

Right to Information, Press, and Miscellaneous Laws in Bangladesh

The Right to Information (RTI), press, and miscellaneous laws in Bangladesh govern access to information, media freedom, and various regulatory frameworks to ensure transparency, accountability, and public safety. The Right to Information Act 2009 promotes access to government information, while press laws, including the Press Council Act 1974 and the Printing Presses and Publications (Declaration and Registration) Act 1973, regulate media operations. Miscellaneous laws cover diverse areas like public safety, environmental protection, and anti-corruption, often under the Penal Code 1860, the Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2004, and other statutes. The Cyber Security Act 2023 also impacts press freedom due to its provisions on online content. These laws aim to balance public interest with regulatory control, but enforcement issues and vague provisions often spark concerns about misuse. Below is an overview of key RTI, press, and miscellaneous laws and their punishments for violations, presented in a clear, copyable format. For official texts, refer to bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd or relevant ministry websites.

Key RTI, Press, and Miscellaneous Laws and Punishments:

- **Denial of Information (Section 9, Right to Information Act 2009):** Public authorities refusing to provide requested information without valid reason face a fine up to 5,000 taka or disciplinary action; willful obstruction carries up to 3 months' imprisonment.
- **Misuse of Information (Section 24, RTI Act 2009):** Using disclosed information for unauthorized purposes carries up to 6 months' imprisonment, a fine up to 10,000 taka, or both.
- **False RTI Application (Section 25):** Submitting fraudulent RTI requests carries a fine up to 5,000 taka or disciplinary action for public servants.
- **Publishing Prohibited News (Section 4, Press Council Act 1974):** Publishing news inciting communal hatred or endangering state security carries up to 3 years' imprisonment, a fine up to 50,000 taka, or both; repeat violations may lead to publication suspension.
- **Operating Unregistered Press (Section 5, Printing Presses and Publications Act 1973):** Running a press without registration carries up to 6 months' imprisonment, a fine up to 2,000 taka, or both; unregistered publications may be confiscated.
- **Defamation in Media (Section 500, Penal Code 1860):** Publishing defamatory content harming reputation carries up to 2 years' simple imprisonment, a fine, or both. Under the Cyber Security Act 2023 (Section 29), online defamation carries a fine up to 25 lakh taka or 3-6 months' imprisonment if unpaid.
- **Spreading False News Online (Section 21, Cyber Security Act 2023):** Publishing false or offensive content disrupting law and order carries up to 7 years' imprisonment, a fine up to 25 lakh taka, or both.
- **Hurting Religious Sentiments in Media (Section 28, Cyber Security Act 2023):** Publishing content online to provoke religious sentiments carries up to 5 years' imprisonment, a fine up to 20 lakh taka, or both.
- **Corruption by Public Servants (Section 5, Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2004):** Bribery or abuse of power carries up to 7 years' imprisonment, a fine, and property

confiscation; embezzlement (Penal Code Section 409) carries life or up to 7 years' imprisonment with a fine.

- **Public Nuisance (Section 268, Penal Code 1860):** Acts causing public annoyance or injury (e.g., illegal waste dumping) carry a fine up to 200 taka; specific nuisances like polluting water (Section 277) carry up to 3 months' imprisonment, a fine up to 500 taka, or both.
- **Environmental Violations (Environment Conservation Act 1995, Section 15):** Polluting air, water, or soil beyond permissible limits carries up to 5 years' imprisonment, a fine up to 1 lakh taka, or both; causing death due to pollution (Section 15A) carries up to 7 years' imprisonment and a fine.
- **Food Adulteration (Safe Food Act 2013, Section 22):** Adulterating food items carries up to 3 years' imprisonment, a fine up to 2 lakh taka, or both; endangering lives carries up to 7 years' imprisonment and a fine.
- **Smoking in Public Places (Smoking and Tobacco Products Usage Control Act 2005, Section 5):** Smoking in prohibited areas carries a fine up to 300 taka; selling tobacco to minors carries up to 3 months' imprisonment, a fine up to 1,000 taka, or both.
- **Unlicensed Arms Possession (Arms Act 1878, Section 19):** Possessing or carrying unlicensed firearms carries up to 7 years' imprisonment, a fine, or both; illegal manufacture carries life imprisonment or 7-14 years with a fine.
- **Public Gambling (Public Gambling Act 1867, Section 3):** Operating a gambling house carries up to 3 months' imprisonment, a fine up to 200 taka, or both; gambling in public carries a fine up to 100 taka.
- **Obstructing Public Servant (Section 186, Penal Code 1860):** Preventing a public servant from performing duties carries up to 3 months' imprisonment, a fine up to 500 taka, or both.
- **False Weights and Measures (Standards of Weights and Measures Act 1982, Section 28):** Using incorrect weights or measures carries up to 1 year's imprisonment, a fine up to 2,000 taka, or both.

Implementation and Additional Notes:

The RTI Act 2009 is enforced by the Information Commission, but low public awareness (only 1% of citizens used RTI by 2020) and bureaucratic resistance limit its impact. Press laws face criticism for restricting freedom, with 1,649 cases under the repealed Digital Security Act by 2022 targeting journalists (8.6% of total cases). The Cyber Security Act 2023 reduced penalties for online content but retains vague provisions, risking misuse. Miscellaneous laws like the Anti-Corruption Commission Act are enforced by the ACC, with 2,500 corruption cases filed in 2022, though convictions are low due to political interference. Environmental and food safety laws are weakly enforced, with 70% of food samples adulterated (BFS 2020). Most offenses are bailable, but serious crimes like corruption or arms violations are non-bailable under the Code of Criminal Procedure 1898. The National Helpline 333 and mobile courts assist enforcement, but resource constraints and corruption hinder progress. For updates, consult bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd, infocom.gov.bd, or acc.org.bd.