

2025 telecom reset: Policy rewritten, but fault lines remain

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As 2025 draws to a close, Bangladesh's telecommunications sector stands at a pivotal juncture, reshaped by a wave of policy interventions that have altered how connectivity is regulated, owned and governed.

Over the year, the government rolled out sweeping reforms to telecom licensing, amended decades-old surveillance laws, fast-tracked the entry of satellite internet through Starlink and revived plans to block unauthorised handsets through the National Equipment Identity Register (NEIR).

Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, special assistant to the chief adviser for telecom and ICT, who led much of the reform drive, has argued that under the previous regime the sector had descended into what he described as "anarchy".

According to him, thousands of licences were issued on political considerations, while intermediaries extracted large sums without adding meaningful value.

THE REWIND

Industry leaders and policy experts broadly agree that reform was overdue. But many warn that several provisions risk undermining competition, discouraging investment and entrenching the dominance of large multinational players.

Telecom expert Abu Nazam M Tanveer Hossain said the changes were being pursued without a coherent long-term roadmap. "There should first be a national telecom policy with a 10-year vision, followed by revisions of the act and then the licensing guidelines, rules and regulations."

NEW LICENSING ARCHITECTURE, OLD FEARS

The centrepiece of the year's reform agenda was the new Telecommunication Licensing Policy, approved in September.

The policy dismantles a patchwork of over 20 licence categories and replaces it with four core licence types: access networks, national infrastructure, international connectivity and non-terrestrial networks. Telecom-enabled services will require registration rather than licensing.

Mobile, internet and satellite service and submarine cable operators, are to be brought under this framework. Existing licences – such as for international internet gateway, interconnection exchange, national internet exchange and internet gateway – will be allowed to

AT A GLANCE

Reform-driven reset marked by consolidation, tighter oversight and new technologies, tempered by investor unease and implementation delays

SURVEILLANCE LAW CHANGES

Internet shutdowns barred

Quasi-judicial council comprising executive branch formed

STARLINK ENTRY

Commercial launch in May : Focus on corporate, remote and backup connectivity

TELECOM POLICY 2025

LICENSING OVERHAUL

Over 20 licence categories consolidated into four core licences

Most IIG, ICX, NIX and IGW licences set to end by 2027

BTRC regains authority over most licences

OWNERSHIP RULE SHIFT

Foreign equity capped at 85% for mobile operators

NEIR

Handset blocking deferred until March next year

Grey market still dominates over half of handset sales



expire naturally, with most set to lapse by 2027.

"We have already drafted guidelines accordingly, and these guidelines are awaiting government approval," said Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission Chairman Maj Gen (retd) Md Emdad ul Bari.

Yet the policy has triggered unease within the industry, particularly over ownership rules. It caps foreign equity in mobile operators at 85 percent, effectively requiring at least 15 percent local ownership.

Among private mobile operators, only Grameenphone already meets this threshold. Malaysia-based Axiata holds 82.12 percent of Robi, India's Bharti Airtel 28.18 percent, while Banglalink is fully foreign-owned by Dubai-based VEON.

Shahid Alam, Robi's chief corporate and regulatory affairs officer, warned that mandating a 15 percent local share offload "may concern investors who have already invested billions with long-term plans."

Taimur Rahman, Banglalink's chief corporate and regulatory affairs officer, welcomed provisions for active network and spectrum sharing, but warned ownership mandates could discourage foreign investment.

Critics, meanwhile, also point to another asymmetry: multinational companies with up to 65 percent foreign direct investment can obtain cross-layer licences, while similar opportunities remain constrained for local firms.

Sumon Ahmed Sabir, deputy managing director of Fiber@Home, said this could marginalise domestic entrepreneurs and entrench market dominance.

Policy expert Tanveer Hossain added

that weak cross-ownership limits could distort competition.

SURVEILLANCE LAW REFORM

Another major development came with the approval of the Bangladesh Telecommunication (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025. It bars state-led internet shutdowns and introduces limited transparency and accountability measures in lawful interception.

Under the amended framework, interception requests will be overseen by a three-member quasi-judicial council composed entirely of executive officials, with the minister of law, justice and parliamentary affairs as chair. It must document all decisions, allow appeals and file complaints over unlawful interception.

Unauthorised interception or misuse of data will carry penalties of up to five years' imprisonment, a fine of Tk 1 crore, or both. Budgetary sanctions of up to Tk 99 crore may be recommended against offending agencies.

Tanveer Hossain said although safeguards that were absent in the 2010 law have been introduced in the ordinance, the council's composition may not ensure independent assessment.

The National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre will be abolished and replaced by a Centre for Information Support under the home ministry. Lawful interception will be limited to national security, law and order, emergencies, judicial or investigative needs, and cross-border matters.

Crucially, the amendment restores some balance between the ministry and the regulator. The ministry will approve only nationally significant licences, while the BTRC regains authority over others.

Even so, BTRC Chairman Bari has cautioned that certain accountability provisions may still encroach on regulatory independence.

THE NEIR STALEMATE

Few telecom initiatives have generated as much controversy as the launch of NEIR. Revived again in 2025, NEIR was announced amid strong resistance from small handset traders, prompting authorities to retreat from immediate enforcement.

Although the system is designed to block unauthorised mobile phones, enforcement has been deferred until late March next year in the face of continued protests. The BTRC has extended the deadline for registering unauthorised devices until year end, and no handsets will be disconnected before enforcement begins.

The system aims to curb illegal handset imports in a market where grey-channel phones account for an estimated 50 to 60 percent of sales.

STARLINK CHANGES EQUATION

The arrival of Starlink added a new dimension to Bangladesh's connectivity landscape. The satellite internet provider received fast-track approvals through a three-month accelerated process.

Starlink obtained its operating licence on April 29, began test operations on May 8, and officially launched on May 20. Residential packages were priced at Tk 6,000 and Tk 4,200. Gateways were established in Gazipur, Rajshahi and Jashore, supported by local data centres and fibre partners.

Commercial momentum increased after Robi Axiata PLC and Bangladesh Satellite Company Limited signed reseller agreements worth \$2.5 million.

Plastic industry resilient amid challenges

Trade body says; int'l fair to begin on Jan 28

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Despite economic challenges, Bangladesh's plastic industry remains resilient and continues to grow steadily, said Shamim Ahmed, president of the Bangladesh Plastic Goods Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

He made the statement at a media briefing yesterday at the association's office in Paltan, marking the 20th anniversary of the International Plastic Fair (IPF).

Ahmed said the plastic industry has changed significantly over the years. "Once limited to household items, the sector now serves as a vital backward linkage for more than 60 industries, including pharmaceuticals, agriculture and engineering," he said.

Recalling the history of the IPF, Ahmed said the first fair was held in 1989 and inaugurated by then-president HM Ershad. After a long gap, the exhibition was relaunched in 2002 and has since grown into one of South Asia's leading platforms for the plastic industry.

The 18th edition of the IPF will be held from January 28 to 31, 2026, at the International Convention City Bashundhara (ICCB). Ahmed said the event is expected to attract strong foreign participation and showcase advanced machinery.

Despite a difficult business environment in 2025, the plastic sector has continued to expand, he said. More than 4,000 plastic-related enterprises are now operating in the country, mostly in the business-to-business segment.

He added that new memberships of the association indicate rising investment, particularly in agricultural plastics, packaging and engineering grade materials.

Ahmed said direct exports from the plastic industry are nearing \$300 million, while indirect exports, mainly through garment accessories and packaging, add an estimated \$1.2 billion.

He urged policymakers to include indirect exports in national data. "If indirect exports are recognised, the industry's export figure would be closer to \$2 billion," he said.

He also called for government support to ease land acquisition, especially for the long-delayed Plastic Industrial City under the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation.

According to him, current land prices there remain beyond the reach of small entrepreneurs.

On environmental issues, Ahmed said plastic pollution mainly comes from post-consumer waste rather than manufacturing. He pointed to Japan's waste management system as an example Bangladesh could follow.

Responding to questions on diversification, he said the industry now has 29 active sub-sectors, including toys, optics and agricultural products such as greenhouse films and biofloc tanks.

As the IPF 2026 approaches, Ahmed highlighted the fair's role in promoting innovation and collaboration in the sector. "Exhibitions like the IPF are more than trade shows—they are tools for transformation," he said.

Bank Asia celebrates 17th anniversary of Islamic banking

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Bank Asia PLC has celebrated the 17th anniversary of its Islamic banking services.

To mark the occasion, the bank organised a discussion meeting at Bank Asia Tower in Karwan Bazar, Dhaka recently, according to a press release.

Shahid Rahmani, former chairman of the bank's shariah supervisory committee; Shah Mohammad Wali Ullah, former member secretary; and Mohammad Mofazzal Hussain Khan and Muhammad Ismail Hussain, faqih members, attended the programme.

Bank Asia has been operating its Islamic banking services since December 24, 2008.

Placing utmost importance on shariah compliance, Bank Asia Islamic Banking offers comprehensive services, including



Shahid Rahmani, former chairman of Bank Asia's shariah supervisory committee, and Shah Mohammad Wali Ullah, former member secretary, attend the 17th anniversary of the bank's Islamic banking services at Bank Asia Tower in Karwan Bazar, Dhaka recently.

PHOTO: BANK ASIA

deposit mobilisation and investment facilities, to meet the diverse needs of customers across all segments, the release added.

Areful Arefeen, deputy managing director of the bank, along with other deputy managing directors, heads of departments and divisions, and other officials, were also present.

Pubali Bank holds managers' conference

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Pubali Bank PLC recently held its "5th Managers' Conference 2025" for managers of the Dhaka Central Region, aiming to motivate them to expand the bank's business through improved service delivery.

Mohammad Ali, managing director and CEO of Pubali Bank PLC, inaugurated the conference as the chief guest, according to a press release.

During the conference, strategies and action plans were formulated to achieve the targets set for 2025.



Mohammad Ali, managing director and CEO of Pubali Bank PLC, inaugurates the bank's "5th Managers' Conference 2025" for the Dhaka Central Region in the capital recently.

PHOTO: PUBALI BANK

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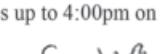
Date: 28.12.2025

e-Tender Notice

e-Tenders are invited in National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) by Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Noakhali for the Procurement of following works:

Sl No.	Tender ID No.	Package No.	Description of works	Tender last selling (date & time)	Tender closing (date & time)	Tender opening (date & time)
1	1202754	NRD/e-GP/36/OTM/2025-2026	Repair of Railing and Painting work and Protective work with Concrete Slope Protection at (i) Sonapur (Mannan Nagar)-Char Jabber-Steamer Ghat Road (Z-1424) at 3rd (P) Km (Keramatnagar) (ii) Sonapur Bazar-Banglabazar-Subarnachar Upazilla Head Quarter Road (Z-1451) at 2nd km (P) Income Chowdhury Pole Bridge (iii) Maizdeeb-Rajgonj-Chayani-Bashurhat-Chandragonj Road (R-143) at 12th Km (P) Bhabani Jibonpur Bridge (iv) Lakshimpur-Char Alexander-Sonapur Road (Z-1405) at 56th Km (P) Kamal Pole Bridge and (iv) under Noakhali Road Division during the year 2025-2026.	12/01/2026 up to 4:00pm	13/01/2026 12:15pm	13/01/2026 12:15pm

This is an online tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, please register on e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>). Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP helpdesk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd). The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any Member of Scheduled Banks branches up to 4:00pm on 12-01-2026.



Md. Farid Uddin
ID No. 602218
Executive Engineer, RHD
Road Division Noakhali



Towhid Iftakher Hussain, managing director of Flowco Bangladesh Limited, and M Nazeem A Choudhury, deputy managing director of Prime Bank PLC, pose for a photograph after signing the memorandum of understanding at the bank's corporate office in Dhaka recently.

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Prime Bank PLC has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Flowco Bangladesh Limited to introduce dedicated green financing facilities for petrol pump owners across Bangladesh.

M Nazeem A Choudhury, deputy managing director of Prime Bank PLC, and Towhid Iftakher Hussain, managing director of Flowco Bangladesh Limited, signed the MoU at the bank's corporate office in Dhaka recently, according to a press release.

Under the MoU, Prime Bank will provide tailored green financing solutions to eligible petrol station owners, enabling them to adopt advanced fuel tank cleaning, sludge removal and vapour emission reduction technologies without the burden of heavy upfront capital investment.

The initiative supports Bangladesh's national sustainability goals and environmental compliance requirements, promoting a transition towards cleaner energy practices in the downstream fuel retail sector.

By bridging the gap between high-end environmental technology and accessible