



BANGLADESH

	2012	2013
INTERNET FREEDOM STATUS	N/A	PARTLY FREE
Obstacles to Access (0-25)	n/a	13
Limits on Content (0-35)	n/a	12
Violations of User Rights (0-40)	n/a	24
Total (0-100)	n/a	49

POPULATION: 153 million
INTERNET PENETRATION 2012: 6-20 percent*
SOCIAL MEDIA/ICT APPS BLOCKED: Yes
POLITICAL/SOCIAL CONTENT BLOCKED: Yes
BLOGGERS/ICT USERS ARRESTED: Yes
PRESS FREEDOM 2013 STATUS: Partly Free

* 0=most free, 100=least free

* Sources present conflicting data

KEY DEVELOPMENTS: MAY 2012 – APRIL 2013

- Secularist blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider was murdered after calling for and promoting protests against a convicted Islamist war criminal online (see **VIOLATIONS OF USER RIGHTS**).
- Police charged four bloggers with harming religious sentiment under the ICT Act 2006 (see **VIOLATIONS OF USER RIGHTS**).
- Regulators blocked YouTube for nine months after the anti-Islamic “Innocence of Muslims” video sparked widespread criticism in September 2012; not all ISPs complied (see **LIMITS ON CONTENT**).

INTRODUCTION

As an emerging economy, Bangladesh has recognized information communication technologies (ICTs) as core tools for development. Even with new media still a comparatively recent phenomenon, however, officials have sought to control and censor online content—particularly as the internet took center stage in major social and political events in 2012 and 2013.

Since opening up the country's electronic media to the private sector in the early 1990s, the government has, at least officially, encouraged open internet access and communication. The ruling Bangladesh Awami League under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is working towards a “knowledge based networked society” under the “Digital Bangladesh by 2021” program launched in 2009.¹ The program seeks to integrate internet access with development efforts in national priority areas, such as education, healthcare, and agriculture. Private commercial stakeholders have also helped in the proliferation of net usage. Bangladesh further benefits from a vibrant—though often partisan—print and audio-visual media industry, but traditional journalists face physical threats and regulatory constraints that are increasingly being replicated online.

Religious sentiments and ICTs were both subject to manipulation, which led to major violations to internet freedom during the coverage period of this report. Authorities seemed ill-prepared at both policy and regulatory levels for the turbulent political developments and used a combination of punitive laws and ad hoc directives to curb expression on the internet, even while failing to offer adequate protection to individuals and websites under threat for their online activities. Police arrested four bloggers on the charge of harming religious sentiment, and regulators shut down their blogs without a court order. YouTube was inaccessible for nine months after the government blocked it in response to anti-Islamic content posted in 2012.

In October 2012, journalists traced attacks targeting Buddhist neighborhoods in the southeastern district of Ramu to a Buddhist's Facebook profile apparently altered to display anti-Islamic images and incite local Muslims to retaliate; it's not clear who was responsible for the alleged manipulation.² In February 2013, domestic tensions escalated when a war crimes tribunal sentenced Abdul Quader Mollah, leader of the country's largest political Islamic party Jamaat-e-Islami, to life imprisonment for crimes committed during the country's 1971 war of independence with Pakistan, including mass murder and rape.³ Some thought the sentence was lenient, and tens of thousands of protesters gathered around the Shahbag intersection in the capital, Dhaka, for more than two months. Traditional social, cultural, and pro-independence political forces later joined and strengthened the non-violent demonstration, causing some observers to compare it to the 2011 protests in Egypt's Tahrir Square.⁴ The Shahbag Movement, as it became known, was facilitated by

¹ “Digital Bangladesh Strategy Paper, 2010,” Access to Information Program, Prime Minister's Office, The People's Republic of Bangladesh, <http://www.a2i.pmo.gov.bd/tempdoc/spdbb.pdf>.

² “A Devil's Design,” *The Daily Star*, October 14, 2012, <http://bit.ly/1eQ4GBn>.

³ Tamima Anam, “Shahbag Protesters Versus the Butcher of Mirpur,” *The Guardian*, February 13, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/feb/13/shahbag-protest-bangladesh-quader-mollah>.

⁴ Saurabh Shukla, “Shahbag Square Cheers for Change: Dhaka's Young Protesters Demand Ban on Extremism and Death for War Criminals,” *Daily Mail*, February 28, 2013, <http://dailymail.com/18e9tHR>.

blogs, Facebook, and Twitter, a convincing display of the power of ICTs to mobilize and disseminate information.⁵ Its opponents certainly thought so: Mollah's supporters rallied in response against a conspiracy by "atheist bloggers."⁶ On February 11, a pro-Jamaat-e-Islami blog identified blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider as a Shahbag ringleader; armed assailants attacked and killed Rajib outside his home four days later. These were troubling developments for a country still striving to become a part of the connected global community.

OBSTACLES TO ACCESS

The International Telecommunication Union reported internet penetration in Bangladesh at 6 percent in 2012.⁷ Government estimates were closer to 20 percent.⁸ Over 90 percent of users access the internet through GPRS/CDMA services, which local regulators classify as narrowband. The remainder subscribe to fixed lines, either through a traditional Internet Service Provider (ISPs) or via one of two WiMax operators.⁹

The government has established 4,501 Information Centers all over Bangladesh, with the goal of ensuring cost-effective internet access and related e-services for the base of the pyramid population.¹⁰ No specific study has been done yet to analyze the user breakdown between urban and rural population.

Mobile penetration was at 64 percent in 2012, with connections provided by six operators.¹¹ Grameen Phone, owned by Telenor, is the market leader with 42 percent of the total customer base, followed by Orascom's Banglalink with 26 percent, and Robi, under the Axiata company, with 21 percent. The remaining three—Airtel, Citycell, and the state-owned Teletalk—have a total customer base of 10 percent.¹² Right now, Teletalk is the only entity offering mobile broadband to its comparatively small user base. Other operators offer 2G services, as the government is yet to provide licenses for 3G/4G operations.

While ICT usage is increasing fast, Bangladesh is lagging behind globally. The World Economic Forum's 2013 global IT report ranked Bangladesh 114 out of 144 countries worldwide, with infrastructure and the regulatory environment scoring poorly, though overall communication

⁵ The movement's demands were diverse, including the death sentence for the war crimes conviction, and banning the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami party from politics. See, "Shahbag Grand Rally Demands Hanging to War Criminals, Banning Jamaat (Updated)," *The Independent* (Dhaka), February 8, 2013, <http://bit.ly/18zoSTZ>.

⁶ Al Jazeera, "Bangladesh Opposition Protests turn Deadly," February 22, 2013, <http://aje.me/XF7s1z>.

⁷ International Telecommunication Union, "Percentage of Individuals Using the Internet, 2000-2012," <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>.

⁸ Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh, "Telecom and ICT: Key Enablers for Economic Development," presentation, March 25, 2013, www.amtob.org.bd.

⁹ Faheem Hussain, "License Renewal of Mobile Phone Services: What a Country Should Not Do (A Case Study of Bangladesh)," Telecommunication Policy Research Conference, George Mason University, VA, USA, September 21-23, 2012, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2032127.

¹⁰ Faheem Hussain, "ICT Sector Performance Review for Bangladesh," *LIRNEasia*, 2011. Abstract available: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2013707.

¹¹ International Telecommunication Union, "Mobile-cellular Telephone Subscriptions, 2000-2012."

¹² Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, accessed March, 2013, <http://www.btrc.gov.bd/>.

service was comparatively affordable, a factor that is driving growth.¹³ In addition, the ability to access localized information and create content in Bengali has contributed to the popularity of local blog hosting services.¹⁴

Bangladesh's physical internet infrastructure has been vulnerable to frequent disconnection, since the country historically relied on a single undersea cable (SEA-ME-WE-4) for its backbone.¹⁵ In late 2012, however, Bangladesh became connected to an international terrestrial cable managed by private companies, reducing the country's the risk of being completely cut off from the "information superhighway."¹⁶

The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), established under the Bangladesh Telecommunications Act of 2001, is the official regulatory body overseeing telecommunication and related ICT issues. However, the current administration amended the act in 2010, passing control of regulating the telecommunication sector to the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications and making the BTRC an auxiliary organization.¹⁷ This move created administrative delays in a number of basic processes like the announcement of new tariffs or license renewals.¹⁸ In addition, the prime minister's office has an Access to Information (A2I) program, supported by the United Nations Development Program, which has considerable influence over top-level ICT-related decision making.¹⁹

LIMITS ON CONTENT

The BTRC blocked access to YouTube for nearly nine months in 2012. While it had blocked social media and communication apps in the past, some fear the anti-Islamic video that prompted the censorship was merely a pretext for officials to exert more control over online content. This fear grew in 2013. As the Shahbag movement showed online mobilization gaining force, BTRC officials—without a court order—directed local blog hosts to remove four blogs for alleged anti-religious content, apparently at the behest of religious groups. In another worrisome development, a Facebook page containing a religious insult launched violent attacks on Buddhist minorities and their establishments in Ramu. A newspaper subsequently reported that the page had been doctored to incite retaliation.

The BTRC censors content relating to religious issues or that offends state leaders primarily by issuing informal orders to domestic service providers, who are legally bound through their license

¹³ Beñat Bilbao-Osorio, Soumitra Dutta, and Bruno Lanvin, "The Global Information Technology Report 2013," World Economic Forum, <http://reports.weforum.org/global-information-technology-report-2013/>.

¹⁴ Interview with Syeda Gulshan Ferdous Jana, founder of *Somewhereinblog*, April 2013.

¹⁵ Hussain, "ICT Sector Performance Review for Bangladesh."

¹⁶ "Bangladesh Connected with Terrestrial Cable," *BDNews24*, December 8, 2012, <http://bit.ly/1fyvt6j>.

¹⁷ S.M. Shahidul Islam and Abdullah-Al Monzur Hussain, "Bangladesh Telecommunication (Amended) Act, 2010," *Manual of Cyber Law in Bangladesh*, (Dhaka: Central Law Book House, 2011), 241-264.

¹⁸ Faheem Hussain, "Telecom Regulatory Environment in Digital Bangladesh: Exploring the Disconnects Between Public Policies/Regulations and Real World Sector Performance," Sixth Communication Policy Research South Conference by LIRNEasia and Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 2011.

¹⁹ "Access to Information Program," UNDP in Bangladesh, accessed in June, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1biN3ty>.

and operations agreements to cooperate. Service providers describe official censorship as ad hoc in nature, without proper follow up mechanisms in place to ensure whether the imposed restrictions have been carried out or not.²⁰ In addition, online news providers do not have the government recognition granted to traditional, licensed, press organizations, leaving them in regulatory limbo. International social media and communication apps like Facebook and YouTube are regular victims of government censorship in Bangladesh. Facebook is one of the most visited websites in the country,²¹ attracting more than 10 percent of the nation's total internet users.²² The entire platform has been blocked several times, for periods ranging from a few hours to a few days at a time, though the process by which this decision is made and implemented is not known. Government officials justify such actions as necessary to “contain negative campaigns” on social networks.²³

Google services, particularly its search engine and video-sharing website YouTube, also enjoy a high volume of user traffic. Despite its popularity, the BTRC blocked access to YouTube in Bangladesh from September 2012 to May 2013 in response to a 14-minute derogatory video about Islam titled, “The Innocence of Muslims.”²⁴ The video, uploaded in the United States in summer 2012, incited violent anti-American protests in Bangladesh, among other predominantly Muslim nations.²⁵ Google temporarily blocked versions of the video in some countries, apparently on grounds that the content broke local laws, but declined to do so in Bangladesh.²⁶ Some critics said the length of the ban in Bangladesh indicates the disputed video was a pretext for officials to gain control over the video-sharing platform, which they have blocked in the past for politically sensitive content.²⁷ However, the impact of the censorship was less severe than the duration implies, since some ISPs informally unblocked the platform after just a few weeks. Other internet users continued to access it using proxy servers. So far, the BTRC has not sought to block software that allows users to circumvent content blocking.

Domestically-hosted websites, including the most popular news sites, *Prothom Alo*, *BDNews24*, and *Banglanews24*, have yet to face any targeted blocking. However, in March 2013, the government formed an official committee to identify bloggers who had allegedly demeaned the spirit of Islam.²⁸ The committee participated in discussions with clerics to produce a list of bloggers and Facebook users they alleged had published anti-Islamic blasphemy.²⁹ Though there were more than 80 names

²⁰ Author interviews with seven experts in Bangladesh who requested anonymity, early 2013.

²¹ Alexa, “Top Sites in Bangladesh,” accessed May, 2013, <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/BD>.

²² Social Bakers, “Bangladesh Facebook Statistics,” accessed May 2013, <http://bit.ly/KcscJ>.

²³ Ariful Faisal, “Facebook Opens After a Short Period Block,” *Priyo*, February 28, 2012, <http://bit.ly/16Jwtuo>.

²⁴ Abdullah Mamun, “YouTube Blocked in Bangladesh,” *The Daily Star*, September 18, 2012, <http://bit.ly/1azjwHF>.

²⁵ Mamun, “YouTube Blocked in Bangladesh.”

²⁶ Arun Devnath & Haris Anwar, “Pakistan, Bangladesh Block YouTube; Saudis May Follow,” Bloomberg News, September 20, 2013, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-09-18/pakistan-bangladesh-block-youtube-to-restrict-anti-islam-film.html>.

²⁷ Zafar Sobhan, “YouTube is Still Banned in Bangla,” *The Sunday Guardian*, October 27, 2012, <http://www.sunday-guardian.com/analysis/youtube-is-still-banned-in-bangla>. Authorities have instigated politically-motivated, though temporary blocks on YouTube in the past. See: BBC News, “Bangladesh Imposes YouTube Block,” March 9, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7932659.stm>.

²⁸ Global Voices Advocacy, “Bangladesh Authorities Go After ‘Anti-Muslim’ Bloggers,” April 1, 2013, <http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/2013/04/01/bangladesh-authorities-go-after-anti-muslim-bloggers/>.

²⁹ “Churashi Bloggerer Talika Shorastro Montronaloye,” [Home Ministry has the List of Eighty-four Bloggers], *NatunBarta*, March 31, 2013, <http://www.natunbarta.com/si-tech/2013/03/31/18939/>.

on the list, the BTRC subsequently directed domestic blog hosting platforms to close the accounts of just four bloggers it identified as “anti-religious elements.” All four were prominently involved in the Shahbag movement, which had come into conflict with ultra-religious groups as well as the administration, which they accused of poor governance. The owners of the host platforms reported that officials never used any court orders or legal explanations during their communications.³⁰ Officially, the legal system ensures the right to appeal against most government decisions, but the lack of a warrant, as well as the risk of losing a license or legal permission to operate, makes mounting such an appeal challenging, and so far none have been documented in response to censorship directives.

Such strict and opaque content regulation has resulted in self-censorship by social media users, bloggers, and online news media. In particular, the developments of the last year have made discussion of religious issues more sensitive. More positively, there has been no evidence of government officials proactively manipulating online content. Some unknown actors, however, apparently orchestrated an outbreak of religious violence in the Ramu area of southeastern Chittagong based on a Facebook profile. In September 2012, members of the local Muslim majority community accused a Buddhist of displaying an anti-Islamic image on his Facebook profile and launched retaliatory attacks that destroyed a dozen temples. *The Daily Star* newspaper reported in October that the image had been added to the Facebook profile, then shown to Muslims both online and off, falsely creating the impression that local Buddhists were sharing blasphemous material. No police investigation was launched into the alleged manipulation, and the page’s owner was forced to flee the area.³¹

Despite recent restrictions and uncertainties, there are around 200,000 active bloggers in Bangladesh, and this number is growing. The BTRC has identified 48 active domestic blog hosting platforms. Leading examples, based on subscriber figures, include SomewhereinBlog, Amarblog, and Shocholayoton.³²

The Shahbag Movement, which was initiated by the Bangladesh Online Activists’ Network, is the country’s most significant example of online activism to date. The protests coalesced around the International Crimes Tribunal verdict against the Jamaat-e-Islami leader (see Introduction) but quickly took on a political element.³³ In its early stages, however, the movement spread through blogging, Facebook, and mobile telephony.³⁴ Twitter, previously little-used in Bangladesh, gained popularity as a tool to broadcast information about Shahbag, both domestically and internationally.³⁵

³⁰ Global Voices Advocacy, “Bangladesh Authorities Go After ‘Anti-Muslim’ Bloggers.”

³¹ “A Devil’s Design,” *The Daily Star*, October 14, 2012, <http://bit.ly/1eQ4GBn>.

³² “Blog,” *Daily Manab Zamin*, April 4, 2013, <http://bit.ly/17clexA>.

³³ Mohammad Shahid Ullah, “Shahbagh People’s Movement: New Generation Challenging the Unjust Structure,” *Voice of the Oppressed*, February 18, 2013, <http://www.voiceoftheoppressed.in/tag/bangladesh-online-activist-network/>.

³⁴ Tamanna Khan, “Shahbag Beyond Boundaries,” *The Daily Star*, March 29, 2013, <http://bit.ly/18zMyW8>.

³⁵ Faheem Hussain, Zyma Islam, and Mashiat Mostafa, “Proliferation of Twitter for Political Microblogging in a Developing Country: An Exploratory Study of #Shahbag,” (unpublished research funded by the Asian University for Women Faculty Research Fund, 2013).

VIOLATIONS OF USER RIGHTS

The February 2013 murder of blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider by armed assailants after an ultra-religious blog identified him as a Shahbag organizer was one of the most shocking developments during the coverage period for this report. While the government offered to protect some secularist bloggers from the hate speech spiraling out of control online in the wake of the Shahbag movement, it clouded that message by arresting four of them, including one who had been stabbed just a few months before, in April. Domestic online news sites faced cyber-attacks during periods of heightened religious contention.

Article 39 (1, 2) of Chapter 2 in the Bangladeshi constitution recognizes freedom of thought, conscience, and speech as a fundamental right.³⁶ Online expression has been traditionally considered to fall within the scope of this provision. The Information and Communication Technology Act of 2006 is the primary legal reference for addressing issues related to internet usage, in addition to defining and protecting freedom of expression online; it also penalizes citizens who violate others' rights to communicate electronically.³⁷ In addition, the amended Bangladesh Telecommunication Act of 2010 allows officials to intercept electronic communications from any individual or institution to ensure the security of the state or public order.³⁸ The judicial system of Bangladesh is independent from the executive and the legislative branches of government, but critics say it can be partisan, and police and regulators generally bypass the courts to implement censorship and surveillance without oversight.³⁹

Section 56 of the ICT Act defines hacking as a crime punishable by up to three years in prison, a fine of BDT 10,000,000 (\$ 125,000), or both. Section 57 is vaguer, and characterizes different types of religious, social or political expression made electronically as potential violations. People found guilty under this section face a maximum of 10 years imprisonment and fines up to BDT 10,000,000 (\$125,000).⁴⁰

The first arrests made using these clauses took place in 2013. On April 1, as regulators were shutting down their websites, police detained bloggers Rasel Parvez, Mashiur Rahman Biplob, and Subrata Ashikari Shuvo. Two days later they also detained Asif Mohiuddin, author of a renowned blog on sensitive sociopolitical issues that won a user-nominated award from German broadcaster Deutsche Welle in 2012.⁴¹ Just a few months before his arrest, in January 2013, Mohiuddin was

³⁶ S.M. Shahidul Islam and Abdullah-Al Monzur Hussain, "Right to Information Act, 2009", *Manual of Cyber Law in Bangladesh*, (Dhaka, Central Law Book House, 2011) 1-47.

³⁷ S.M. Shahidul Islam and Abdullah-Al Monzur Hussain, "Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006," *Manual of Cyber Law in Bangladesh*, (Dhaka, Central Law Book House, 2011) 90-91.

³⁸ Bangladesh Telecommunication (Amended) Act, 2010.

³⁹ "The Historic Masdar Hossain Case and the Independence of Judiciary of Bangladesh: A Compilation," *Wahab Ohid Legal Aid*, March 12, 2013, <http://wahabohidlegalaid.blogspot.com/2013/03/the-historic-masdar-hossain-case-and.html>; M. Moneruzzaman, "Judiciary Independence Still on Paper," *The Bangladesh Chronicle*, January 15, 2013, <http://www.bangladeshchronicle.net/index.php/2013/01/judiciary-independence-still-on-paper/>.

⁴⁰ Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006.

⁴¹ Emran Hossain, "Bangladesh Arrests 'Atheist Bloggers,' Cracking Down on Critics," *Huffington Post*, April 3, 2013,

hospitalized with serious stab wounds, apparently inflicted by armed assailants in reprisal for his writing and activism.⁴² All four bloggers were charged with harming religious sentiment under Section 57(2) of the ICT Act 2006, and conservative political forces branded them as anti-Islamic atheists, though activists defended them.⁴³ The bloggers were later released on bail, though Asif Mohiuddin's application was initially denied until he appealed on medical grounds in June.⁴⁴ A judge declined to extend bail beyond one month, and he was re-arrested in July.⁴⁵

Also in April, police arrested Mahmudur Rahman, acting editor and majority owner of the pro-opposition newspaper *Amar Desh*, on charges that included defaming religion under ICT Act sections 56 and 57.⁴⁶ The case was the latest in dozens of investigations involving Rahman that his supporters characterize as politically motivated. In 2012, he was charged with sedition in relation to his paper's publication of private Skype communications involving an International Crimes Tribunal judge that cast doubt on the integrity of the tribunal's judgments;⁴⁷ the judge issued a court order against the U.K.-based *Economist* magazine in the same case, though much of the material was leaked online in Bangladesh.⁴⁸

The threat of sedition charges—which carry a possible death penalty—has been used against others for online activity. In October 2012, Australian immigration authorities granted asylum to Muhammad Ruhul Khandaker after a court in Bangladesh recommended he be charged with sedition for a comment he posted to his personal Facebook account while living in Australia.⁴⁹ In January 2012, the court had sentenced Khandaker in absentia to six months in jail for contempt of court when he failed to attend a hearing in Dhaka in relation to the comment, which was considered insulting to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.⁵⁰

At present, the government allows anonymous access and web posting, and does not require website owners, bloggers, or internet users to register. However, even though people can post comments online without revealing their true identities, they are susceptible to surveillance. Under the 2010 Telecommunication Act, regulators have the power to intercept any communication—

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/03/bangladesh-bloggers_n_3009137.html; Arafatul Islam, "Bangladesh Gags Award-winning Blogger," *Deutsche Welle*, March 25, 2013, <http://dw.de/p/183px>.

⁴² "Blogger Knifed in Dhaka," *BDNews24*, January 14, 2013, <http://bit.ly/10vt99p>.

⁴³ "'Bloggers' to be Charged under ICT Act," *BDNews24*, April 4, 2013, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2013/04/02/bloggers-to-be-charged-under-ict-act>. See also, Rezwan, "Bloggers in Bangladesh Face Threats Online and Off," *Slate, Future Tense* (blog), April 4, 2013, <http://slate.me/YOKiBE>.

⁴⁴ "Bloggers Shuvo, Parvez Released," *The Daily Star*, May 12, 2013 <http://www.thedailystar.net/beta2/news/bloggers-shuvo-parvez-get-bail/>; Md Sanaul Islam Tipu, "Blogger Moshir Granted Bail," *Dhaka Tribune*, June 2, 2013; <http://bit.ly/13d88yi>;

"Blogger Asif Mohiuddin Gets Bail", *BDNews24*, June 27, 2013, <http://bit.ly/18zMRQY>.

⁴⁵ "Blogger Asif sent to jail again," *The Daily Star*, July 29, 2013, <http://bit.ly/15qApCO>.

⁴⁶ "Mahmudur Rahman Arrested Under ICT Act: MK Alamgir," *The Independent* (Dhaka), April 11, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1fRgQZH>.

⁴⁷ T.J., "Press Freedom in Bangladesh: 'In the Best Interest of the Media,'" *Banyan* (blog), *The Economist*, May 25, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2013/05/press-freedom-bangladesh>.

⁴⁸ *Economist*, "The Trial of the Birth of a Nation," December 15, 2012, <http://econ.st/RpQnK7>.

⁴⁹ Adam Gartrell, "Bangladeshi Gets Asylum over Facebook Case," *Australian Associated Press*, November 27, 2012, <http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-national/bangladeshi-gets-asylum-over-facebook-case-20121127-2a5b9.html>.

⁵⁰ Amanda Hodge, "Student, Muhammad Ruhul Khandaker, Fears Death Penalty for Facebook Comment," *The Australian*, January 10, 2012, <http://bit.ly/woBd2g>.

voice or data—over the telecom network without a court order.⁵¹ Both data and voice service providers are required by law to aid the government in monitoring the user communications.⁵² Meanwhile, citizens must provide their national identity card and related personal information to obtain a mobile connection.

The BTRC has also been using methods such as deep-packet inspection to identify “unlawful and sensitive information” sent over the internet, according to news reports.⁵³ The government has yet to define “unlawful” or “sensitive,” but no abuse of deep-packet inspection has been documented. There is no independent oversight body in Bangladesh to guard against the abuse of surveillance options initiated by the government.

The physical safety of journalists and media personnel is at risk in Bangladesh, with three journalists killed in 2012.⁵⁴ Bloggers and online news providers have also suffered from physical attacks, and reported an increasing number of threats in the past year from different groups, perhaps in response to intensifying activism by the Shahbag Movement and others. The government’s response was contradictory, supporting the pro-independence, secular bloggers against the threats of anti-Shahbag elements, while arresting some known, pro-Shahbag online activists for insulting Islam.

On February 15, 2013, during the peak of the Shahbag Movement, one of the group’s leading activists, Ahmed Rajib Haider, was brutally murdered by suspected religious extremists.⁵⁵ Police found a series of posts targeting Rajib and other key figures in the movement on the blog, Sonar Bangladesh, which the BTRC subsequently blocked.⁵⁶ The first of such posts was against Rajib, whose critical stance against religious extremism apparently offended them. On March 1, five people police described as religious extremists were detained in connection with Rajib’s murder.⁵⁷ On April 1, 2013, police arrested four suspects in relation to the attack on Asif Mohiuddin, also linking them with religious extremism.⁵⁸

Cyberattacks on key government websites, online news sites, and blogs are also on the rise. News sites *The Daily Star*, *Prothom Alo*, *BDNews24*, and *Banglanews24* have regularly been victims of hacking and related cyberattacks by third parties; *Prothom Alo* and the London-hosted *UKBDNews* website

⁵¹ Abu Saeed Khan, presentation in “Third South Asian Meeting on the Internet and Freedom of Expression,” Dhaka, Bangladesh, 14-15 January 2013.

⁵² Bangladesh Telecommunication (Amended) Act, 2010.

⁵³ Ashraf Khan, “Cyber Crime Niyontrone Paanch Koti Takar Device” [The Device Forth Five Crore to Control Cyber Crime], *Daily Manab Zamin*, April 20, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1biMIHp>.

⁵⁴ The motive for the murder was definitely related to journalism in one case; it remains unconfirmed in the other two. See, Committee to Protect Journalists, “14 Journalists Killed in Bangladesh since 1992,” <http://www.cpj.org/killed/asia/bangladesh/>, accessed July 2013.

⁵⁵ “Blogger Brutally Killed,” *The Daily Star*, February 16, 2013, <http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=269336>.

⁵⁶ “12 Blogs, Facebook Pages Blocked,” *BDNews24*, February 20, 2013 <http://dev-bd.bdnnews24.com/details.php?id=240964&cid=2>.

⁵⁷ “Blogger Rajib Killing - Mastermind Shibir man,” *The Daily Star*, March 3, 2013 <http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=271147>.

⁵⁸ “4 Held For Attacking Blogger Asif,” *BDNews24*, April 1, 2013, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2013/04/01/4-held-for-attacking-blogger-asif>.

reported being infected with malware in February 2013,⁵⁹ while *The Daily Star* site was attacked by Anonymous in March.⁶⁰ The youth population has turned out to be the most vulnerable group against any privacy violations, predominantly through mobile phones and the internet.⁶¹ People are slowly realizing the importance of protecting their online presence against any outside, unlawful intrusion. ISPs informally organized a Bangladesh Cyber Emergency Response Team and are working towards dealing with cyberattacks, hacking, and other malicious threats.⁶² In addition, the Bangladesh government has established its own response mechanism to deal with such issues.

⁵⁹ Eqramul Islam, "Prothom-alo Spreading Viruses, ukbdnews.com Under Attack," *UKBD News*, February 19, 2013 <http://ukbdnews.com/english/1119-prothom-alo-spreading-viruses-ukbdnewscom-under-attack.html>.

⁶⁰ "Daily Star Website Hacked," *Daily Sun*, March 5, 2013

http://www.daily-sun.com/details_yes_05-03-2013_Daily-Star-website-hacked_428_1_0_3_32.html.

⁶¹ Faheem Hussain and Mohammad Sahid Ullah, "Mobile Communication and Internet in Bangladesh: Is Privacy at Risk for Youth Population?" *Media Watch*, Centre for Communication Studies, 2013

⁶² Bangladesh Cyber Emergency Response Team, accessed April, 2013, <http://www.bdcert.org/v2/>.