

**Digital Governance Commitments
in Party Manifestos for 13th National
Parliamentary Election of Bangladesh**

2 February 2026, Hotel Sarina, Dhaka

Bangladesh Internet Governance Forum (BIGF)

<https://bangladeshigf.org>

Digital Governance Manifesto Recommendations for the Political Parties

Background:

In anticipation of the upcoming 13th National Parliament Election, the Bangladesh Internet Governance Forum (BIGF) organized a roundtable discussion to analyze the importance given to digital governance pledges in the election manifestos of political parties. The discussion, titled "Digital Governance Pledges in Party Manifestos," was held on Monday evening (February 2) at Hotel Sarina in Banani, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The roundtable highlighted issues related to Bangladesh's digital future, citizens' rights, post-election policy priorities, and the development of actionable recommendations. The primary objective was to foster mutual understanding of Bangladesh's key digital governance priorities and to present consensus-based recommendations to help political parties incorporate these issues into their manifestos and policymaking.

Key topics discussed included digital rights and inclusion, affordable and meaningful internet connectivity, data protection and privacy, cybersecurity, information integrity, digital public infrastructure, sustainable internet, innovation, responsible artificial intelligence, and transparency and accountability in digital governance.

The roundtable was attended by academics, policymakers, politicians, researchers, media personnel, lawyers, youth and representatives from various institutions and communities.



The Keynote presentation is prepared by:

Md. Saimum Reza Talukder

Vice-Chairperson, Bangladesh Internet Governance Forum (BIGF)

Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh

Adjunct Faculty, BRAC University, North South University, and Independent University of Bangladesh

Former member, Artificial Intelligence Working Group, Hannah Arendt Center for Politics and Humanities, Vienna University



Moderation & Distinguished Guests:

The event was moderated by BIGF Executive Member Ms. Sharmin Khan. Attendees included BIGF Chairperson Mr. Aminul Hakim, BIGF Secretary General Mr. Mohammad Abdul Haque Anu, Information and Technology Affairs Secretary of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Mr. AKM Wahiduzzaman, Rastro Songskar Andolon (State Reform Movement) Joint Secretary Mr. Didarul Bhuiyan, Journalist and Political Analyst Mr. Maruf Mallick, Chairman of the Management Information Systems Department at Dhaka University Prof. Dr. Md. Rakibul Hoque, and Professor of Computer Science at United International University Dr. Khandaker A. Mamun. Other notable attendees were Bangladesh Association of Contact Center & Outsourcing (BACCO) Secretary General Mr. Faisal Alim, Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) Executive Director Mr. T.I.M. Nurul Kabir, Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh (AMTOB) Head of Communications Mr. Abdullah Al Mamun, Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and

Communication (BNNRC) CEO & Executive Member BIGF Mr. AHM Bazlur Rahman, Economic Analyst Mr. Galib Ibn Anwarul Azim, Views Bangladesh Editor Mr. Rashed Mehedi, Bangladesh Women Internet Governance Forum Chairperson Ms. Shamima Akhtar, Bangladesh Youth Internet Governance Forum Chairperson Ms. Syeda Kamrun Jahan Ripa, Genius Firms Ltd. CIO Mr. Mohammad Irad Ali, Private University Students' Alliance of Bangladesh (PUSAB) Founder & President Mr. Abdullah Al Mahfuz Zakaria, Cyber Security expert Mr. Parvez Alam, Fiber@Home Chief of Government & Regulatory Officer Mr. Abbas Faruq, and BIGF Executive Member Dr. Jamil Ahmed.



Based on the keynote presentation and the discussions by the distinguished attendees of the above-mentioned seminar, the policy recommendations to the political parties before the upcoming national election are as follows:

Theme / Section	Key Challenges & Context	Proposed Manifesto Commitments (Strategic)	Specific Actionable Recommendations (Stakeholder Inputs)
1. Legal & Regulatory Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Laws often enacted without stakeholder input. "Broadcasting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Law First" Principle: Enact primary laws defining rights and scope <i>before</i> forming regulatory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review & Reform: Review existing laws and policies immediately upon taking power. Stakeholder Inclusion:



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	<p>Commission" proposed without a primary Act.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existence of "repressive laws" used for suppression. 	<p>commissions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeal Repressive Laws: Commitment to repeal or reform laws that facilitate repression. 	<p>Involve relevant stakeholders (public/private) in all law-making processes.</p>
2. Institutional Accountability & Financial Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of evaluation of agencies like a2i over the last 15 years. • Unclear usage of the "Social Obligation Fund" (SOF). • Question of whether laws or institutions take precedence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional Review: Comprehensive "Stock-Taking" of digital agencies to assess achievements and mistakes. • Fund Transparency: Guarantee transparency in the usage of funds meant for the underprivileged. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90/180-Day Action Plan: Adopt a clear, 90/180-day roadmap for the ICT sector immediately after the election. • Comprehensive Audits: Conduct financial audits of IT sector allocations and expenditures from previous governments. • Accountability Mechanism: Bring government institutions under strict accountability frameworks.
3. Internet Access & Affordability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Usage Gap": 93.4 million citizens remain offline. • Data costs prohibit access for students and workers. • Internet shutdowns harm the economy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Zero-Cost Access": Policy for zero-rated (free) data access to education, health, and government services. • Right to Connectivity: Guarantee no arbitrary internet shutdowns; protect online rights as offline rights. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal Coverage Target: Commit to bringing all the population, if not then majority of the population, under affordable internet coverage. • Free Digital Services: Consider providing specific digital services free of charge to safeguard citizen rights.
4. Digital Infrastructure & Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of redundancy limits foreign investment. • Fragmented systems act as "islands of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unified "DPI Authority": Establish a body to oversee interoperable Digital Public Infrastructure (e.g. ID, Payments etc.). • Infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5-10 Submarine Cables: Install at least 5 to 10 submarine cables to ensure stability and attract big-tech investment. • Central Data Center: Establish a central national data center to

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	data". • Dependence on limited submarine cables.	Redundancy: Ensure robust backup systems for national connectivity.	streamline government data storage.
5. Data Governance & Sovereignty	• Critical/sensitive data stored in foreign clouds creates jurisdictional risk. • Unclear data ownership and transfer policies.	• "Digital Embassy" Strategy: Legal frameworks to maintain sovereign rights over data stored in foreign jurisdictions. • Data Ownership Policy: Clear definition of who owns user data.	• Cross-Border Security: Establish clear policies and security protocols for transferring data between countries. • National Data Strategy: Develop a strategy to ensure Bangladesh is not just a data consumer but a sovereign owner.
6. Artificial Intelligence (AI) & Innovation	• Lack of a comprehensive AI policy. • Risk of "cultural erasure" by relying solely on foreign AI models.	• "Sovereign AI": Invest in capacity to train AI models on local datasets to preserve language/culture. • Sector-Specific AI: Utilize AI for national food security and development.	• National AI Framework: Urgently formulate a comprehensive AI policy, strategy, and regulatory framework. • AI in Agriculture: Specific policies to deploy AI technology in the agricultural sector to ensure food safety and sovereignty.
7. Online Safety & Social Inclusion	• Women represent only 36.9% of social media users vs. 63.1% men. • Rising online threats to women and children.	• Inclusive-by-Design: Ensure digital systems work for those with low literacy or limited tech access. • Gender-Responsive Policy: specific measures to close the digital gender gap.	• One-Stop Crisis System: Create a "One Stop Crisis Management System" coordinating gov/private sectors to protect women and children online. • Safety Coordination: Collaborate with private bodies to enhance online safety for students.
8. Strategic	• Global shift to	• "Tech-Economic	• Public-Private Coordination:



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Autonomy & Economic Growth	"Economic Nationalism" requires local resilience. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need for coordination among government agencies.	"Nationalism" : Strategy to prioritize local software/tech development over foreign dependency. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Negotiation Capability: Leverage Global South position for better tech transfer deals.	Ensure ICT policies reflect the opinions of both sectors. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unified Services: Coordinate among various agencies to provide collective/integrated ICT services rather than fragmented ones.
9. Digital Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data centers consume massive energy; Bangladesh is climate-vulnerable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Green Digital Policy": Mandate renewable energy use for data centers and digital infrastructure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Green Investment: Prioritize investment and innovation in green technologies.• E-Waste Regulation: Enforce strict regulations on electronic waste management.

With best wishes, Esteem!

Mohammad Abdul Haque Anu
Secretary General, BIGF