

# Make ICT policy a priority, not a side show



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In the first days of a new government, it is always the immediate anxieties that set the tone. People want to know whether the streets will be calmer, whether corruption will loosen its grip, or whether the price of essentials will hold steady. Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has already addressed these concerns. However, the government's real challenge in the long term will be to prove that its ministerial portfolios are fit to withstand the test of time, and few matter more than the ICT portfolio, which feels sidelined in high-level conversations about growth, reforms, and good governance.

Tech policies are no longer a side project on the global stage. Today, they increasingly determine how economies compete, how states protect critical systems, how businesses handle data, and how safely citizens can speak and organise online. Countries that treat this brief as an afterthought do not get to opt out; they simply end up living under rules written elsewhere.

Yet our tech governance has too often followed a familiar script: heavy compliance burdens, weak incentives for risk-taking, and a preference for control over capability. Public benefit has remained limited because the state has consistently failed to build the institutional competence that a fast-moving, high-stakes sector demands. The digital economy has grown nonetheless, driven by entrepreneurs and firms operating despite policy rather than because of it.

In a fast-moving policy landscape, delay is often punished. By the time a state realises a law is unworkable, or that a regulatory approach has fallen behind, the world may have already moved on. Standards shift, supply chains relocate, platforms change their enforcement, and what once looked manageable becomes expensive to repair. Bangladesh has already paid some of that price in the past.

Enforcement of regulatory frameworks such as the Digital Security Act, 2018 and the Cyber Security Act, 2023 has repeatedly attracted controversy, while reports of data leaks and breaches have periodically jolted the public. These episodes make headlines, then fade, which points to a deeper problem—a troubling approach to tech policy that seems more comfortable asserting authority than



FILE VISUAL: FATIMA JAHAN ENA

**'A credible, modern ICT portfolio would prioritise three things at once: operational security, legal clarity, and public legitimacy.'**

building competence, more inclined towards restrictive law than enforceable standards, and more willing to treat the ICT portfolio as a political instrument rather than a governance discipline.

What is striking here is how often the scale of harm is underestimated. Digital systems sit inside everyday routines, so the consequences of database leaks are not abstract; they are felt in real life. When digital laws are loosely drafted or unpredictably enforced, the impact is felt through fear, self-censorship, and a loss of trust in institutions. The effects also travel

beyond borders, shaping how Bangladesh is judged by investors, platforms, partners, and the wider world.

The interim government's attempt to undo years of damage in the digital policy sector often risked reproducing the same weaknesses. Rights groups repeatedly urged the administration to stop fast-tracking sweeping digital ordinances and to adopt transparent, inclusive, realistic and evidence-

ups, telecom operators, universities, civil society, diaspora networks, and the engineers who actually build systems. If consultation is reduced to a box-ticking exercise, policy will again be captured by incumbents, blindsided by technical realities, or rejected by the public.

What's needed instead is the boring, discipline-building work: publishing draft laws well ahead of passage, responding to critiques in time, clearly explaining which

What's needed is enforceable standards, clearer accountability, and independent oversight that gives citizens and investors the confidence that security policy is not a euphemism for control.

A credible, modern ICT portfolio would prioritise three things at once: operational security, legal clarity, and public legitimacy. That requires an enforceable data protection regime suited to a services economy, alongside serious investment in government-wide security standards, incident response capacity, and basic digital hygiene training for officials. It also requires recognising that cybersecurity is not a single ministry's project. It is a whole-of-government discipline, with clear audit requirements, procurement rules, and consequences for negligence.

Previous governments had a habit of announcing the future in slogans while leaving the present untouched. This government should resist that temptation, particularly on emerging technologies such as AI. A national launch of "AI revolution" may generate headlines; it will not, on its own, generate trust or capability.

Any good policy should take inspiration from global best practice. But that should not mean copying just about any foreign model. Bangladesh's context is its own. It is densely populated, overwhelmingly young, anchored by a major garments export sector, increasingly shaped by a growing start-up ecosystem, and still recovering politically from a tumultuous period. The point here is to understand the trade-offs embedded in global models of tech governance and to build a Bangladeshi approach that is realistic, grounded, enforceable and credible.

The most important cultural change, however, must be internal. Digital capacity across the country remains uneven, so there is no alternative to sustained training, proper incentives, and real accountability. Officials responsible for sensitive systems must grasp the basics of cyber hygiene—phishing awareness, access controls, credential management, data minimisation—because ignorance or lack of awareness can easily lead to leaks, outages, and national embarrassment.

None of this transformation will be easy. That is precisely why the ICT portfolio is one of the most difficult jobs in government. It sits at the intersection of commerce and sovereignty, growth and rights, security and openness. Bangladesh cannot afford to treat it as just a platform for announcements, optics, and slogans. The priority must be the hard governance of the infrastructure and rules that increasingly determine national power.

The warnings from our past missteps are written in plain sight. The question for Tarique Rahman's government is whether it reads them as history, or as a manual.

# Jahanara's case and the need for athlete protection



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BADRUL HASSAN

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has finally found Manjurul Islam guilty in the sexual harassment case involving women's team cricketer Jahanara Alam. However, the outcome still raises a troubling question about justice in Bangladeshi sports. The complaint was formally lodged in 2022, but the board acted in February 2026, following an order by the High Court. Manjurul had already been outside any BCB contract since June 2025. The delayed finding arrives after institutional inaction has already imposed real costs on the complainant.

The consequences for Jahanara came in the form of years of uncertainty, reputational damage, psychological strain, and lost professional opportunities. Notably, the decisive movement followed only after the High Court reprimanded BCB and directed it to treat the allegation seriously. Without the judicial intervention, it is doubtful the case would have progressed at all. The episode exposes a structural safeguarding risk: delayed institutional action shifts the cost of inaction onto the complainant rather than the system responsible for protection.

Sport is often portrayed as a realm of discipline, merit, and national pride. Yet it is also shaped by sharp power imbalances—between administrators and athletes, coaches and players, and selectors and aspirants. When unchecked, these imbalances can enable abuse, silence, and retaliation.

Over the past decade in Bangladesh, allegations of sexual harassment and abuse of authority have surfaced repeatedly in cricket, football, shooting and tennis at the national level, often marked by delayed or contested responses and, at times, judicial or administrative intervention. Taken together, these cases reveal a structural failure to meet

legal duties already recognised under Bangladeshi law.

The High Court's intervention in Jahanara's case—seeking the BCB's explanation and questioning its actions—was critical. Jahanara is a visible symbol of women's cricket in Bangladesh. The story of an athlete of her stature signals to younger players that even established figures struggle to obtain credible redress. The court's scrutiny also affirmed that safeguarding failures in sport are not internal matters; they engage legal obligation and public accountability.

This position aligns with Bangladesh's legal framework. Constitutional guarantees of equality and dignity establish a clear baseline: organisations cannot treat harassment as peripheral. The High Court's 2009 sexual-harassment directives require complaint committees, defined procedures, and protection from retaliation—expectations directly relevant to federations, academies, clubs, and camps. The Labour Act, 2006, reinforces duties to ensure safe and non-discriminatory environments wherever institutional control exists.

Where criminal conduct arises, the Penal Code, 1860, provides the basis for the prosecution of sexual offences. In addition, the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000, establishes specific criminal liability and procedural protections in cases of sexual violence and abuse against women and minors. Governance authority rests with the National Sports Council under the National Sports Council Act 2018. Policy direction is also strengthening: last month, the government approved the draft Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace and Educational Institutions Ordinance 2026, alongside the Domestic Violence

Prevention Ordinance 2026, reinforcing that protection from harassment is an enforceable right and institutional responsibility.

Women's football faced a public reckoning when national players accused head coach Peter Butler of abusive conduct and humiliation. Players described fear and professional consequences for speaking out. The episode showed how vulnerable athletes are when complaint pathways appear tied to those controlling selection and careers. Even a perceived lack of independence undermines safeguarding credibility.

The National Sports Council last month removed GM Haider Sajjad as joint secretary of the Bangladesh Shooting Sports Federation following allegations of harassment and mental abuse by female shooters. The removal demonstrated that authorities can act, but also showed how safeguarding responses still depend on discretionary intervention rather than predictable procedures that athletes can rely on.

Tennis exposed another dimension in 2019 when a Bangladesh Tennis Federation official, Golam Morshed, was suspended after allegations of sexually harassing a juvenile player. The victim filed a case against the general secretary, Golam Morshed. The case highlighted child-safeguarding risks in sport, where young athletes depend heavily on coaches and officials for access, travel, and advancement. Protection in such contexts must be institutional and immediate, not informal.

An even more concerning gap remains. These cases involve elite athletes and visible institutions. We know little about what girls face at district teams, school programmes, academies, and local clubs, where oversight is weaker and power imbalances sharper. If safeguarding struggles at the national level, risks at the grassroots level are likely greater and less reported.

FIFA and the ICC frame safeguarding as governance, requiring codes of conduct, education, accessible reporting, independent process and proportionate sanctions. The Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) framework similarly emphasises zero tolerance, prohibition of exploitative relationships,

safe reporting channels, and protection from retaliation—principles directly applicable to sport.

Meaningful reform requires moving beyond ad hoc responses. Federations must operationalise safeguarding policies aligned with the law and ensure they function in practice. Reporting mechanisms must be independent of coaching and selection hierarchies; investigations must be time-bound and survivor-centred; retaliation protection must be enforced. Training on conduct and legal duty should be mandatory and embedded in licensing and accreditation.

To move from a culture of personality-driven choices to one of institutional safety, the National Sports Council should make legal recognition and government funding strictly dependent on a federation's proven commitment to safeguarding.

A new government is now in office, and the sports portfolio includes former national football captain Md Aminul Haque, now serving as the state minister for the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Having lived the realities of sporting hierarchies, he is uniquely positioned to ensure that athletes are protected with dignity and security. Leadership in sport governance is measured not only by victories or facilities, but by whether those representing the country are safe from abuse of power. This is therefore a moment for Aminul to translate personal legacy into institutional protection by ensuring credible, accessible, and enforced safeguarding systems across sporting bodies.

Ultimately, sports spectators in Bangladesh want to see authorities treat allegations seriously and act promptly. Confidence depends on visible, reliable procedures that anyone—an athlete, a staff member, or a trainee—can access without fear. Sporting institutions should therefore adopt digitised, independently monitored safeguarding systems in which complaints can be lodged securely, tracked transparently, and resolved within defined timelines. Such mechanisms would signal that athlete protection is treated with the same seriousness as competition integrity. Accountability in sport is owed not only to athletes but to the public that sustains it.

## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**  
1 Drag participant  
7 "Troy" star  
11 New York lake  
12 In — (lined up)  
13 Add yeast to  
14 Rake  
15 Titled women  
16 Book category  
17 Place for a coin  
18 Outlaw  
19 Continental coin  
21 Cart puller  
22 Make the biosphere suitable for humans  
25 Sandy color  
26 Small statue  
27 Bare  
29 Ordeal  
33 Michael of Monty Python  
34 Back biter  
35 They may be inflated  
36 Geisha garb  
37 For fear that  
38 Sulking  
39 Refinery rocks  
40 Casual eateries
- DOWN**  
1 Cargo spots  
2 Basketball's Shaquille  
3 Spanish "I love you"  
4 Rosie, for one  
5 Lyric poems  
6 Dapper fellow  
7 Kitchen gadget  
8 Cell feature  
9 Resort business  
10 Suit fabrics  
16 Blunders  
18 Deception  
20 City-based  
22 Colorful bird  
23 Surround  
24 Padded footstool  
25 Elvis's birthplace  
28 Shopping aids  
30 Skip the ceremony  
31 More rational  
32 Easy gaiters  
34 Skimpy skirt  
36 Young one



## YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

C	O	H	A	N	A	C	H	E	D
A	R	E	N	A	S	E	E	D	Y
P	I	N	T	S	A	L	L	I	N
P	O	R	T	S	I	N	E	T	A
E	L	Y	I	N	A	N	O	M	
R	E	F	U	E	L	A	F	R	O
A	L	E	E	B	L	E	E	P	S
E	E	L	L	O	U	L	O	T	
R	A	D	I	R	S	D	U	O	
A	S	I	A	N	I	N	I	N	K
T	E	N	S	E	V	I	N	C	E
E	D	G	A	R	E	A	G	E	R

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