

# **Project Completion Report**

**(2 March 2025 to 31 March 2025)**

## **Strengthening News Media Freedom and Accountability in Bangladesh**

**Prepared by**



**Submission Date: 9 April 2025**

## **Background**

The interim government, formed following the mass upsurge, has formed a Media Reform Commission to recommend steps necessary for initiating reforms in the media sector. The commission will propose a set of reforms in consultation with various stakeholders by 31 March 2025.

Since its inception, MRDI is implementing various activities to enhance the quality of news media and journalism in Bangladesh. MRDI has already submitted a set of reform recommendations to the commission based on insights gathered through seven consultation meetings with media stakeholders and expert interviews.

As part of its continued support, MRDI would be supporting the Media Reform Commission according to its needs before submitting final recommendations to the Interim Government under this project. In response to a request from the Head of the Commission and following discussions, MRDI would support in drafting the National Media Reform Policy 2025 and the Journalists' Protection Ordinance 2025.

## **Objectives**

To provide support to the Media Reform Commission as required.

## **Activities performed**

During the reporting period, MRDI developed two significant draft ordinances: the National Media Commission Ordinance, 2025 and the Journalists Protection Ordinance, 2025. The drafts were designed to uphold freedom of news media, provide safeguards for journalists and news media workers, enhance accountability and improve quality of journalism.

### **Activity 1: Draft of National Media Commission Ordinance, 2025**

On request Media Reform Commission of the interim government of Bangladesh, MRDI developed the draft of The National Media Commission Ordinance, 2025 that aims to establish an independent media commission to safeguard news media professionals and address grievance by consumers to bring accountability in the industry.

MRDI engaged Md. Moinul Kabir, former secretary of the Legislative and Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs to prepare primary draft of the ordinance. The expert, with feedback from chair of Media Reform Commission and MRDI team, revised the draft ordinance and shared the final draft with MRDI and reform commission.

In order to draft the ordinance, the expert reviewed existing national and regional laws and other documents and proposed revisions and synchronization of legal provisions to create a more journalism-friendly, responsible, and responsive regulatory system that supports independent journalism. The ordinance if enacted is expected to address gaps in existing laws and policies and endorsed best practices from regional and global laws by integrating it to Bangladesh's framework.

The ordinance presents a structure of the formation of the media commission, its organogram and criteria for selection of members, the scope of work for the commission, its authority relating to principle of self-regulation in news media and its financial management. It

authorized the commission to have the rights and responsibility to handle complaints, enforce ethical guidelines and promote transparency in news media operations.

### **Activity 2- Draft of Journalists Protection Ordinance, 2025**

MRDI developed another draft ordinance for journalist protection as part of the project and on request of the interim government's Media Reform Commission. If enacted, the Journalist Protection Ordinance is expected to offer legal safeguards for journalists and news media outlets to allow the journalists perform their duties without fear of retaliation or intimidation.

Similar to the previous activity, MRDI engaged Md. Moinul Kabir to prepare primary draft of the ordinance. The expert, with feedback from chair of Media Reform Commission and MRDI team, revised the draft ordinance and shared the final draft with MRDI and reform commission.

One of the key mandate of the ordinance is protection of journalists against lawsuits and harassment which are often used as tools to silence critical reporting in Bangladesh. With such safeguards, the ordinance if enacted will empower journalists to continue their work with confidence knowing they are protected from intimidation and harassment.

The ordinance covers sections on protection of journalists' lives, their independence and right to privacy, freedom of expression and favorable working environment. This Ordinance ensures the punishment for those who violate the safety, security and freedom of the journalists and news media workers.

### **Activity 3: Review of the Draft of National Media Commission Ordinance, 2025**

MRDI engaged two technical reviewers for review of the draft of National Media Commission Ordinance, 2025. Afsan Chowdhury, a researcher and writer, and Sajjad Sharif, Executive Editor of Daily Prothom Alo reviewed the draft and provided their inputs and opinions on the draft.

The second draft of ordinance on journalists' protection had not been reviewed by MRDI as the draft was reviewed by the reform commission members of the interim governments.