

Meaningful participation can strengthen Bangladesh’s global digital voice

MOHAMMAD KAWSAR UDDIN

As Bangladesh pursues its “Smart Nation” ambitions, questions of digital inclusion, online safety, misinformation and access in Bangla are becoming central to its development agenda. Amrita Choudhury, an internet governance expert and recipient of the 2026 Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) Community Excellence Award, said in an interview with The Daily Star that Bangladesh can strengthen its global digital voice by enabling meaningful participation from civil society, women, young people, journalists and the technology community.

Choudhury chairs the Asian, Australasian and Pacific Islands Regional At-Large Organisation (APRALO) and the Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum (APriGF). She also co-founded the India School of Internet Governance (inSIG) and serves as director of the Cyber Cafe Association of India (CCAOI).

The Daily Star: As chair of APRALO, what concrete steps can Bangladeshi civil society and technology communities take to move from being passive observers to active policy shapers within ICANN?

Amrita Choudhury: Bangladeshi civil society groups and technology communities need to move beyond attending meetings and engage more meaningfully in global internet governance discussions. The first step is to join mailing lists, follow policy debates and understand the issues shaping the future of the internet.

This requires time and preparation. People need to understand domain name policy, digital inclusion, cybersecurity and internet accessibility before they can contribute informed local perspectives. Students, young professionals, civil society representatives and the technology community should take part in ICANN’s multistakeholder model so that policies reflect the realities of developing countries.

TDS: You co-founded inSIG. How can it and the Bangladesh School of Internet Governance (bdSIG) collaborate to build a stronger South Asian voice?

AC: Both inSIG and bdSIG aim to build the capacity of communities to understand internet governance and participate in global policy discussions. inSIG has also benefited from the participation of non-Indian fellows, including several from Bangladesh, helping participants exchange local experiences and identify common priorities.

A completely unified South Asian voice may be difficult in the current geopolitical context, but collaboration on shared issues is both practical and necessary. Greater cooperation between the two schools can build informed regional leadership and strengthen South

Asia’s presence in forums such as ICANN and the Internet Governance Forum (IGF).

TDS: What strategies can help women in Bangladesh move from being everyday internet users to digital policy leaders?

AC: The first step is encouraging more women to participate actively in forums such as the Bangladesh Internet Governance Forum, APriGF and other regional and global platforms. But participation alone is not enough. Women need to understand the issues, speak confidently and share their experiences of online challenges.

Misinformation, online harassment and trolling often affect women disproportionately. Their perspectives are essential to shaping safer digital spaces. Capacity-building programmes, mentorship and regional networking can help women become policy contributors and make Bangladesh’s digital policy ecosystem more inclusive.



TDS: You have championed vernacular internet adoption. How can the Asia-Pacific community support Bangladesh in addressing the shortage of localised technical content and native-language domain names?

AC: This challenge is not unique to Bangladesh. Many regions face a shortage of locally relevant technical content because English still dominates the digital ecosystem.

Translated and locally relevant content must be expanded. Artificial intelligence (AI) tools can make this faster and more scalable, but human oversight remains essential for accuracy and cultural relevance. For native-language domain names, a key barrier is Universal Acceptance, which ensures that browsers, search engines and applications recognise internationalised domain names, including Bangla. Governments, regulators and industry should also demonstrate practical uses for native-language domains.

TDS: What lessons can Bangladesh apply from India’s cybercafés and Common Service Centres to keep rural digital centres safe and sustainable?

AC: When cybercafés and Common Service Centres were introduced in India nearly 17 years ago, the focus was on expanding digital access. Today, India and Bangladesh are largely mobile-first societies, but assisted digital services remain important.

Many people still need help booking transport tickets, using government platforms or completing citizen transactions. Bangladesh should strengthen existing centres as trusted and secure access points rather than only creating new ones. Operators need continuous training in cybersecurity and data protection. These centres can also support health, finance and public services while serving as hubs for digital literacy, online safety and misinformation

awareness.

TDS: Bangladesh has pioneered youth initiatives such as the Bangladesh Kids Internet Governance Forum (BKIGF). How can global bodies such as ICANN better support young South Asian voices?

AC: Bangladesh’s Kids Internet Governance Forum is commendable because very few countries have such initiatives. Afghanistan had a similar effort, but it could not be sustained.

ICANN’s mandate is limited to names and numbers, and it generally does not directly engage with participants under 18 because of legal and ethical considerations, including parental consent and data protection. Most ICANN youth programmes, such as NextGen, begin at 18. Broader spaces such as the IGF offer more direct opportunities for younger voices, including initiatives on children’s rights in the digital environment. Youth engagement must include strong safeguards and responsible

data practices.

TDS: Do you see scope for a cross-border digital literacy framework between India and Bangladesh to address misinformation?

AC: Misinformation is a global challenge, made more complex by AI-generated content and deepfakes. It often intensifies during elections and spreads quickly across languages and platforms.

Governments, technology platforms and civil society are all responding, including through discussions on takedown timelines for harmful or manipulated content. But there is a delicate balance between swift action and freedom of expression. South Asia would benefit from regional learning through shared best practices, policy frameworks and response mechanisms. News organisations, fact-checking networks and misinformation coalitions can also work together. There is no single solution; sustained cooperation and long-term media literacy are essential.

TDS: Having reviewed the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)-20 outcomes, what is the most critical step Bangladesh must take as it pursues “Smart Nation” status?

AC: Bangladesh must ensure inclusive and meaningful participation in global internet governance and digital development processes. Governments will lead WSIS-20-related discussions, but the multistakeholder model must be applied in practice, not just acknowledged in principle.

Civil society, the technical community, academia and the private sector should all help shape and monitor outcomes. Implementation remains a concern because many operational details are still being developed. Bangladesh should stay engaged in these processes while strengthening national platforms that allow diverse stakeholders to contribute. This is essential if Smart Nation benefits are to reach marginalised communities.

TDS: Journalists in South Asia remain underrepresented in internet governance. What mechanisms can improve their participation?

AC: Journalists often remain on the margins of internet governance discussions, even though many issues directly affect their work. Regional platforms such as APriGF provide immediate entry points. Journalists and media organisations can propose sessions on artificial intelligence, copyright, misinformation, freedom of expression and content regulation.

The IGF also offers limited media fellowships, allowing journalists to observe and engage more closely. But journalists should move beyond reporting on internet governance. They should participate in shaping the debates that will influence the future of their profession and the wider public interest.

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RUMI



Anthropic reaches \$965 bln valuation, surpasses OpenAI

NEXT STEP DESK

Anthropic has raised \$65 billion in a recent Series H funding round, valuing the artificial intelligence company at \$965 billion post-money. The figure propels Anthropic ahead of rival OpenAI, which was last valued at \$852 billion in March, and marks a steep climb from the \$380 billion valuation Anthropic secured in February.

The round was led by Altimeter Capital, Dragoneer, Greenoaks, and Sequoia Capital, with Coatue and ICONIQ as co-leads. Strategic infrastructure partners Micron, Samsung, and SK hynix also participated, and the total includes



\$15 billion of previously committed hyperscaler investments, among them \$5 billion from Amazon. Anthropic plans to use the fresh capital to advance safety

research, scale compute, and broaden its product offerings.

Anthropic said its annualised revenue run rate crossed \$47 billion earlier last month, driven by growing enterprise adoption of its Claude chatbot. The company has struggled to keep pace with demand, however, and recently introduced usage limits during peak hours while offering additional compute during off-peak periods to ease the strain. To expand capacity, Anthropic has signed agreements for up to five gigawatts of new cloud infrastructure with Amazon, five gigawatts of next-generation TPU capacity with Google and Broadcom, and GPU access in SpaceX’s Colossus data centres.

Meta launches paid subscriptions for Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp

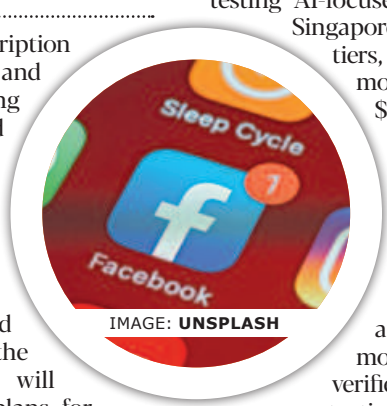
NEXT STEP DESK

Meta has launched paid subscription tiers for Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp globally, grouping them under a new brand called Meta One. Instagram Plus and Facebook Plus each cost \$3.99 per month, while WhatsApp Plus is priced at \$2.99 per month. Subscribers receive profile customisation, super reactions, story insights, and other extras. Meta Verified, the existing verification service, will continue alongside the new plans for now.

The company also announced it will begin

testing AI-focused subscriptions this month in Singapore, Guatemala, and Bolivia. Two tiers, Meta One Plus at \$7.99 per month and Meta One Premium at \$19.99 per month, will offer more advanced reasoning and greater video and image generation capacity. Meta AI remains free for casual use.

Meta will also test plans for creators and businesses in Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Thailand, and Bangladesh. The \$14.99 per month Essential plan includes a verified badge and impersonation protection, while the \$49.99 per month Advanced plan adds search ranking boosts, deeper analytics, and scheduling tools.



Snap alumni launch Ghost Angels fund to back the next wave of social media

NEXT STEP DESK

A group of 20 former Snap employees has launched Ghost Angels, a venture fund targeting early-stage AI startups in social media and consumer tech, according to a recent TechCrunch report. Founded in 2025 by ex-Snap global partnerships head Max Rivera, now at Microsoft’s AI division, the fund has already backed five companies and plans to invest in 15 more within a year. The fund size remains undisclosed.

Founding members include Alexandra Levitt, who ran Snap’s corporate accelerator, and Will Wu, a founding product and design member, alongside a small number of current Snap employees. Rivera said mixing senior executives with earlier-career talent is central to how the group evaluates deals and supports founders.

Ghost Angels is betting on a split in social media. The traditional ad-driven, algorithm-fed model is losing users who originally wanted connection, Rivera said. The fund backs founders using AI to deliver on that promise, while also supporting AI-native formats and generative tools across music, gaming, sports, and fashion. Rivera noted that new founders are launching leaner, iterating publicly, and exploring monetisation beyond ads, including subscriptions, tokens, and outcome-based pricing. Founder-led go-to-market strategies are also becoming essential.

How to adjust to work after a long break

NEXT STEP DESK

It’s always exciting to look forward to the next big holiday. Especially during the Eids, Bangladeshis often plan long vacations with family and loved ones. But when the holiday ends, the thought of returning to work can feel a little daunting. The first day back asks you to reset your schedule, shift your mood back to workplace energy, and reconnect with supervisors and coworkers after time away. It’s a lot to navigate at once. Here are a few tips to keep in mind when trying to adjust to work after a long break.

Start slow and lower the bar for yourself

Walking back into work and expecting to pick up exactly where you left off would frustrate anyone. Your brain needs time to remember where it stopped, and your body needs time to readjust to the rhythm of working hours. As such, give yourself some time to ease back in. The emails can

wait a few hours. The backlog will still be there tomorrow. Focus on identifying two or three things that genuinely need your attention on day one, and let the rest follow naturally.

Rebuild small routines before you return

One of the hardest parts of coming back from a break is the shock of structure. During the holidays, meal times shift, sleep schedules stretch, and the day moves at its own pace. In the last day or two before work resumes, try to gently bring back some order. Go to bed a little earlier. Set an alarm again. Have your morning tea or coffee at roughly the time you would on a working day. These small resets signal to your mind that a new phase is beginning and reduce the exhaustion that comes from switching too abruptly.

Get on top of your workload without letting it get on top of you

A full inbox and a pile of unread

messages can feel like a mountain on the first morning back. The instinct to clear everything at once is strong, but it is rarely helpful. Instead, scan for what is urgent and flag the rest for later. A quick chat with your manager or team about shifting priorities can also take the weight off. Most people understand that nobody returns from a break at full speed, and a short conversation can help everyone get on the same page without guesswork.

Managers play a role too

If you are in a position of leadership, a brief check-in with each person can go a long way. Ask how they are doing, clarify what the immediate priorities are, and be flexible where possible. A supportive manager sets the tone for a healthier, more productive workplace, and people who feel looked after tend to bounce back faster.

Pay attention to how you are actually feeling

When returning to work, some

people feel genuinely anxious, low, or emotionally drained, especially if stress was already present before the holidays. Ignoring those feelings does not make them go away. Notice whether you are unusually irritable, struggling to focus, or feeling disconnected from your tasks. These are signals worth paying attention to, and seeking support early, whether from a trusted colleague, a supervisor, or a professional counsellor, can stop small problems from growing into something harder to manage.

The bottom line

Returning to work after a long break is a process, not a single event. The goal is not to be perfectly productive on day one but to rebuild momentum in a way that you can actually sustain. Be patient with yourself, protect your sleep, communicate openly, and remember that feeling a bit off after the holidays is not a sign of weakness. It is simply human.