4.4 Contempt of Court Act

a. The Contempt of Court Act of 1926 should be reconsidered to protect the right to justice and the presumption of innocence under Article 14 of international human rights law (ICCPR).

b. The government should take steps for the swift hearing of Civil Appeal No. 1234 of 2023, which is pending in the Appellate Division against the High Court's ruling that repealed the Contempt of Court Act of 2013 (which had repealed the Contempt of Court Act of 1926 and reintroduced the offense of 'undermining the image of the court').

21.4.5 Laws Related to Hateful Speech

Sections 295A and 298 of the Penal Code and Section 28 of the Cyber Security Act should be repealed.

21.4.6 Right to Information Act, 2009

Section 7 of the Right to Information Act should be amended to align with international standards and the provisions described in Articles 14, 19, and 20 of the ICCPR, so that the disclosure of information does not prejudice the administration of justice, national security, or the right to privacy of any person. However, if the disclosure of information is essential in the public interest, there should be a provision for an 'Exception' to overcome these barriers.

A provision should be added to the Right to Information Act to allow applications for information to private companies, organizations/and NGOs when disclosure is necessary in the public interest.

Section 6 of the Right to Information Act should include a new provision. According to this provision, the Information Commission will monitor the information disclosure of each government authority and provide a written opinion on how successful each authority has been in its information disclosure. Additionally, the Information Commission will create an open Central Database of all information published in response to applications made under the Right to

Information Act, so that the public can access this information in the future without making separate applications.

21.4.7 Blocking or Removal of Information/Data

Sections 66A and 97A of the BTRC Act (which refer to unnamed security agencies and BTRC), Section 46 of the Information and Communication Technology Act, and Section 8 of the Cyber Security Act should be amended to prohibit decisions to remove content without the approval of an appropriate court.

21.4.8 National Broadcast Policy 2014

It is necessary to clearly define these adjectives and restrictions, such as content that 'distorts the historical dignity of the country' and is 'not consistent with law, culture, and tradition'. These restrictions should be reconsidered to ensure that broadcasting is restricted only for permissible reasons according to international human rights law (ICCPR).

21.4.9 Online Media Policy 2017

This policy should be reconsidered to protect media autonomy, and the responsibility and authority for its oversight and an effective self-regulation mechanism should be entrusted to the proposed permanent Media Commission.

21.5 Recommendations Regarding Private Television

21.5.1 Upon reviewing the applications for licenses of privately owned television channels, the no-objection certificates from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and the license holders' undertakings, it is evident that no open and transparent competitive method was followed in granting these licenses. Furthermore, no specific prerequisite qualifications for the license recipients were stipulated. These licenses were primarily granted based on political considerations and to some extent on business familiarity. The government's 'Policy for the Establishment and Operation of Privately Owned Television Channels' in section 2.6 mentions granting licenses for an initial period of five years and subsequently renewing them after reviewing their proper operation. In this context, all licenses granted in the last one and a half decades warrant review.

Since the Broadcast Policy mentions forming a Broadcast Commission, the responsibility for recommending broadcast licenses lies with the Broadcast Commission. Since the Media Reform Commission has recommended the formation of a permanent National Media Commission by combining the duties and powers of the existing Press Council and the proposed Broadcast Commission for all media matters, i.e., newspapers, television, radio, and online, the Media Commission will undertake the responsibility of reviewing the licenses of private TV channels.

2. A system for determining acceptable and logical Television Rating Points (TRP) must be established quickly. Accountability must be ensured for those responsible for irregularities in the

current TRP system. If media outlets disseminate false TRP and seek compensation, their claims must be considered.

3. Three representatives, one each from ATCO, anti-corruption organizations, and advertising agencies, must be included in the TRP monitoring activities. If any private entity wishes to undertake the TRP determination process, it must be open to them. The National Media Commission will oversee whether their TRP system is appropriate.

4. A fee must be paid for broadcasting any government announcement or advertisement on television.

5. The government should give cable operators a one-year deadline to digitize so that television channels can earn revenue.

6. Until cable operators become digitalized, 25 percent of the money collected from cable subscribers should be distributed equally among the channels operating in the country every month.

7. The mandatory use of Bangladesh Satellite Company Limited (BSCL) for uplink and downlink must be removed. This is because no channel can broadcast internationally through this BSCL.

21.6 Recommendations for FM Radio

1. FM radio broadcasting appears to be facing an existential crisis due to declining listeners and a dramatic drop in advertising revenue. However, the importance of radio has not yet ended. Some unreasonable restrictions on FM radio licensing should be removed. For example, the security deposit kept by the government against the license should be refunded, and the provision for keeping a security deposit should be abolished.

2. The annual renewal system for FM radio should be abolished.

3. The oversight system of Bangladesh Betar on FM radio should be ended. However, the proposed National Media Commission can oversee broadcasting quality and compliance with the policy or code of ethics.

4. If government announcements are to be broadcast on FM radio, they should pay a determined fee.

5. Arrangements should also be made to allocate government advertisements to FM radio.

21.7 Recommendations for Online Portals

While online portals encourage individual initiatives, small and medium-sized enterprises, and large institutions to launch news-based portals, their uncontrolled and chaotic development or expansion is also occurring. This unchecked proliferation is, in many cases, leading to yellow

journalism, unethical blackmailing, harassment of citizens, and violation of the right to privacy, simultaneously creating harsh conditions for honest and objective journalism. The previous government's online policy failed to establish effective discipline. Therefore, this policy needs to be reviewed and made realistic and functional. There is a High Court directive to shut down unregistered portals, but it has not been implemented fully.

For this reason, specific criteria for determining when an online portal will be recognised as a media outlet are necessary. Unless the required editorial qualifications and skills for media are specified at the same level as a daily newspaper or broadcast medium, and a similar investment capacity is stipulated, this chaos will continue. In the previous government's online policy, the responsibility for setting these conditions was supposed to be entrusted to the proposed Broadcast Commission. But instead of forming the Broadcast Commission, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has granted registrations according to its whim, where political considerations have predominated.

1. Since the responsibility and authority for updating the policy for online portal registration and granting registration accordingly were vested in the proposed Broadcast Commission of the previous government, it is appropriate to entrust this to the proposed National Media Commission.
2. Since the online registrations granted in the last decade were not done under any transparent and specific policy, but rather through the arbitrary exercise of government power, they need to be reviewed. It is appropriate to vest the responsibility for this review in the independent Media Commission.
3. The system of investigation by multiple security agencies for online portal registration must be abolished. In this case, the existing police investigation system for newspaper declarations can be considered sufficient.
4. The annual renewal system for online portals after registration should be abolished.
5. The prohibition in the Online Policy that news bulletins cannot be broadcast on IPTV and online portals should be lifted.
6. Arrangements for government advertisements for online portals must be made based on specific policies with transparency and fairness.
7. The trade license fee for online portals is several times the standard trade license fee. This is a policy to discourage the media. It should be abolished.

21.8 Recommendations Regarding BTV, Betar, and BSS

The national consensus that has existed for the past three and a half decades regarding the autonomy of Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar has been discussed earlier. BBC and Deutsche Welle are examples of the optimal use of resources, skills, and creativity when television and radio function as two branches of a single integrated institution under one roof as broadcast media. This works most effectively in the case of news and current affairs programs.

Separating the audio format of reports/programs recorded in video format is not very difficult. Conversely, many radio programs are now video-streamed for social media broadcasts. Dhaka and the regional centers of Bangladesh Betar are doing this regularly. In this reality, institutionalizing cooperation (collaboration) between Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar is now in demand. However, it is necessary to mention here that the newsrooms of both BTV and Betar are not at all familiar with professional journalism; instead, they are entirely accustomed to broadcasting government handouts, news of state rituals, and development messages. Government information (broadcasting) officers primarily lead the news departments, and those hired as reporters have no opportunity to work independently.

In contrast, the state news agency, Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS), has a professional newsroom despite various flaws and weaknesses. However, due to government control and politicization, the agency has not been able to become an ideal news agency to date. The first Press Commission's report opined that the government should not own a news agency. Many countries around the world do not have a state news agency. Even 40 years since that first Press Commission report, no positive change has been brought about in the institution; instead, it has become a rehabilitation center for journalists loyal only to the party in power. In the global arena, news agencies are no longer traditional. They are focusing more on video journalism and humanitarian aspects of situations like wars and natural disasters. A video journalism project is also being implemented in BSS.

1. In this reality, the commission believes that merging BSS into the news division of the proposed new combined institution of BTV and Betar would be the optimal use of state resources, rather than keeping it as an independent institution. News generated by this central newsroom will be broadcast on BTV and Bangladesh Betar. The new unified institution combining BTV, Betar, and BSS can be named the Bangladesh Broadcasting Agency or the National Broadcasting Agency. This new institution will have three divisions: Television, Radio, and News Division. The News Division in the new broadcasting agency will continue to provide services to its current clients. There will be a Director as the head of each division, and the head of the new integrated broadcasting agency will be a Director General. The government will appoint the Director General; however, s/he will be accountable to the Governing Board.

2. The government will fund this new institution as it is currently funding. At the same time, the Bangladesh Broadcasting Agency will also find its own sources of income. The government may consider reintroducing an annual television set license fee.

3. An independent Governing Board will operate it. The Chairman will be full-time, and the board will determine their salary and allowances. Members will receive honoraria for participating in meetings. This Governing Board will be accountable to the National Parliament and shall submit an annual report to the parliamentary standing committee on the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

4. Composition of the Bangladesh Broadcasting Agency Governing Board: The Governing Board will have nine members. They will include:

- One with extensive experience in broadcast media management/leadership;
- One with extensive experience in journalism.
- One leading figure in the world of arts, literature, and culture.
- One academic.
- One representative from civil society.
- One economist.
- One representative from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting with the rank of Secretary/Additional Secretary.
- One representative from the Ministry of Finance with the rank of Secretary/Additional Secretary.
- The Director General of the Bangladesh Broadcasting Agency will serve as the member secretary of this board.
- Among the members, at least one will be a woman and one from a minority community.
- These members will elect the Chairperson/President of the Governing Board from among themselves.
- Ministry representatives and the agency's Director General will be ineligible for election to the Chairman position.
- This Governing Board will determine the editorial policy. The board will hold financial and administrative powers.
- Members of the Governing Board will be nominated for three years. However, no one can serve in their position for more than two terms.

5. There will be a three-member selection committee for nominations to the Governing Board. An editor of a national newspaper, the chief executive of a private television channel, and an academic will be members of this selection committee. This committee will propose the names of 18 members against the six members of the Governing Board. The government will nominate six members for the Governing Board from that proposal.

6. The Governing Board will formulate the recruitment rules and policies for the new entity.

7. Among the current workforce in Radio and BTV, if anyone does not wish to stay in the autonomous institution, they will be absorbed into other government institutions. Those who remain in service in the unified broadcasting agency will retain all the benefits of government service unchanged. If anyone voluntarily seeks termination of service, they will receive all dues according to the rules.

8. Urgent actions required from the government for the implementation of the recommendation for the formation of the new unified broadcasting agency:

- a. Drafting and issuing an ordinance for the new unified broadcasting agency;
- b. Forming a selection committee for the formation of the broadcasting agency's Governing Board;

- c. Forming the independent Governing Board of the new unified entity based on the recommendations of the selection committee;
- d. allowing the officers and employees of Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar to continue their service under the new autonomous entity or be absorbed into any other government department;
- e. Arranging a one-time special allocation for the modernization of the infrastructure of the new unified broadcasting agency.

21.9 Alternative Proposal Regarding BSS

The commission has, however, also seriously considered an alternative proposal received regarding the Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha. That proposal also suggests that BSS should operate with its income and be free from government control. Commission member Syed Abdal Ahmed has specifically suggested including this proposal for restructuring BSS, following the model of the Press Trust of India (PTI), separately in the recommendations.

1. A Trustee Board will be formed comprising representatives of media owners (NOAB & ATCO) and editors, representatives of the government (maximum two), a representative of the Press Institute Bangladesh (PIB), and a media expert, from among whom the Trustees will elect a Chairman. The term of the Trustees and the Chairman must be set between three and four years, and no one shall be eligible for a second consecutive term. They will be eligible for re-election after a break of one term. The government will transfer all or part of the current assets of BSS to the Trust. This Trust will submit an annual report related to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to the parliamentary standing committee.

2. The Trust will determine the Editor and Managing Director qualifications and fill the positions, subject to fulfilling those conditions. The Editor and Managing Director will be accountable to the Trust.

3. The Trust will quickly formulate recruitment rules and verify the appointments of the current workforce based on those rules. Those who do not meet the qualification requirements will be given an opportunity for training and have to retake the qualification test. If someone fails to meet the qualification requirements a second time, the government will absorb them into another job. For those not interested in alternative employment, their service will be terminated after paying all dues according to existing law.

21.10 Recommendations for the Newspaper Industry

There is no doubt that the crisis in the newspaper industry is increasing. However, much of this is due to destroying the environment of healthy and transparent competition. The numerous opportunistic, irregular, and nominal publications are the main reason for destroying this competitive environment. If the declared circulation figures of daily newspapers audited by the Department of Films and Publications are to be believed, then every infant in Dhaka city would have to buy a daily newspaper every day. Eligibility for government advertisements is determined based on an unrealistic calculation of more than 1 crore 53 lakh copies of Bengali newspapers being distributed in Dhaka daily. According to the same calculation, 6 lakh 80

thousand daily English newspapers are sold in Dhaka. As a result, genuinely promising newspapers are being harmed. This needs to end.

1. It is urgent to reform the auditing of newspaper circulation figures. There is corruption in the current system. The conditions for being listed in the media list include a minimum circulation number. For example, for newspapers published from Dhaka, Chittagong, and Sylhet divisional cities, it is 6000, from other divisional towns it is 4000, and from other cities it is 3000. This should be the number of *sold* copies, not the circulation number, which will be subject to verification of paid bills. Newspapers will be media-listed if they have three thousand sold copies in a divisional city outside Dhaka and one thousand in a district city.

2. For newspapers published from Dhaka to be media-listed, the number is the same for Bengali and English newspapers. However, in reality, the readership of English newspapers is minimal compared to Bengali newspapers. However, English newspapers promote English among the country's youth and foreigners. Additionally, the production cost of English newspapers is higher due to the lack of a skilled workforce. Therefore, it would be reasonable for English newspapers to set the number of sold copies at two thousand in Dhaka, Chittagong, and Sylhet divisional cities. It can also be reduced proportionally in other cities.

3. To ensure transparency in newspaper sales figures, it is mandatory to provide receipts for collecting newspaper sales bills when certifying the number of newspaper sales. Additionally, submitting a copy of the income tax return on the newspaper's revenue is mandatory.

4. In the system for verifying newspaper circulation figures through the Audit Bureau of Circulation, which includes inspecting presses and offices, it is necessary to include representatives from civil society. Therefore, at least three representatives from civil society must be included in these inspections. These three representatives will be nominated from among representatives of the media, educational institutions, the legal profession, and advertising agency associations. None of these representatives can serve for more than two or three years, and the government will determine their honorarium.

5. Newspaper advertisement rates have not increased in the last 10 years. The rates must be increased, and the advertisement rates should be increased annually in line with market inflation. The separate classification system for determining advertisement rates must be reviewed and adjusted proportionally.

6. The rate for government advertisements is negligible compared to the rate for private advertisements. To reduce this disparity, the rate for government advertisements needs to be market-based.

7. Adequate advertising is needed for regional and local newspapers. Advertisements containing information relevant to the local community/population must be given priority in regional/local newspapers.

8. A kind of unannounced tax has been imposed on newspapers in the name of advance income tax, because the advance income tax is not adjusted with the payable tax each year. It is appropriate to cancel all types of advance tax imposed on the newspaper industry.

9. The high corporate tax rate (27.5 percent) imposed on the newspaper industry is pushing this industry towards disaster. This corporate tax rate is the highest among industrial sectors. In the ready-made garment industry, this rate is 15 percent. Reviewing the audited accounts of various newspapers shows that even if the institution makes a small profit before tax, it incurs significant losses after paying tax. If the high corporate tax rate and the practice of collecting advance tax continue, many established newspapers will close within the next few years. This is a significant obstacle to developing a strong media and should be removed soon. However, this will be subject to the fulfillment of ownership and other conditions.

10. The abolition of import duty on newsprint for the newspaper industry should be considered.

11. Prompt payment of advertisement dues by the government and autonomous agencies to newspapers is necessary.

12. In determining government advertisement rates for English newspapers, circulation figures are not comparable to those of Bengali newspapers. Therefore, it is necessary to rationalize the maximum and minimum advertisement rates for English newspapers.

13. Arrangements must be made for loans for the media industry on easy terms with minimum interest.

14. To encourage initiatives for establishing non-profit media in the public interest, incentives can be provided by granting all kinds of tax exemptions. However, it is a condition that any profit earned by such institutions must be mandatorily reinvested.

21.11 Recommendations Regarding Advertising Standards and Transparency, Fairness, and Competition in Advertisement Distribution

While advertisers are increasingly moving towards the so-called new media due to the advent and popularity of social media and other online platforms, traditional or legacy media expansion is still ongoing in Bangladesh. As a result, the competition for obtaining advertisements has reached an unhealthy level. Advertisers naturally benefit from the competition by lowering prices. Furthermore, there are allegations of collusion among advertising agencies in this crisis. Transparency and fairness are lacking in the competition. Based on stakeholders' opinions, the commission believes:

a. An oversight institution, the Advertising Standards Authority, needs to be established soon to ensure the standard of advertisements, transparency, and fairness in competition.

b. This institution will be an autonomous and statutory body.

c. This institution will create advertising policies consistent with international norms and various laws, which will be mandatory for advertisers, agencies, and the media outlets that publish and broadcast advertisements.

d. This authority will also formulate transparent policies and codes of conduct for PR agencies and media buying, and ensure compliance.

e. The representation of the organization of advertising agencies, the Advertising Agencies Association of Bangladesh, must be ensured in the system for determining television ratings (TRP) and the inspection system for verifying newspaper circulation figures. The commission has made separate recommendations regarding this.

f. It would also be appropriate to investigate whether any collusion and strategies contrary to fair competition are practiced in the advertising industry. The Competition Commission can take the initiative in this regard.

21.12 Recommendations Regarding Financial Security and Labor Laws for Journalists

Against the backdrop of many media outlets and increasing educated unemployment in the country, salaries and allowances in journalism are continuously decreasing or becoming uncertain. The trend of contractual appointments is rising, where various entitled allowances are excluded, and job security becomes uncertain. However, without the certainty of livelihood, the risk of compromise and corruption in journalism increases, contrary to objective and independent journalism. This uncertainty encourages or forces complacency towards political and vested interest groups. To resolve this situation, the following steps are necessary for journalists and other news employees in all newspapers, television channels, radio, and online media:

1. No media outlet shall appoint any journalist, whether temporary, permanent, or contractual, without an appointment letter, identity card, photo, or salary.

2. A journalist's probationary period shall not exceed one year. In this case, a respectable probationary allowance must be provided.

3. It is necessary to determine a uniform minimum starting salary for permanent journalists across the country, equal to the basic salary of a government Grade 9 officer. Due to the excessively high cost of living in Dhaka, journalists stationed in Dhaka will be entitled to a 'Dhaka allowance' in addition to their basic salary. After three years of working as correspondents (retainers), journalists outside Dhaka will be promoted to staff correspondents. The necessity of removing this disparity in salary, allowances, and status for journalists outside Dhaka was also mentioned in the first Press Commission Report.

4. Besides the basic salary, journalists shall be entitled to house rent, transport allowance, medical allowance, festival allowance equal to the basic wage, risk allowance (where applicable), phone bill, internet bill, provident fund, and retirement benefits or gratuity.

5. At the beginning of each year, journalists' salaries will be increased in line with the average inflation of the previous year. In the case of other allowances, they must be reviewed at least every two years, adjusting for inflation.
6. There will be recruitment rules for campus journalists. Minimum salary and allowances commensurate with the cost of living on campus must be provided.
7. No journalist in any media outlet can be assigned to circulation oversight and advertisement collection.
8. Full implementation of the Newspaper Employees (Conditions of Services) Act 1973 and labor laws must be ensured to guarantee the safety and rights of journalists and media workers.
9. Media organizations will provide photographers/video journalists with the necessary equipment.
10. Media organizations will ensure safety equipment and training for all journalists where applicable. The institution's obligation to provide legal assistance in resolving any lawsuits related to professional work must be ensured.
11. The salaries and allowances currently received by officers and employees (non-journalists) of media outlets will increase proportionally (in ratio) with the increase in the salaries and allowances of journalists.

21.13 Recommendations Regarding PIB and National Institute of Mass Communication (NIMC)

1. Since all types of media are now becoming multimedia-dependent in content creation, the Media Reform Commission deems it appropriate to merge the two institutions, considering the future of the press. It will be transformed into an intense national media training and research institution/institute if merged.
2. If the Press Institute Bangladesh (PIB) and the National Institute of Mass Communication (NIMC) can be operated under a single Governing Board, this merged institution can play an effective role as a functional training and research center.
3. An autonomous and statutory independent infrastructure for this merged institution must be provided (by enacting a new law).
4. The two existing institutions' infrastructure, workforce, and assets will be transferred to the new institution.
5. The new institution will identify the types of skill gaps in the media industry through surveys and bring necessary changes to the training programs.

6. Conducting various research throughout the year in the interest of the media will be one of the main tasks of the institution.

7. Modernizing the existing library and transforming it into a usable reference center for the media industry will be one of the institution's tasks.

21.14 Recommendations Regarding Bangladesh Film and Television Institute

This institution has virtually no connection with journalism. Although it plays a vital role in television program production, its relevance is more for cinema. The commission could not find any logical explanation for why cinema is attached to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting instead of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. Therefore, the commission believes that the government may consider whether this institution can be attached to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs.

21.15 Recommendations on Combating Fake/Misinformation

1. It is necessary to introduce specific systems/methods for verifying misinformation/fake news in every newsroom. Responsible and trained journalists can do this work. However, technological support should also be in place. To address the shortage of adequate investment in truth verification activities due to the financial crisis in the media, the possibility of arranging a larger and collective initiative within the news industry can be considered. The right of this initiative to work independently must, of course, be ensured.

2. Initiatives should be taken to establish communication, coordination, and rapid response arrangements with large technology-based companies, such as Google, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and similar platforms.

This will enable prompt alerting of these platforms when misinformation/fake news is identified, assist in information verification and investigation, and facilitate rapid removal and correction of falsehoods/misinformation/rumors/confusion. Bringing these multinational companies under the purview of accountability for disseminating fake news, misinformation, or falsehoods is crucial. The examples of significant fines and the empowerment and capacity building of regulatory institutions in various European countries can be helpful in this regard.

3. Assistance can be sought from and effective steps taken in coordination with some existing fact-checking organizations and networks. However, caution is needed regarding fact-checking institutions or initiatives that have recently become active with political patronage. There are instances of individuals banned for spreading fake news on social media being involved in fact-checking in Bangladesh. For this reason, ensuring honesty and transparency in fact-checking is crucial.

4. Measures need to be taken to educate the public on combating fake/misinformation and teaching them various strategies so that they exercise utmost caution and give importance to verifying every piece of information.

21.16 Recommendations Regarding Media Literacy

1. Various workshops, seminars, and sessions can be organized in classrooms to increase basic knowledge and skills about media literacy among secondary and college students (including equivalent madrasas). Researchers and thinkers on media literacy must be involved in these activities. These activities can be undertaken through a combined initiative of the relevant ministries, research institutions/NGOs, and academia.
2. Besides students, free short-term online courses can be organized to increase media literacy among people of other classes, professions, genders, ages, and geographical locations. Extensive publicity and campaigns must be conducted on this matter. All types of media, from sending messages via mobile phones, must be used in this work. This will allow marginalized groups (e.g., disadvantaged women, rural inhabitants, indigenous people of the plains and hill tracts) to gain skills and knowledge.
3. Information officers stationed at the upazilla level must be trained to organize local training and workshops on media literacy.
4. Local social organizations (sports and cultural clubs) must be activated at the neighborhood, locality, and area levels. The participation of residents must be increased through them, and discussions and various programs on media literacy using an educational model can be organized for people of different ages in each area.
5. As a long-term measure, media literacy must be included in the curriculum of different levels of education.
6. More research-based knowledge is needed on media literacy's methods, effectiveness, evaluation, etc..
7. To increase research in this area, the government can take the initiative to provide incentives for research work.

21.17 Recommendations Regarding Ensuring Gender and Equality in Media

As part of creating a gender-equal environment in society, it is necessary to give due importance to the issue of gender equality in the media. Therefore, attention can be given to the following matters:

- a. Eliminating gender discrimination in recruitment, placement, and training to ensure the participation of all genders at all levels of the media;
- b. Preparing gender-sensitive codes of conduct in each media outlet and establishing systems for providing information, discussion, training, and monitoring for effective implementation of the code of conduct; ensuring infrastructure (e.g., separate toilets, childcare centers) for the smooth participation of all genders;

- c. Ensuring the utmost caution in the safety and protection of journalists of all genders, prioritizing the needs of women; providing transportation arrangements for safe travel;
- d. Establishing a complaint redressal cell in each media office as per the High Court directive on preventing sexual harassment (2009);
- e. Taking mental health protection measures to cope with various types of pressure in journalism;
- f. Ensuring that women receive proper maternity leave and do not face any discrimination upon returning to work after leave;
- g. Formulating clear guidelines and rules for how women will be presented; preparing policies on not publishing or broadcasting stereotypical ideas that create hatred, animosity, or negative attitudes towards women, or hinder their smooth presence in all fields;
- h. Highlighting the multifaceted roles and participation of women in society; ensuring that the voice and perspective of women are reflected in any news/feature;
- I. Preparing clear guidelines for language use to avoid direct or indirect humiliation of women through words or descriptions.

21.18 Recommendations Regarding Creating Equal Opportunities for Indigenous and Disabled Populations

To be truly inclusive, the media needs to do more than report on people with disabilities. It's crucial to actively include individuals with disabilities in the workplace, content creation, and policymaking. Here's how that can be achieved:

1. Inclusion of matters ensuring the language, culture, and freedom of expression of indigenous communities in media policies;
2. Setting a minimum broadcast time limit for indigenous populations in the media;
3. Giving priority to news and program broadcasting in indigenous languages in media published/broadcast in indigenous-majority areas;
4. Making the registration process easier for media outlets established through the initiatives and funding of indigenous people, providing necessary support to develop more indigenous media.
5. Preparing guidelines for the appropriate presentation of indigenous populations in mainstream media to ensure their proper representation and presence;
6. Including 'Indigenous Studies' in journalism education and training;
7. Providing fellowships for indigenous journalists/journalism students and giving them priority in recruitment;

21.19 Recommendations Regarding Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs

For media to be truly inclusive it is not enough to merely report on persons with disabilities; it is crucial to actively include persons with disabilities in the workplace, content creation, and policy-making. Ways this can be done:

- Writing job advertisements that are screen reader-friendly and in simple language; ensuring necessary support during interviews (e.g., sign language interpreter, flexible evaluation methods); employing persons with disabilities in journalist, editor, producer, and technical positions; arranging mentorship and skills development training for persons with disabilities.
- Ensuring accessible offices (ramps, lifts, disability-friendly bathrooms);
- Providing assistive technologies (screen readers, speech-to-text software).
- Offering flexible working hours and remote work facilities.
- Highlighting the capabilities and contributions of persons with disabilities instead of merely presenting them as objects of pity or inspiration, regularly including persons with disabilities as journalists, discussants, and panelists.
- Closed captions and sign language interpreters should be added to television news, and written transcripts for radio programs or audio descriptions for visually impaired persons should be provided.
- Using simple language, alt text, image descriptions, and braille-friendly formats in online news and social media.
- Providing training on reporting related to persons with disabilities, including guidelines for using respectful language when reporting on persons with disabilities.
- Ensure that websites are designed according to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1); develop screen-reader-enabled news apps; make arrangements for publishing news in audio, braille, and large print formats.

21.20 Recommendations Regarding News Presentation Style and the Mental Health of Readers and Viewers

Each media outlet needs to have its editorial policy on the type of impact any content published by the media can have on the reader's mental health. In this regard, the effect on people of different professions, ages, religions, and ethnic groups must be considered.

21.21 It is necessary for the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics to conduct annual surveys to verify the expectations and actual experiences of listeners, viewers, and readers regarding the media.

Bangladesh Media Commission Ordinance, 2025

(Draft)

March 3, 2025

Table of Contents

First Chapter: Preliminary

1. Short title and commencement
2. Definitions
3. Predominance of the Ordinance

Second Chapter: Establishment of Bangladesh Media Commission

4. Establishment of Bangladesh Media Commission
5. Commission Office
6. Formation of the Commission
7. Selection Committee
8. Appointment, qualification, term, resignation, etc., of the Chairman and members
9. Disqualification for appointment as Chairman or member
10. Status, remuneration, and facilities of Commission members

Third Chapter: Objectives and Functions of the Commission

11. Objectives and Functions of the Commission
12. Special provision regarding the principle of Self-Regulation in Media
13. Taking action in case of violation of the Code of Conduct
14. Commission Meetings
15. Formation of Committees
16. Registration of Print, Electronic, Online Media, News Agencies, and Organizations

Fourth Chapter: Financial Affairs of the Commission

17. Commission Fund
18. Budget
19. Power to Contract

20. Financial Independence of the Commission

21. Accounting and Audit

Fifth Chapter: Officers and Employees of the Commission

22. Secretary and other Officers and Employees of the Commission

Sixth Chapter: Miscellaneous

23. Commission's Annual Report

24. Power to Make Rules

25. Publication of English Translated Text

26. Repeal and Savings

Ordinance No.--

An Ordinance

enacted for the establishment of the Bangladesh Media Commission

WHEREAS the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh guarantees freedom of thought and conscience, freedom of speech and expression, and freedom of the press in Article 39, and these have been recognized as fundamental rights; and

WHEREAS due to the limitations and lack of capacity of the existing Press Council Act, 1974 (ACT NO. XXV OF 1974), the effectiveness of the said Act has been lost, and due to the transformation and unprecedented development of the media, the necessity has arisen to enact a new law for ensuring the freedom, protection, standard, and working environment of media and journalism; and

WHEREAS the Parliament stands dissolved and it has been satisfactorily apparent to the President that circumstances exist rendering immediate action necessary;

NOW, THEREFORE, in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 93(1) of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the President is pleased to make and promulgate the following Ordinance, namely:—

First Chapter

Preliminary

1. Short title and commencement.—(1) This Ordinance may be called the Bangladesh Media Commission Ordinance, 2025.

(2) It shall come into force at once.

2. Definitions.—Unless there is anything repugnant in the subject or context, in this Ordinance—

'Commission' means the Bangladesh Media Commission.

(1) 'Media' means print, electronic, online news media and news agencies, and includes any news media or news agency registered or unregistered in Bangladesh that publishes, broadcasts, and transmits any news, advertisement, program, or content containing information, data presented through still and moving images, sound, text, graphics, or multimedia, or in any other manner, to broadcast directly or indirectly via satellite or internet-based radio, television, or online media operated from the territory of Bangladesh in Bengali, English, or any other language, and also includes any news media or news agency located outside Bangladesh that broadcasts, publishes, and transmits targeting Bangladeshi viewers and listeners;

- (3) 'Chairman' means the Chairman of the Commission and includes any member acting as Chairman;
- (4) 'Member' means a member of the Commission and includes the Chairman;
- (5) 'Self-Regulation' means a process that ensures the transparency, accountability, and responsibility of the media to uphold and protect the freedom of expression;
- (6) 'Selection Committee' means the Selection Committee constituted under section 7;
- (7) 'Rule' means any rule made under section 24.
3. Predominance of the Ordinance.—notwithstanding anything contained in any other existing law, the provisions of this Ordinance shall have predominance.

Second Chapter

Establishment of Bangladesh Media Commission

4. Establishment of Bangladesh Media Commission.—(1) After this Ordinance comes into force, a Commission shall be established to fulfil the objectives of this Ordinance and, by its provisions, be called the Bangladesh Mass Media Commission.
- (2) The Commission shall be a statutory independent body and shall have perpetual succession, and subject to the provisions of this Ordinance, shall have the power to acquire, hold, and transfer movable and immovable property, and may sue or be sued in its name.
- (3) The Commission shall have a common seal, which shall be kept in the custody of the Secretary of the Commission.
5. Commission Office.—The Commission's principal office shall be in Dhaka, and the Commission may establish branch offices in any country as needed.
6. Formation of the Commission.—The Bangladesh Mass Media Commission shall be formed as follows, namely:—
- (1) The Commission shall be composed of a total of 9 (nine) persons, including one Chairman and 8 (eight) members.
- (2) The Chairman and three members, including one woman, shall be full-time, and the other members shall be unpaid.
- (3) Among the members of the Commission, there shall be at least 4 (four) women and at least 1 (one) member from the community of indigenous peoples or small ethnic groups or ethnic communities.
- (4) The Chairman shall be the chief executive of the Commission.

7. Selection Committee.—(1) To recommend the appointment of the Chairman and members, a Selection Committee shall be formed, composed of the following 3 (three) members, namely:—
- (a) A Judge of the Appellate Division nominated by the Chief Justice, who shall also be its Chairman;
 - (b) A professor of Mass Communication and Journalism or Law from any public university nominated by the University Grants Commission (UGC);
 - (c) A representative from the journalism profession with editorial qualifications, who has been continuously engaged in the profession for at least 20 (twenty) years.
- (2) The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting shall provide necessary secretarial support for the formation of the Selection Committee under sub-section (1) and the execution of the functions of the said Selection Committee.
- (3) The Selection Committee's quorum shall consist of at least 2 (two) members.
- (4) The Selection Committee shall recommend to the President the names of 3 (three) persons against each vacant position for the appointment of the Chairman and members, based on the majority decision of the members present at the meeting.
- (5) In case of equality of votes in the Selection Committee, the Chairman shall have the right to cast a second or deciding vote.
- (6) The Selection Committee may determine the procedure of its meetings.
8. Appointment, qualification, term, resignation, etc., of the Chairman and members.—(1) The President shall appoint the Chairman and Commission members based on the Selection Committee's recommendation.
- (2) A person must have at least 20 (twenty) years of practical knowledge and experience in media, journalism, law, judiciary, education, technology, information, social work, or management.
- (3) The Chairman and members shall hold office for 4 (four) years from their appointment.
- (4) The Chairman or any member may resign in writing addressed to the President.
- (5) If the office of the Chairman falls vacant, or if the Chairman is unable to perform his duties due to absence, illness, or any other reason, the responsibility of the Chairman may be assigned to any member of the Commission, based on the opinion of the majority of members, until the newly appointed Chairman joins his office or until the Chairman can resume his duties.
9. Disqualification for appointment as Chairman or member.—A person shall not be eligible for appointment as Chairman or member if he is—

- (a) Not a citizen of Bangladesh; or
- (b) Convicted by a competent court for any offense involving financial corruption or moral turpitude; or
- (c) Declared bankrupt by a competent court; or
- (d) Declared of unsound mind by a competent court; or
- (e) Not possessing the practical knowledge and experience mentioned in section 8(3); or
- (f) Engaged in any other remunerated employment outside of his duties:

This provision shall not apply to unpaid members.

10. Salary, allowances, etc., of the Commission's Chairman and members.—(1) The Chairman shall be entitled to the salary, allowances, and other facilities of a Judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.
- (2) A full-time member shall be entitled to the salary, allowances, and other facilities of a Judge of the High Court Division of the Supreme Court.
- (3) Unpaid members shall receive honorarium and allowances at the rate determined by the Commission for attending meetings and performing other duties.

Third Chapter

Objectives and Functions of the Commission

11. Objectives and Functions of the Commission.— (1) The main objectives of the Commission shall be—
- (a) To ensure the freedom and standard of print, electronic, and online media and news agencies;
 - (b) To ensure the freedom, standard, and working environment of journalists working in Bangladesh;
 - (c) To formulate the policies and rules regarding best practices, integrity, grievance redressal management, and self-regulation systems in print, electronic, and online media and news agencies.
- (2) To ensure the matters mentioned in sub-section (1), the Commission shall—
- (a) assist in formulating acceptable codes of conduct for owners, editors, journalists, employees, workers, and all concerned with print, electronic, and online media and news agencies;

(b) Provide appropriate training assistance to news employees employed in print, electronic, and online media and news agencies;

(c) Assist in increasing the research and technological skills of those concerned working in print, electronic, and online media and news agencies;

(d) If a complaint is raised against an individual or institution of print, electronic, or online media or a news agency, inquire into the matter upon application or on its own initiative and take necessary action;

(e) Continuously encourage the role of media in ensuring equality, human dignity, and social justice, and gender equality in print, electronic, and online media and news agencies;

(f) Create awareness about citizens' religious sentiments, social customs, and morality in the dissemination, publication, and expression of opinion in news or information;

(g) Formulate rules regarding the registration method of journalists of print, electronic, and online media and news agencies;

(h) Formulate policies and rules regarding advertisements of print, electronic, and online media and news agencies;

(i) Assist in establishing closer ties between domestic media and international media; and

(j) Undertake various initiatives to increase media awareness among the country's citizens.

12. Special Provision regarding the Principle of Self-Regulation in Media.— (1) The owners, editors, journalists, and their organizations of print, electronic, and online media and news agencies shall—

(a) Assist in taking necessary initiatives for the formulation, adherence to, and monitoring of standards regarding freedom, accountability, responsibility, transparency, and ethics;

(b) Assist in formulating policies, rules, and guidelines;

(c) Uphold the development of democracy, pluralism, and diversity by following international customs and standards;

(d) Maintain the free flow of news and information by maintaining truthfulness, neutrality, and gender equality; and

(e) Correctly determine the accuracy of the verification process.

(2) To implement the self-regulation system, the Commission shall formulate one or more Codes of Ethical Guidelines for media institutions, agencies, and organizations and, if necessary, ensure the following matters in consultation with and based on the review of stakeholders, namely:—

(a) Monitoring of unfair and inappropriate matters in any news, advertisement, program, or content containing information, data published, broadcast, and transmitted by print, electronic, and online media and news agencies;

(b) Avoiding the publication or broadcast of any information or data that illegally violates personal privacy or is inappropriate;

(c) Ensuring that print, electronic, and online media, news agencies, and organizations adhere to a specific Charter of Duty, Disclosure Policy, and Editorial Policy;

(d) Print, electronic, and online media, news agencies, and organizations shall prepare regular inspection, monitoring, audit, and accounting reports.

13. Taking Action in Case of Violation of the Code of Conduct.— (1) If any owner, editor, journalist, worker, or concerned person of any print, electronic, or online media or news agency individually or jointly violates the code of conduct, the Commission may take the following actions upon proof after providing an opportunity for a necessary hearing:—

(a) In case of the first violation, issue a written warning and reprimand;

(b) In case of repeated violation, impose a reasonable fine.

(2) In the following matters, the Media Commission or, as the case may be, the Chairman or members shall have the same powers as a civil court may exercise under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 (Act V of 1908), namely:

(a) Issuing summons to compel the appearance of any person before the Commission and compelling the production of oral or written evidence, documents, or anything else under oath;

(b) Verifying and inspecting information;

(c) Receiving evidence on affidavit;

(d) Obtaining any information from any office; and

(e) Issuing summons compelling the appearance of any witness, the production of any document, etc.

14. Commission Meetings— (1) Subject to the provisions of this Ordinance, the Commission may determine the procedure of its meetings.

(2) The Chairman shall preside over all meetings of the Commission, and in his absence, a member shall preside over the meeting based on the majority decision of the members present at the meeting.

(3) The quorum of the Commission meeting shall consist of the presence of the Chairman and a majority of the members.

(4) Each member shall have one vote in decision-making at the Commission meeting, and in case of equality of votes, the person presiding over the meeting shall have the right to cast a second or deciding vote.

(5) At least one meeting of the Commission shall be held every two months.

15. Formation of Committees— to fulfill the objectives of this Ordinance and efficiently perform the Commission's functions, the Commission may, by order, form one or more committees as needed.

16. Registration of Print, Electronic, Online Media, News Agencies, Organizations, and Journalists— (1) To fulfil the objectives of this Ordinance, all print, electronic, and online media, news agencies, organizations, and all journalists shall be registered with the Commission.

(2) Rules framed by the Commission shall determine the rules, conditions, and fees related to registration.

Fourth Chapter

Financial Affairs of the Commission

17. Commission Fund. — (1) To fulfill the objectives of this Ordinance, a fund shall be called the Media Commission Fund.

(2) The operation and administration of the Commission's fund shall, subject to this section and the rules, be vested in the Commission.

(3) The salaries, allowances, and other amounts payable according to the terms of service of the Chairman and members and the Secretary and other officers and employees shall be paid from the Commission's fund, and other necessary expenses of the Commission shall be defrayed.

(4) The following amounts shall be credited to the Commission's fund, namely:—

(a) Money received as subscription at the rate of 1 (one) percent of the annual turnover of all registered print, electronic, and online media and news agencies;

(b) Fees received for registration;

(c) Money received from fines;

(d) Annual grants provided by the government;

(e) Grants provided by any individual or institution.

18. Budget. — The Commission shall prepare an annual budget statement and arrange for its publication at least one month before the commencement of the next financial year.
19. Financial Independence of the Commission. — (1) The government shall allocate specified funds in favor of the Commission for its expenses in each financial year, considering its requirements, and it shall not be necessary for the Commission to obtain prior approval from the government for spending the said allocated funds in the approved and designated sectors.
- (2) The provision of this section shall not be construed as diminishing the rights of the Comptroller and Auditor General conferred by Article 128 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
20. Accounting and Audit. — (1) The Commission shall properly maintain its accounts and prepare annual statements of accounts.
- (2) The Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh, hereinafter referred to as the Comptroller and Auditor General, shall audit the Commission's accounts annually and submit a copy of the audit report to the government and the Commission.
- (3) For auditing accounts by sub-section (2), the Comptroller and Auditor General or any person authorized by him in this behalf may examine all records, documents, cash or money deposited in banks, securities, stores, and other property of the Commission and may interrogate the Chairman or members or any officer or employee.
21. Power to Contract.— The Commission may enter into contracts with any domestic or foreign individual, agency, or institution for the overall development of media-related matters;
- Provided that the government shall be notified in writing before entering into any contract with a foreign individual, agency, or institution.

Fifth Chapter

Officers and Employees of the Commission

22. Secretary and other Officers and Employees of the Commission. — (1) There shall be a Secretary of the Commission for secretarial support. (2) The Commission may appoint the necessary number of other officers and employees to perform its functions under this Ordinance efficiently. (3) The salaries, allowances, and terms of service of the Secretary and other officers and employees shall be determined by rules framed by the Commission.

Sixth Chapter

Miscellaneous

23. Commission's Annual Report.— The Commission shall submit an annual report regarding its activities performed during the preceding year to the President by the 31st of March each year;

24. Power to Make Rules. — The Commission may make rules to fulfill the objectives of this Ordinance.

25. Publication of English Translated Text. — (1) After the commencement of this Ordinance, the Commission shall publish a reliable English translation of this Ordinance.

(2) In case of conflict between the Bengali and English texts, the Bengali text shall prevail.

26. Repeal and Savings. — (1) Upon the commencement of this Ordinance, the Press Council Act, 1974 (ACT NO. XXV OF 1974), hereinafter referred to as the said Act, shall stand repealed.

(2) Notwithstanding such repeal, any act done or action taken or order, notice, notification, or regulation issued by the Press Council established under the said Act shall be deemed done, taken, or issued under this Ordinance.

(3) Upon the commencement of this Ordinance, the Press Council established under the said Act—

(a) all its movable and immovable property and all other rights and interests in or arising out of such property, cash and money deposited in banks, investments, all account books, records, and other documents shall be transferred to and vested in the Commission;

(b) all its debts, liabilities, and obligations, and all contracts executed by, for, or with it shall be deemed to be the debts, liabilities, and responsibilities of the Commission and contracts executed by, for, or with it;

(c) cases or legal proceedings filed against or by it shall be deemed to be cases or legal proceedings filed against or by the Commission and shall be disposed of accordingly; and

(d) All its officers and employees shall be deemed officers and employees of the Commission. They shall remain in service under the same terms and conditions as they were employed immediately before the commencement of this Ordinance, unless changed by the Commission.

Journalism Rights Protection Ordinance, 2025

(Draft)

March 13, 2025

Table of Contents

First Chapter: Preliminary

1. Short title and commencement
2. Definitions

Second Chapter: Right to Protection of Journalism Rights

3. Right to protection of life and property from violence, threats, and harassment
4. Right to privacy of personal information and not to disclose sources
5. Right to perform professional duties independently
6. Special provision regarding the independent performance of duties by a journalist or news worker in their institution
7. Right to protection for actions done in good faith

Third Chapter: Filing Complaints, etc.

8. Filing complaints

Fourth Chapter: Offenses, Punishments, Compensation, etc.

9. Offenses and punishments
10. Conversion of fine into compensation

Fifth Chapter: Trial, Investigation, etc.

11. Trial of offenses
12. Application of the Code of Criminal Procedure
13. Cognizability, bailability, and compoundability
14. Investigation
15. Punishment for filing a false complaint
16. Commission of an offense by a company

Sixth Chapter:

17. Removal of ambiguity

18. Government's responsibility for the effective implementation of the Ordinance

19. Power to make rules

20. Publication of English-translated text

Ordinance No. ---, 2025

An Ordinance

enacted for providing protection of journalism and journalists' rights and formulating ancillary provisions

WHEREAS the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh guarantees the right to protection of life and personal liberty in Article 32, freedom of thought and conscience, freedom of speech and expression, and freedom of the press in Article 39, and the freedom and right to profession and occupation in Article 40; and

WHEREAS journalists/news employees engaged in professional duties are often victims or are at risk of violence, threats, and harassment; and

WHEREAS it is expedient and necessary to provide adequate legal protection for journalists/news employees and make provisions for other relevant matters; and

WHEREAS the Parliament stands dissolved and it has been satisfactorily apparent to the President that circumstances exist rendering immediate action necessary;

NOW, THEREFORE, in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 93(1) of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the President is pleased to make and promulgate the following Ordinance, namely:—

First Chapter

Preliminary

1. Short title and commencement.—(1) This Ordinance may be called the Journalism Rights Protection Ordinance, 2025.

(2) It shall come into force at once.

2. Definitions.—Unless there is anything repugnant in the subject or context, in this Ordinance—

(1) 'Offense' means any offense committed under this Ordinance and the Penal Code, 1860 (Act No XLV of 1860);

(2) 'Complainant' means any journalist or news employees who is a victim of violence, threats, or harassment under this Ordinance;

(3) 'Act' means the Public Interest Information Disclosure (Protection Provided) Act, 2011 (Act No. 7 of 2011);

(4) 'Law enforcement agency' means any government agency enforcing and implementing law in the country, including the Police, Rapid Action Battalion, Border Guard Bangladesh, Customs, Immigration, Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Special Branch, Detective Branch, Ansar VDP, and Coast Guard, and shall also include the Armed Forces;

(5) 'Competent authority' means the competent authority mentioned in section 2(1) of the Act;

(6) 'Commission' means the Bangladesh National Media Commission established by section 4 of the National Media Commission Ordinance, 2025;

(7) 'Media' means print, electronic, online news media and news agencies, and includes any news media or news agency registered or unregistered in Bangladesh that publishes, broadcasts, and transmits any news, advertisement, program, or content containing information, data presented through still and moving images, sound, text, graphics, or multimedia, or in any other manner, to broadcast directly or indirectly via satellite or internet-based radio, television, or online media operated from the territory of Bangladesh in Bengali, English, or any other language, and also includes any news media or news agency located outside Bangladesh that broadcasts, publishes, and transmits targeting Bangladeshi viewers and listeners;

(8) 'Journalist/News employee' means a person who is—

(a) A full-time journalist; and

(b) Any editor, editorial writer, news editor, sub-editor, assistant editor, video editor, feature writer, reporter, or correspondent engaged in media work; and

(c) A part-time journalist, freelance journalist, and journalist working as a contributor for foreign media; and

(d) Any copy tester, cartoonist, news photographer, graphic designer, or employee engaged in the news work of a registered media outlet;

(9) 'Public interest' means the public interest mentioned in sub-section (3) of section 2 of the Act;

(10) 'Information related to public interest' means the information related to public interest mentioned in sub-section (4) of section 2 of the Act;

(11) 'Code of Criminal Procedure' means the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898 (Act No V of 1898);

(12) 'Rule' means any rule made under this Ordinance;

(13) 'Person' includes any individual, institution, agency, company, statutory body, partnership, firm, association, society, or any other artificial legal entity, and shall also include all persons who are owners, directors, investors, or in charge of the management of a media institution;

(14) 'Government employee' means any government employee mentioned in Article 152 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh;

(15) 'Violence, threats, and harassment' means the actions of any individual, agency, or company that endanger the life and property of a news worker/journalist engaged in professional work, and shall include all forms of criminal intimidation or threats, harassment, molestation, constant surveillance, physical or mental torture, insult, contempt, obstruction of work, use of force, coercion, sexual harassment, illegal detention, enforced disappearance, and abduction;

(16) 'Agency' means the agency mentioned in sub-section (8) of section 2 of the Act.

Second Chapter

Right to Protection of Journalism Rights

3. Right to protection of life and property from violence, threats, and harassment. — (1) The competent authority and the government shall protect every journalist/news employee from violence, threats, and harassment, and the competent authority and the government shall properly ensure the matter.
 - (2) No person shall do any act or be engaged in any activity that causes any damage to the personal or professional life or property of a journalist/news worker.
 - (3) to ensure the professional neutrality and independence of journalists/news employees, the competent authority and the government shall take appropriate initiatives/measures so that the security of the personal or professional life or property of journalists/news employees is not jeopardized by any suppressive law or rule, or that they are not arrested or detained illegally.
 - (4) The competent authority and the government shall take appropriate initiatives or measures to ensure that no journalist/news employee engaged in professional work is subjected to any violence, threats, or harassment due to collecting, publishing, or broadcasting any information related to public interest.
 - (5) The competent authority and the government shall take appropriate measures to ensure that no journalist/news employee engaged in professional work is subjected to violence, threats, and harassment by any person or law enforcement agency or government employee or agency due to collecting or publishing or broadcasting any information related to public interest.
 - (6) The competent authority and the government shall take necessary measures to ensure that no journalist/news employee engaged in professional work in any conflict area of the country is subjected to violence, threats, and harassment while collecting or due to publishing or broadcasting any information related to public interest.
4. Right to privacy of personal information and not to disclose sources.— (1) All journalists/news employees engaged in professional work shall have the right to protection of their privacy, and

all means of communication of their home, family, and the competent authority and the government shall take appropriate measures in this regard.

(2) No journalist/news employee engaged in professional work shall be deprived of their life, personal liberty, and personal privacy, nor shall their home be entered, searched, or property seized illegally by force, and no measure shall be taken except by law which causes harm to their personal life, family, liberty, reputation, honor, or property.

(3) No person, agency, authority, company, institution, government employee, or law enforcement agency shall compel any journalist/news employee engaged in professional work to disclose their sources by intimidation or using physical or mental pressure.

5. Right to perform professional duties independently. — (1) The competent authority and the government shall take necessary measures to ensure that no journalist/news employee engaged in professional work is subjected to violence or physical or mental pressure by any person, agency or authority, company or institution, or government employee or law enforcement agency, and can perform their duties independently and in a favorable environment.

(2) The competent authority and the government shall take special initiatives to ensure that no journalist/news employee is subjected to violence, threats, harassment, and particularly sexual harassment while performing professional duties.

6. Special provision regarding the independent performance of duties by a journalist or news employee in their institution.— (1) Notwithstanding anything contained in any written agreement or terms of service, the owners, directors, investors, or all persons in charge of the management of a media institution shall ensure that no journalist/news employee is subjected to violence or physical or mental pressure while performing professional duties in their institution and can perform their duties independently and in a favorable environment. If there is any violation of the said matter, the journalist or news employee may file a written complaint with the Commission.

(2) Upon receiving a complaint under sub-section (1), the Commission shall verify the truth of the complaint and investigate and settle the matter after conducting the necessary hearing of both parties:

If the complaint involves a criminal offense, the Commission shall take cognizance of it and forward it to the relevant competent First Class Judicial Magistrate court for taking necessary legal action according to section 190 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

7. Right to protection for actions done in good faith. — If any journalist/news employee engaged in professional work publishes any information, data, written, audio, or video report in good faith in any media, and any person or institution or agency is harmed or is likely to be harmed by such publication, no civil or criminal case or any other legal proceeding shall be filed against the said journalist/news employee, unless a different intention is proven.

Third Chapter

Filing Complaints, etc.

8. Filing complaints.—(1) If a journalist/news employee engaged in professional work becomes a victim of violence, s/he may file a complaint in writing, online, or through his representative with a First Class Judicial Magistrate court having jurisdiction. (2) Upon receiving a complaint filed under sub-section (1), the First Class Judicial Magistrate court shall forward the said complaint to the relevant Superintendent of Police and direct the filing of a case. It shall issue an order to submit an investigation report within 30 (thirty) working days. (3) If it is impossible to complete the investigation within the time mentioned in sub-section (2) for reasonable cause, the investigating officer shall appear before the court and explain the reason for the delay. The court may, after hearing the journalist/news employee who is a victim of violence, extend the investigation for a further 30 (thirty) working days.

Fourth Chapter

Offenses, Punishments, Compensation, etc.

9. Offenses and punishments.—If any person, agency, authority, company, or institution commits violence, threats, and harassment against any journalist/news employee engaged in professional work, it shall be considered a punishable offense. The accused person shall be punished with imprisonment of not less than 1 (one) year or up to 5 (five) years, or a fine of not less than 1,00,000 (one lakh) taka, or both, depending on the degree of the offense.
10. Conversion of fine into compensation.—Notwithstanding anything otherwise contained in any other existing law, the competent court may consider the fine imposed by it under section 9 as compensation for the journalist/news worker engaged in professional duty, and the amount of fine or compensation shall be recoverable from the convicted person.

Fifth Chapter

Trial, Investigation, etc.

11. Trial of offenses.—(1) Complaints and offenses filed under this Ordinance shall be triable by a First Class Judicial Magistrate or, as the case may be, a Metropolitan Magistrate.
- (2) There shall be no specified limit to the power of the First Class Judicial Magistrate or Metropolitan Magistrate to order compensation.
12. Application of the Code of Criminal Procedure.—(1) The Code of Criminal Procedure shall apply to matters related to the filing of complaints, investigation, trial, disposal, and appeal of offenses committed under this Ordinance, including other relevant matters.

(2) The summary trial procedure under Chapter XXII of the Code of Criminal Procedure shall apply to the trial or disposal of offenses under this Ordinance.

13. Cognizability, bailability, and compoundability.—Any offense committed under this Ordinance shall be cognizable, bailable, and compoundable.

14. Investigation.—(1) Complaints and cases filed under this Ordinance shall be investigated by a police officer not below the rank of Assistant Superintendent of Police.

(2) All rules and regulations of the Code of Criminal Procedure shall apply to the conduct of the investigation.

15. Punishment for filing false complaint.—If any journalist/news employee files a complaint under this Ordinance knowing that there is no lawful cause to harm another person, s/he shall be punished with imprisonment not exceeding 1 (one) year or a fine of 50,000 (fifty thousand) taka or both punishments.

16. Commission of offense by company.—If a company commits the offense of violence, threat, and harassment under this Ordinance, every investor or every director or manager or secretary or other officer or agent of the said company shall be deemed to be accused, unless s/he can prove that the said violence was committed without her/his knowledge or that s/he made her/his best efforts to prevent the said violence.

[Explanation.—In this section—

(a) 'Company' includes any statutory body, commercial establishment, partnership, association, society, or organization; and

(b) In the case of a commercial establishment, 'director' includes any of its investors, partners, or management board members.]

Sixth Chapter

Miscellaneous

17. Removal of ambiguity. — If any ambiguity arises in the implementation of any provision of this Ordinance, the government may, by order, remove such ambiguity, provided it is consistent with the provisions of this Ordinance.

18. The government's responsibility is to implement the Ordinance effectively. — The government shall take all necessary measures to effectively and adequately implement this Ordinance. It may issue orders or directives in this regard occasionally as needed.

19. Power to make rules. — To fulfill the objectives of this Ordinance, the government may make rules by notification in the official Gazette.

20. Publication of English-translated text. — (1) After the commencement of this Ordinance, the government shall publish a reliable English translation of this Ordinance by notification in the official Gazette.

(2) In case of conflict between the Bengali and English texts, the Bengali text shall prevail.

Appendix and Attachment

1. Gazette Notification for the Formation of the Media Reform Commission
2. Gazette Notification for the Inclusion of Media Reform Commission Member Kamrun Nesa Hasan
3. <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-s-2021-press-freedom-predators-gallery-old-tyrants-two-women-and-european>
4. <https://file-rajshahi.portal.gov.bd/uploads/d27e6ad2-7dfc-48f1-9b01-449228948d00/623/1f7/d78/6231f7d78080f133927337.pdf>
5. <https://moi.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/moi.portal.gov.bd/files/a22f434a-b3f5-4931-be15-7d56494ab8db/National%20Broadcasting%20Policy.pdf>
6. Questionnaire of the Survey Conducted by the Commission Among Newspaper Owners
7. <https://dfp.portal.gov.bd/site/notices/b0d990eb-091f-454c-a778-a1cbb5c3df56/%E0%A6%B7%E0%A6%BB%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%B8%E0%A6%AA%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%B0%E0%A7%87%E0%A6%B0-%E0%A6%AA%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%B0%E0%A6%9A%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%B0%E0%A6%B8%E0%A6%82%E0%A6%96%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AF%E0%A6%BE-%E0%A6%A8%E0%A6%BF%E0%A6%B0%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%A7%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%B0%E0%A6%A3-%E0%A6%AA%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%B0%E0%A6%95%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%B0%E0%A6%BF%E0%A6%AF%E0%A6%BC%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%B0-%E0%A6%A6%E0%A6%BF%E0%A6%95-%E0%A6%A8%E0%A6%BF%E0%A6%B0%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%A6%E0%A7%87%E0%A6%B6%E0%A6%BF%E0%A6%95%E0%A6%BE>
8. <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-437.html?lang=bn>
9. <https://bscl.gov.bd/site/page/4b941407-3b03-443f-81fa-cec333ed071a/->
10. <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-details-949.html>
11. <https://bscl.gov.bd/site/page/0bfe013e-b653-4bf9-a9fc-6ccb76f26833/->
12. <https://tofflive.com/en>
13. <https://pressinform.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/pressinform.portal.gov.bd/page/077eb6d2-9c46-44c7-88ff-1dbbf6cb-17b9/2025-03-02-06-10-81da5b24474de3f08d3f933d670619cb.pdf>
14. <https://pprnewsagency.com/>
15. <https://ena-news.com/>
16. <https://unb.com.bd/>
17. <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-details-950.html>
18. <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-1261.html>
19. First Press Commission Report
20. <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-11.html?lang=bn>
21. <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-1457.html>
22. <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-75.html>
23. <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-132/section-6995.html>

24. <https://presscouncil.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/presscouncil.portal.gov.bd/law/52bb87d5-3b99-418f-99db-fd3d3616bfd9/Press%20Council%20Act%201974%20গাজেট%20copy.pdf>
25. Specific Proposal for the Establishment of Media Commission and Legal Draft of the Proposed Commission
26. <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-1108/section-42467.html>
27. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>
28. <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-1457/section-52851.html>
29. <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-11/section-3116.html?lang=bn>
30. <https://moi.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/moi.portal.gov.bd/files/67d98ba7-9fca-4565-be79-86b7d3b52cf4/RTI.pdf>
31. <https://moi.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/moi.portal.gov.bd/files/a22f434a-b3f5-4931-be15-7d56494ab8db/National%20Broadcasting%20Policy.pdf>
32. <https://www.dfpp.gov.bd/upload-file/gazettes/22061-65078.pdf>
33. Draft of the Journalism Rights Protection Ordinance Proposed by the Commission
34. The Printing Press and Publications (Declaration and Registration) Act 1973
35. <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-details-437.html>
36. National Public Opinion Survey on Media 2025
37. <https://betar.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/betar.portal.gov.bd/law/70933be9-530e-4610-a719-aacdbae6cae1/Rule%20Regulation.pdf>
38. Report of the Commission on Formulation of Autonomy Policy for Betar and Bangladesh Television
39. <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-879.html>
40. <https://btv.portal.gov.bd/site/policies/e17d1296-6b99-4cb9-8d9b-1c87c68176f2/%E0%A6%A8%E0%A6%BF%E0%A6%AF%E0%A6%BC%E0%A6%BC%E0%A6%AE%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%B2%E0%A7%80%20%E0%A6%93%20%E0%A6%AA%E0%A6%B0%E0%A6%BF%E0%A6%9A%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%B2%E0%A6%A8%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%AA%E0%A6%A6%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%A7%E0%A6%BF>
41. <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-details-878.html>
42. <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-879/section-26701.html>
43. <https://www.app.com.pk/>
44. file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/Documents/%E0%A6%A6%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%B0%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%B0%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%AA%E0%A6%B8%E0%A6%AA%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%B0%20%E0%A6%AA%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%B0%E0%A6%9A%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%B0%20%E0%A6%AC%E0%A7%83%E0%A6%A6%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%A7%E0%A6%BF,%20%E0%A6%B8%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%A7%E0%A7%80%E0%A6%A8%E0%A6%A4%E0%A6%BE%20%E0%A6%93%20%E0%A6%9C%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%A6%E0%A6%BF%E0%A6%B9%E0%A6%BF%E0%A6%A4%E0%A6%BE%E0%A7%A4pdf (Local file path, cannot be accessed)
45. <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-details-1278.html>
46. <https://www.ptinews.com/>
47. <https://rsf.org/en>
48. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=OJ:L_202401083

49. <https://www.presscouncil.nic.in/>
50. [https://dewanpers.or.id/assets/ebook/buku/2011241422-2016-09-Buku Indonesian Press Law & Regulation of the Press Council.pdf](https://dewanpers.or.id/assets/ebook/buku/2011241422-2016-09-Buku_Indonesian_Press_Law_&_Regulation_of_the_Press_Council.pdf)
51. <https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Rebuilding-Public-Trust-English-final-version-advance-copy-1-May-20162.pdf>
52. <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-1118/section-42694.html>
53. A draft law for establishing the proposed Media Commission is attached at the end of the report.
54. https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fetf?p3_isn=50620
55. <https://mole.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mole.portal.gov.bd/elibrary/150c852f-80cb-4f5d-a49d-f093598df04b/Labour%20Law%202006.pdf>
56. Government No-Objection Certificates of Various Television Channels
57. Policy for the Establishment and Operation of Private Television 1998
58. Television Application Form and Undertaking
59. Information Related to the Establishment and Operation of Private Radio
60. Recommendations from Various Classes and Professions Sent to the Commission
61. BTV Budget at a Glance
62. Report of The Tribunal Newspaper
63. Statistics of Media-Listed Newspapers
64. Statistics of Dhaka Newspaper Hawkers Cooperative Society
65. Statistics of Dhaka Newspaper Hawkers Welfare Multipurpose Society
66. BSS Income and Expenditure Account
67. Minutes of the 25th General Meeting of the 8th Newspaper Wage Board Award Implementation Monitoring Team
68. The Press Council Act 1974
69. Code of Conduct to be Followed by Newspapers, News Agencies and Journalists of Bangladesh, 1993 (Amended 2022)
70. Draft Recommendations Related to Media Reform Prepared by BLAST
71. UNESCO Recommendations
72. Program Policy of Radio Bangladesh, Bangladesh Television, and Bangladesh Television Film Censorship Rules
73. Allocation and Expenditure Statement in the Promotion and Advertising Sector for Newspaper Supplements Published on Various National Days from FY 2008-09 to FY 2023-24
74. Media Listing and Audit Policy for Newspapers and Periodicals 2022
75. Recommendations Received from MRDI
76. BTV Budget at a Glance

END//