

Concept Note | World Press Freedom Day 2026

In 1993, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 3 May as World Press Freedom Day, marking a historic step toward promoting a free press and freedom of expression globally. Since then, the global media landscape has undergone significant transformation, driven by the expansion of independent media and the rapid evolution of digital technologies. International frameworks and human rights standards have continued to reinforce the central role of press freedom in democratic governance, sustainable development, and peace.

However, in recent years, the challenges facing journalists and media institutions have become increasingly complex. UNESCO's global analyses highlight a growing decline in media independence, rising self-censorship, and increasing threats to journalists, particularly in politically sensitive contexts. The digital transformation of the information ecosystem has further complicated these dynamics, accelerating the spread of misinformation and disinformation while challenging the sustainability and credibility of professional journalism. In this context, the concept of "Information as a Public Good," reaffirmed in the Windhoek+30 Declaration (2021), remains highly relevant.

Rebuilding Public Trust: Media Independence and Democratic Accountability in Bangladesh

Public trust in media is fundamental to democratic governance, enabling citizens to access reliable information, engage in informed public debate, and hold power to account. As emphasized by UNESCO, independent, pluralistic, and professional media are essential to safeguarding freedom of expression and ensuring access to information. However, UNESCO's *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development* points to a global decline in media independence and rising self-censorship, particularly in politically sensitive contexts such as elections and democratic transitions.

In Bangladesh, these challenges are particularly pronounced as the country navigates an evolving political and reform landscape. A recent media assessment by UNESCO and UNDP highlights that legal constraints, political pressures, and structural imbalances within the media sector continue to limit the full exercise of press freedom. These dynamics have direct implications for the ability of journalists to report independently on issues of public interest, including governance, accountability, and electoral processes, ultimately affecting public trust in both media and democratic institutions.

The transformation of the information ecosystem has further intensified these challenges. The digital environment in Bangladesh has become increasingly contested, with the rapid spread of misinformation, disinformation, and politically motivated narratives. During electoral periods,

these risks are amplified, undermining informed decision-making and distorting public discourse. At the same time, limited media and information literacy and weak verification practices contribute to the erosion of trust in credible journalism.

UNESCO's work on ensuring the safety of journalists underscores that threats, harassment, surveillance, and legal pressures against journalists not only endanger individuals but also restrict the public's right to information. In Bangladesh, such pressures, combined with concerns around media ownership concentration and economic vulnerabilities, can contribute to self-censorship and reduced editorial independence, particularly in coverage of politically sensitive issues.

Rebuilding public trust in this context requires addressing both structural and political dimensions of the media environment. Recognizing these dynamics, there is a need to examine how media stakeholders, including journalists, editors, media owners, policymakers, and civil society, can work collectively to reinforce media credibility, safeguard independent journalism, and strengthen democratic accountability in Bangladesh.

Objectives of World Press Freedom Day 2026

World Press Freedom Day 2026 aims to examine the role of media independence in rebuilding public trust and strengthening democratic accountability in Bangladesh, in line with global commitments to freedom of expression and **SDG 16.10**.

The discussion will:

- Reaffirm the universal commitment to freedom of expression and press freedom.
- Explore the relationship between media independence, public trust, and democratic accountability.
- Identify key challenges affecting media credibility, including disinformation, political pressures, and safety concerns.
- Promote collaboration among media stakeholders, government institutions, civil society, and development partners.
- Encourage strengthening of professional standards, media ethics, and information integrity in journalism.

Key Activities

The event will begin with an inaugural session, setting the tone for discussions on press freedom, media independence, and public trust in Bangladesh, followed by a high-level panel discussion to stimulate informed debate on media independence, public trust, and democratic accountability in Bangladesh.

High-Level Panel Discussion: Media Independence and Public Trust

A moderated panel will bring together journalists, editors, policymakers, academia, and civil society to examine the theme “Rebuilding Public Trust: Media Independence and Democratic Accountability in Bangladesh.”

The discussion will focus on:

- Drivers of public trust and credibility in Bangladesh’s media landscape
- Editorial independence, professional standards, and newsroom accountability
- Media ownership, sustainability, and structural constraints
- Addressing disinformation and strengthening information integrity

An open discussion and Q&A session will provide participants—particularly journalists, students, and civil society actors—the opportunity to share perspectives and contribute recommendations, fostering inclusive dialogue on rebuilding trust in media.