

GNI Statement on Digital Policy Reforms in Bangladesh

The Global Network Initiative (GNI) is concerned by the opaque, exclusionary, and accelerated digital policy reform process undertaken by the Interim Government of Bangladesh. What initially appeared to be a positive shift toward building a rights-respecting and citizen-centric digital ecosystem has been undermined by serious deficiencies in coordination, transparency, and accountability in the policymaking process led by the interim administration. GNI, a multistakeholder organization of over 100 academic, civil society, investor, and company members working to advance freedom of expression and privacy in the technology sector, calls on - all political parties and relevant stakeholders in Bangladesh to uphold human rights in the context of February's national elections and to prioritize open, transparent, and rights-based digital policy reforms soon thereafter.

The Interim Government's Missed Opportunity

Although some positive steps have been taken by the Interim Government to curb unchecked internet shutdowns, recent ordinances – particularly the Bangladesh Telecommunication (Amendment) Ordinance (BTO) 2025, the Personal Data Protection Ordinance (PDPO) 2025, the National Data Management Ordinance (NDMO) 2025, and the Cyber Security Ordinance (CSO) 2025 – largely reproduce the centralized, state-centric governance model of previous governments. GNI [reiterates](#) its concern over the absence of transparent and inclusive consultations around these ordinances, which has resulted in a failure to address long-standing issues related to excessive executive control over online service providers by the telecommunications regulator and national security agencies. These gaps continue to pose serious risks to freedom of expression, privacy, and other allied constitutionally protected rights in Bangladesh.

Despite early commitments to open, inclusive, and evidence-based lawmaking, the Interim Government pursued an overly rushed and ambitious reform agenda. Consultations were irregular, poorly communicated, non-transparent, and insufficient to enable meaningful stakeholder engagement. As a result, ordinances were enacted within weeks of Cabinet approval, reflecting a lack of deliberation and coherence. The outcome is a set of laws marked by procedural and structural flaws that risk undermining their effectiveness while enabling abuse in practice.

The impact of such a lack of consultation is exacerbated in the context of ordinances that introduce significant changes to existing law. For instance, the amended BTO 2025 represents a major [overhaul](#) of Bangladesh's telecommunications framework. A 10-day consultation period was [announced](#) on 4 November 2025 for the ordinance without prior notice, and no official English translation of the draft was provided. The draft was subsequently revised without further consultation and [approved](#) by the Cabinet of Advisors on 25 December 2025, with no explanation provided for the non-acceptance of recommendations. The final text remains publicly unavailable, limiting substantive analysis, and based on limited [media reporting](#), the only discernible positive development is the formal prohibition of internet shutdowns. Earlier proposals suggesting the effective dissolution of the National Telecommunications Monitoring Center (NTMC), an agency [credibly linked](#) to abusive surveillance practices, and the surveillance architecture behind it, were reportedly [abandoned](#). The ordinance [establishes](#) a new body, the Centre for Information Support (CIS), which is endowed with broad surveillance powers. While oversight is vested in a quasi-judicial council chaired by the home secretary, with senior officials from the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs and the Armed Forces Division as members, the lack of independence and transparency provided makes this arrangement inconsistent with Bangladesh's international and constitutional human rights commitments. This restructuring risks perpetuating executive overreach and represents a missed opportunity to enhance the rule of law and national security.

GNI also reiterates the concerns we [previously articulated](#) regarding the CSO 2025 and the PDPO 2025. Both ordinances [grant](#) expansive executive authority over the digital sphere, confer overly broad investigatory and enforcement powers on law enforcement agencies, allow disproportionate access to user data, and impose wide-ranging content restrictions on service providers. The PDPO 2025 creates [additional risks](#) by introducing overly broad extraterritorial application, mandating data localization of personal data to be classified by the government without any clear criteria, and imposing criminal liability for technical non-compliance. It also permits the collection and processing of personal data on sweeping grounds, including national security, public order, law enforcement, and other government-defined purposes, while exempting much of public administration from meaningful transparency and compliance framework. Approved alongside the PDPO 2025, the NDMO 2025 poses further threats to privacy and freedom of expression through mandatory data disclosures. Together, these provisions risk legitimizing expansive state surveillance and data processing without adequate safeguards, increasing the risk of data breaches, and undermining democratic accountability. As such, they neither achieve the stated policy objectives nor adequately reflect constitutional commitments to citizens' right to privacy.

While GNI acknowledges the scale and ambition of the Interim Government’s overall reform efforts, we regret the missed opportunity to demonstrate a transparent, consultative process capable of producing rights-respecting outcomes and to establish a modern, rights-respecting digital legal framework.

The Importance of Democratic Transition and Ongoing Reform

GNI is also deeply concerned by [recent violence](#) targeting political leaders, journalists, independent media outlets, and cultural institutions in Bangladesh. That such attacks occurred under the watch of the Interim Government underscore the fragility of human rights protections in the current environment. With general elections approaching, GNI calls on the Interim Government, Election Commission, political parties, and other actors to protect and respect human rights, including freedom of expression.

As the interim period draws to a close, constitutional guarantees and international human rights obligations, particularly those protecting privacy and freedom of expression, must guide both the substance and process of digital policy reform. GNI urges the next elected government to undertake a comprehensive review of these ordinances through an open, transparent, and genuinely multistakeholder process. GNI remains ready to engage constructively and offer support toward building a digital ecosystem that respects fundamental rights.

About GNI

GNI is the leading multistakeholder forum for accountability, shared learning, and collective advocacy on government and company policies and practices at the intersection of technology and human rights. Over the last several years, GNI has reviewed, commented on, and helped shape a range of “online safety” bills, data protection laws, and intermediary liability laws across several jurisdictions. Our human rights analysis and recommendations for policymakers can be found in the Content Regulation & Human Rights Policy Brief, which uses international human rights principles to analyze a wide range of legislative efforts and provides proactive guidance on how to address online safety and digital regulations in a rights-protective manner.