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Bangladesh: Nearly 200 Dead Under The Cover Of Internet Censorship

Roger Huang Contributor
Roger Huang writes about Bitcoin and its wider impact on society.

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TOPSHOT - Anti-quota protesters clash with the police in Dhaka on July 18, 2024. Bangladesh students ...
AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

In Bangladesh, under the cover of Internet and mobile censorship, the government has deployed the military and murdered protestors. Though a court has since scaled back the quota system that first kicked the protests off, there have been dozens of recorded deaths, and the Internet continues to be taken down after five days of protests. While [some fixed-line Internet connectivity is back](#), mobile Internet and social media access is still down, preventing the world from fully seeing which atrocities are being committed - though some images are now [coming to the fore](#). The student protestors behind the movement have vowed a 48-hour pause - but also said they are not retreating from the movement, even under torture. This grave episode of state repression and Internet censorship will hold lasting resonance - and gives insights on the digital freedoms afforded by tools like Bitcoin and end-to-end encryption, as well as a rethink on the decentralization principle advocated by cryptocurrency holders to a broader definition of Internet access in the face of government repression.

The Bangladeshi government has been building a surveillance state that allows it to use the Internet to maintain its control. In the past, it has also shut down certain regions—though this will be the first time it has shut down the entire country. While maintaining an open Internet in terms of access to Western Internet platforms like Facebook and Twitter, Bangladesh has also restricted many freedoms (including [the use of Bitcoin](#)), shut down the Internet in different regions, and created a surveillance state that tracks dissidents and arrests them for expressing themselves online.



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This has led to independent calls to decentralize the Internet and [provide Starlink to Bangladesh](#)—a call that has been left unanswered by Elon Musk so far. "There are fires in stadiums, there are fires in metro stations. So the people who have been deprived of their fundamental rights—democratic rights—have taken to the streets now," says Zulkarnian Saer Khan, an investigative journalist who has been covering Bangladesh for years.

This comes amid unrest after the elections, which swept the ruling [Awami League](#) party into power for the fourth consecutive term. The protests started due to the government's enforcement of a quota system that had previously allocated 30% of stable civil-service jobs to relatives of veterans of Bangladesh's independence war with Pakistan.

"And all these elections have been heavily rigged because the government themselves conducted the elections. There were no opposition parties. Meantime, they introduce laws like [the] [Digital Security Act](#), [Cybersecurity Act](#), just to muzzle the press, just to persecute the critics." observed Zulkarnian.

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While Facebook and Twitter are browsed from Bangladesh, the government employs spyware and other devices to monitor and try to control the Internet tightly - and people are arrested for expressing themselves online. "Bangladesh has heavily invested in spyware and surveillance technologies over the past few years," says Zulkarnian, and he continues.

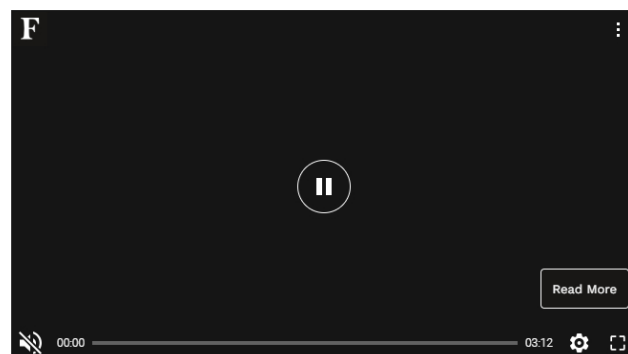
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"Bangladesh- it's a classic example of a surveillance state. There, the government will eavesdrop on your phone line. They will hear your text message, they will read your text message, and they will try to hack into people's computers. Journalists and their Facebook and Twitter are very normally randomly hacked. Their email accounts are compromised sometimes."



As the Internet continues to stay dark in Bangladesh and verifying the number of dead and atrocities committed gets harder - through deliberate design - watching what happens in Bangladesh is something people around the world can do. The outlet [Netra News](#) is reporting on events in Bangladesh in English, as well as [Bangla Outlook English](#). There are trusts still saving from journalists recording

Bangla Outlook English. There are tweets still coming from journalists recording and compiling information about the bloodshed, from Zulkarnian to David Bergman to Muktadir (who is posting live photos of military movements around the capital) - many of whom are trying to document figures on the killed and wounded before the government attempts to erase those figures. Shafiqul Alam, the bureau chief of AFP (which has a special deal to access the Internet), has been sharing updates on his Facebook. It's through journalists like them that we've learned that there are likely more than 180 deaths and with one journalist reporting nearly 200 dead.

One of the student activists involved in the movement, Zadhid Powell, wrote an article on the topic about how Gen Z activists were motivated to correct injustices rather than to make a living/profit themselves when it came to the protests. The Internet slowdown/censorship has made it very to get information from Bangladesh.

For those committed to freedom of information and transparency around the world, what Bangladesh is doing shows the commitment of certain states to using technology in a way that suits state power - and trying to shut it down to create darkness around state repression. This is something technologists should consider - in states of crisis; it should not be assumed that the Internet will be up if it doesn't suit the interests of the ruling political class. This can be a critical chokepoint for technologies meant to share information or finances. And for those governments that have built a surveillance state like Bangladesh, sooner or later, they will use it - to bloody effect.

Check out my [website](#).



Roger Huang

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Suzanne Z

24 July, 2024

This breaks my heart. I run the YouTube channel "WTFarm Girl" (This Life We Live), and my editor is from Bangladesh. He cannot edit my videos or contact me. I had been wondering if perhaps their country was like China, watching what they write. he would often delete off his messages from Whatsap. H...

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