



THE SPOTLIGHT

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NEWSLETTER OF THE GLOBAL CENTER FOR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

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THE PRESS UNDER SIEGE: ANATOMY OF MEDIA REPRESSION IN BANGLADESH SINCE AUGUST 5, 2024

The author remains anonymous

Since the fall of Sheikh Hasina's elected government on August 5, 2024, Bangladesh's interim regime has initiated a sweeping and unprecedented crackdown on press freedom. This report documents the systematic repression of independent journalism, the hostile takeover of media institutions, and the deployment of both legal and extrajudicial mechanisms to silence dissent and manufacture public consent. Backed by the National Citizen Party (NCP) and radical Islamist factions, the unelected regime has pursued a calculated strategy to delegitimize secular narratives and insulate its authority from scrutiny.

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WASHINGTON'S EMBRACE OF DELHI: IN THE WORLD SYSTEM OF POWER GAME, THORNS FOR YUNUS, GREEN LIGHT FOR HASINA

Professor Dr Shyamal Das

It was a diplomatic embrace that spoke louder than any official statement. When Washington fell in love with Delhi, the political temperature of the entire subcontinent changed overnight. The much-praised new India–United States agreement—hailed in the name of “stability” in the Indo-Pacific—has, in fact, quietly redrawn the power map of South Asia, and not in favor of Bangladesh's interim ruler, Dr Muhammad Yunus. For months, Yunus assumed that Washington's corridors echoed with sympathy for his government. But that embrace from America was not merely symbolic; it was a signal of restructuring—a reminder that neoliberal power has no permanent friends, only permanent interests.

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EXTREMISM: INDIA, MYANMAR, NEPAL SHOULD BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT BANGLADESH

Probir Kumar Sarker

The rise of Islamist extremism in Bangladesh poses a growing threat to regional stability, particularly for its neighbors India, Myanmar, and Nepal. Over the past three decades, from 1992 to 2024, Bangladesh has witnessed the emergence and entrenchment of jihadist groups, many of which have historical ties to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami coalition.

These groups, operating under the banner of organizations like Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Harkatul-Jihad al-Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B), Ansar al-Islam, and others, have systematically targeted religious minorities, secularists, and regional actors while aligning with transnational terrorist networks such as al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

২০ কার্তিক ১৪৩২

05 November 2025

On behalf of the Global Center for Democratic Governance (GCDG), I extend warm greetings to all.

Since the assumption of power by the interim government, Bangladesh has witnessed a worrying resurgence of religious extremism. Reports indicate that more than 300 religious extremists have been released on bail, raising grave concerns for both national security and regional stability. The re-emergence of such forces not only undermines Bangladesh's democratic progress but also threatens peace across South Asia.

At the same time, the freedom of the press and professional independence are under severe strain. It has been reported that press accreditation cards of 188 journalists have been revoked, 18 journalists arrested, and over 296 have been falsely implicated in criminal cases. Many media outlets are operating under intimidation and fear, curtailing the fundamental right to free expression.

Bangladesh must be liberated from this crisis. The restoration of good governance, justice, and democracy demands an immediate, free, fair, and credible general election under a neutral and trustworthy caretaker administration, ensuring participation of all political parties.

The Global Center for Democratic Governance reaffirms its unwavering commitment to supporting the people of Bangladesh in their pursuit of democratic integrity, human rights, and the rule of law.

Prof Dr Md Habibe Millat

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EDITOR'S NOTE

On behalf of the Editorial Board, I am pleased to present issue 12 of Spotlight to our esteemed readers.

This issue contains three important articles. *The Press under Siege: Anatomy of Media Repression in Bangladesh since August 5, 2024*, highlights the alarming press freedom situation in Bangladesh with dates and references. The article titled *Washington's embrace of Delhi: In the world system of power game, thorns for Yunus, green light for Hasina* is an in-depth discussion about the development of the recent warm relationship between India and the USA and the impact on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's return. The third article, titled *Extremism: India, Myanmar, Nepal should be cautious about Bangladesh, highlighting "the rise of Islamist extremism in Bangladesh poses a growing threat to regional stability, particularly for its neighbors India, Myanmar, and Nepal"* I am sure these articles are timely, research-rich and timely efforts.

I wish the readers a pleasant reading of the issue.

Mohammad Abdur Rashid, PhD

Editor

২০ কার্তিক ১৪৩২ / 05 November 2025

THE PRESS UNDER SIEGE: ANATOMY OF MEDIA REPRESSION IN BANGLADESH SINCE AUGUST 5, 2024

The author remains anonymous

Executive Summary

Since the fall of Sheikh Hasina's elected government on August 5, 2024, Bangladesh's interim regime has initiated a sweeping and unprecedented crackdown on press freedom. This report documents the systematic repression of independent journalism, the hostile takeover of media institutions, and the deployment of both legal and extrajudicial mechanisms to silence dissent and manufacture public consent. Backed by the National Citizen Party (NCP) and radical Islamist factions, the unelected regime has pursued a calculated strategy to delegitimize secular narratives and insulate its authority from scrutiny.

To date, over 388 journalists have been implicated in fabricated criminal cases—most on spurious murder charges—with at least 38 currently imprisoned and repeatedly denied bail. Vague and politically motivated allegations such as “inciting unrest” or “spreading misinformation” have become standard tools of intimidation. Media houses have faced mass firings, enforced leadership changes, and ideological cleansing through the promotion of editors and anchors aligned with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI). The judiciary—particularly the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT)—has been weaponized to impose an unofficial blackout on any positive reporting about the Awami League (AL) or its leadership. A recent amendment to the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) now criminalizes news coverage related to AL activities, equating political journalism with terrorism.

Even the country's leading dailies, such as Prothom Alo and The Daily Star, have faced intimidation tactics including mob-led sit-ins, Islamist provocations, and psychological pressure—all carried out with tacit state approval. Notably, even previously neutral outlets have not been spared, indicating a comprehensive purge of independent voices. Meanwhile, civil society remains suppressed, and international condemnation has yet to evolve into meaningful diplomatic leverage.

This report explores the ideological motivations behind the repression—including the Islamization of public discourse, erasure of Bangladesh's secular legacy from 1971, and suppression of democratic accountability. It concludes with an urgent appeal to international actors to demand the repeal of repressive laws, the withdrawal of politically motivated cases, and the restoration of media freedom. If left unaddressed, this repression risks normalizing authoritarian rule and pushing Bangladesh further from its democratic trajectory.

I. Introduction

The political landscape of Bangladesh has undergone a profound transformation since the fall of the elected AL government on August 5, 2024. In the wake of this political upheaval, the unelected interim regime—has swiftly dismantled democratic norms and consolidated authoritarian control. Central to this consolidation has been a coordinated, aggressive, and ideologically driven crackdown on press freedom, undermining one of the most essential pillars of democratic governance.

This report, *The Press Under Siege*, offers a detailed examination of the anatomy of media repression in Bangladesh under the interim regime. Drawing from verified legal documents, institutional data, and testimonies from journalists and media professionals, it presents a comprehensive analysis of how state machinery has been weaponized to silence independent journalism. Legal tools such as fabricated First Information Reports (FIRs), non-bailable criminal charges, and expansive anti-terror laws have been systematically deployed to harass, arrest, and detain journalists. These legal measures are complemented by extrajudicial tactics including forced dismissals, digital surveillance, ideological purges of newsrooms, and the dismantling of editorial independence.

More disturbing is the regime's growing alignment with radical Islamist groups. The promotion of BNP and JeI-affiliated figures into key media leadership roles, combined with the tacit endorsement of intimidation campaigns by extremist outfits such as *Tawhidi Janata*—a street force mobilized by Hefazat-e-Islam (HeI) and supported by proscribed groups like Ansar al-Islam (AAI) and Hizb ut-Tahrir (HuT)—reveals a dangerous convergence between authoritarian statecraft and Islamist populism. Institutions like the ICT have been co-opted to issue vague directives effectively criminalizing any favorable coverage of AL leaders, particularly Sheikh Hasina.

The domestic response has been muted, stifled by fear, surveillance, and the threat of reprisal. Meanwhile, international reactions—though critical in tone—have yet to generate the sustained pressure necessary to reverse the tide of repression. This report concludes by offering strategic recommendations for domestic actors and international stakeholders committed to democratic recovery in Bangladesh.

What follows is not merely an account of repression. It is an urgent call to confront a deepening crisis at the inter-

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section of authoritarianism, ideological radicalization, and media capture. The future of democracy in Bangladesh may well depend on whether the freedom of the press can be reclaimed before it is extinguished entirely.

II. Mechanisms of Media Repression

Since its inception, Bangladesh's interim regime has pursued a comprehensive, multi-pronged strategy to suppress independent journalism and dismantle press freedom. This section examines the state's repressive mechanisms—from legal persecution and violent intimidation to institutional overhauls and ideological control. Collectively, these tactics expose a deliberate and systematic campaign to silence dissent, control public discourse, and consolidate authoritarian power.

A. Legal Harassment and Arbitrary Detention

B.

Journalists Accused in Fabricated Cases: Since the interim government took control in August 2024, at least 388 journalists across Bangladesh have been named in fabricated cases designed to silence dissent. These charges are often filed en masse and lack substantiating evidence, typically relying on vague accusations such as “undermining national security” or “defaming state institutions.” The bulk of these cases are lodged by local leaders of the BNP, JeI, NCP, pro-Islamist actors, or state-backed vigilantes to create a chilling effect across the profession.

Arrest and Detention: At least 38 journalists including editors have been arrested under a wide array of politically motivated charges, primarily aimed at silencing dissent and stifling independent reporting. These arrests are often executed in the dead of night without proper warrants or legal justification. Security forces, operating with impunity, frequently detain journalists from their homes or workplaces without informing families of their whereabouts. This tactic fosters an environment of intimidation and unpredictability, sending a chilling message to the broader media community that no one is beyond the reach of state repression.

Abuse of Police Remand to Inflict Psychological Pressure: A particularly cruel tactic employed by the interim regime is the routine placement of arrested journalists under police remand, often without any substantiated charges or credible evidence. Once detained, journalists are frequently subjected to extended periods of police custody—ostensibly for interrogation, but in practice, used to inflict sustained psychological stress. These remands are not sanctioned through impartial legal processes; instead, post-August judicial appointments—heavily biased in favor of the regime—have facilitated the arbitrary granting of police custody without due hearings from defense counsels. The true intent of such remand is not investigation but intimidation—sending a clear signal that dissenting voices will be mentally broken even before trial proceedings begin.

Denial of Bail: Once in custody, detained journalists face systematic judicial harassment. Courts, under direct or indirect pressure from the regime, routinely deny bail regardless of the flimsy or fabricated nature of the charges. The use of non-bailable sections under vague laws—such as incitement, sedition, or spreading misinformation—ensures prolonged pre-trial detention. In many instances, while the journalist remains imprisoned, fresh charges are filed to keep them incarcerated indefinitely. This weaponization of the legal system has effectively turned pre-trial detention into a tool of punishment, bypassing due process and undermining the independence of the judiciary.

Notable Tactic: One of the regime's most insidious tools is the misuse of vague legal provisions to file non-bailable charges. Laws originally intended to combat terrorism or communal violence are being repurposed to stifle journalistic work. Accusations like “inciting violence” or “spreading misinformation” are applied indiscriminately, often based on social media posts, investigative reporting, or even private communications. These charges are broad enough to criminalize almost any critical viewpoint, and are used to bypass the protections normally afforded to journalists.

B. Violence, Threats, and Intimidation

Physical Attacks: Since August 5, 2024, there has been a sharp escalation in physical violence against journalists in Bangladesh. At least 63 reporters have been assaulted by state-backed operatives, affiliates of the ruling coalition, and Islamist mobs while covering protests, reporting on political developments, or investigating regime abuses. These attacks—including beatings, public mob assaults, and attempted abductions—are often carried out in broad daylight to instill fear and deter critical reporting. Perpetrators are rarely held accountable, fostering a culture of impunity. Most alarmingly, at least eight journalists have been killed since August 2024, underscoring the lethal risks of practicing independent journalism under the interim regime.

Targeted Intimidation by Government Machinery: The Chief Advisor's Press Wing, the Ministry of Information, and various security agencies have jointly adopted systematic tactics to intimidate, monitor, and suppress

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independent journalists. Intelligence operatives, often in coordination with local police, routinely engage in phone tapping, digital surveillance, and late-night visits to journalists' homes—framed as “routine checks” or unofficial warnings. In numerous documented cases, outspoken reporters have had their residences raided without warrants under the vague pretext of searching for “anti-state materials.” These operations, carried out with impunity, are not merely punitive—they are designed to instill fear and break the collective morale of the journalistic community, discouraging critical reporting and reinforcing a culture of silence.

Threats from Extremist and Pro-NCP Groups: A disturbing number of journalists have received death threats from both Islamist extremists and pro-NCP social media networks. These threats often follow critical reporting on religious fundamentalism, the interim regime's alliance with hardline groups, or human rights abuses. Some journalists have been “doxxed,” with personal information circulated online, prompting security concerns and forcing many to go into hiding. The government's silence—and in some cases, covert encouragement—has emboldened these radical networks to act with increased aggression.

Forced Exile: Facing relentless persecution, over a dozen high-profile journalists have fled Bangladesh since August 2024. Most have sought asylum in Europe, North America, or neighboring countries, citing credible threats to their lives and freedom. These include investigative reporters, TV anchors, and editors known for their secular, liberal stances. In exile, they continue to face pressure—through family intimidation back home and cyber harassment abroad—highlighting the transnational reach of the interim regime's repression apparatus.

C. Institutional Restructuring

Mass Dismissals of Media Professionals: As part of a deliberate campaign to restructure the media landscape, the interim government has overseen the dismissal of at least 135 media professionals from prominent Dhaka-based outlets. This number excludes the widespread purging of local correspondents across the country. Simultaneously, 80 employees of the state-run Bangladesh Television (BTV)—including senior management, bureau chiefs, and veteran correspondents—have been removed from their posts. These dismissals were neither preceded by due process nor justified with professional grounds; rather, they were politically motivated purges designed to eliminate dissenting or neutral voices within the media.

Strategic Leadership Overhaul: In the wake of widespread dismissals, the interim regime has installed partisan loyalists—primarily aligned with the BNP, JeI, and the NCP—into senior editorial and executive roles across Bangladesh's media landscape. Key officials, including the Director General of Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS), the state-run news agency, have been removed and replaced with individuals affiliated with the BNP and JeI, regardless of their qualifications or professional experience. Similarly, at BTV and nearly all major private television networks, formerly independent or secular professionals have been purged and replaced with ideologically aligned appointees, often lacking journalistic experience or credibility. Print media has witnessed a similar transformation, with regime-friendly figures placed in key decision-making positions, reshaping editorial leadership to serve political ends.

Narrative Control and Media Co-option: These leadership changes have enabled the regime to fully co-opt the media, turning once-diverse newsrooms into tools of state propaganda. Editorial lines now center on delegitimizing the AL, justifying the regime's prolonged tenure, and suppressing scrutiny of military influence and Islamist resurgence. Reporting is carefully curated to exclude dissent, propagate misinformation, and reinforce a manufactured consensus. This systematic control of public and private media outlets has created an information environment where opposition voices are silenced, and the public is continuously exposed to regime-approved narratives.

D. From Courtroom to Newsroom: Legal Warfare Against the Press

Coordinated Media Suppression through ICT and Press Office: The Chief Prosecutor of the ICT, known for his partisan bias, secured a discreet ruling from ICT judges prohibiting any positive media coverage of Sheikh Hasina and other AL figures. The ruling was delivered vaguely and without transparency. Simultaneously, the Chief Advisor's Press Wing issued unofficial instructions to major media outlets to amplify negative—mostly false or fabricated—content targeting Sheikh Hasina, her family, and senior AL leaders, reinforcing a coordinated campaign of reputational assault.

Suppressing Political Reporting via Anti-Terrorism Legislation: A recent amendment to the ATA criminalises the publication of any news related to AL or its affiliates, branding such content as a threat to national security. This clearly equates political reporting with terrorism. The Editors' Council has denounced the move, calling it a grave threat to press freedom and demanding its repeal. The regime, however, remains unmoved—turning the law into a tool for ideological suppression.

III. Suppression of Digital and Cultural Expression

The interim regime's assault on freedom of expression has extended beyond traditional media into the digital and

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cultural spheres, where dissent is met with aggressive censorship, surveillance, and legal persecution. Online platforms, once vibrant spaces for independent journalism and civic discourse, have been systematically undermined through website blocking, algorithmic manipulation, and cyber-policing. Simultaneously, the judiciary and regulatory bodies have been weaponized to criminalize political reporting, silence critical voices, and enforce ideological conformity across both digital and legal domains.

Digital Censorship and Algorithmic Suppression

Website Blocking: In a sweeping crackdown on online dissent, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), under directives from the interim regime, has blocked access to more than 200 news websites, blogs, and citizen journalism platforms. Most of these platforms were known for exposing regime abuses, reporting on civil-military tensions, or publishing secular and progressive commentary. The shutdowns were executed without formal explanation or legal recourse, often in the dead of night, leaving affected media unable to challenge the decisions or alert their readers.

Algorithmic Suppression: In coordination with social media monitoring units and hired foreign firms, the regime has reportedly used advanced algorithmic tools to suppress opposition voices online. Posts critical of the interim government, military overreach, or the rising influence of Islamist forces are increasingly subjected to shadow-banning, flagging, or takedown under vague community standards. Influential digital activists, journalists, and academics report declining engagement and visibility, indicating a systematic manipulation of content moderation processes in cooperation with platform providers or through backdoor lobbying.

Targeting of Journalists on Social Media: The Detective Branch (DB), Criminal Investigation Department (CID), and Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) of the Bangladesh Police have been weaponized to suppress online speech. Journalists who post dissenting views or share sensitive information on platforms like Facebook, YouTube, or X (formerly Twitter) face targeted intimidation—including summons for questioning, pressure to delete content, hacking of personal accounts, and threats of arrest under the draconian Cyber Security Ordinance of 2024, enacted by the interim government. This coordinated digital harassment has forced several prominent reporters offline or into exile, creating a widespread chilling effect across the online media landscape.

Surveillance Infrastructure: Investigations by international watchdogs and leaked intelligence reports suggest the interim government has deployed military-grade spyware—including the controversial Pegasus software—to monitor the digital communications of journalists, political dissidents, and civil society leaders. Additionally, Chinese-origin surveillance systems with AI-enabled facial recognition and data-mining capabilities have been installed across major telecom nodes and internet exchange points. This mass surveillance ecosystem undermines all notions of privacy and enables the regime to preemptively target dissenters, thereby neutralizing digital spaces as zones of resistance.

IV. Systematic Repression Statistics

Form of Harassment	Count
Journalists killed	8
Physical assaults	118+
Arbitrary arrests	38
Accused in fabricated cases	388
Media personnel dismissed (Dhaka only)	135
BTV employees removed	80
Press accreditation card cancellations	168
Expelled from Press Clubs	92
ACC bank account inquiries	~50
Accounts frozen	~50
Travel restrictions	~80
Barred from TV talk shows	~25
Barred from column publication	Numerous
Doxxing and vilification campaigns	Systematic
Threats of arrest for social media expression	Frequent

V. Target Profile and Themes of Suppression

Critical of Interim Regime: Journalists who openly question the legitimacy of the interim government or ex-

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pose its covert alliances with military and Islamist forces face systematic repression. These media professionals are targeted for challenging the official narrative, with their work often labeled as subversive or destabilizing. The regime perceives such criticism as a direct threat to its hold on power, prompting harassment, censorship, and legal persecution aimed at silencing dissenting voices.

Investigative Journalism: Investigative reporters uncovering stories of corruption, communal violence, and institutional decay are prime targets for suppression. By exposing the deep-rooted malpractices and abuses within government and allied groups, these journalists disrupt the carefully managed image the regime seeks to project. Their reporting is met with intimidation tactics, fabricated charges, and professional blacklisting designed to discredit their findings and deter others from following suit.

Secular and Progressive Voices: Media personalities and outlets that champion secularism and progressive values, especially those upholding the ethos of Bangladesh's 1971 liberation struggle, face particular scrutiny and repression. These voices challenge the rising tide of Islamist influence and authoritarianism, making them vulnerable to state-sponsored smear campaigns, institutional marginalization, and economic pressures intended to diminish their reach and impact on public discourse.

Independent Media Personalities: Independent analysts and commentators who provide nuanced, non-partisan assessments are increasingly barred from mainstream platforms. Subjected to character assassination and public vilification, they are portrayed as enemies of the state or agents of foreign influence. This exclusion from public debate narrows the spectrum of acceptable viewpoints, consolidating control over the narrative and depriving the public of critical perspectives necessary for a healthy democracy.

VI. Strategic Goals of Media Repression

Delegitimizing AL and Secular, Pro-Independence Opposition: One of the central aims of the interim regime's media repression is to systematically delegitimize the AL and other secular, pro-liberation opposition forces. By branding dissenting political views as "anti-state," "terror-linked," or "subversive," the regime creates a chilling effect that discourages public support and political engagement. This narrative engineering reframes patriotic or democratic opposition as a threat to national security, justifying repression and silencing critical voices.

Islamization of Media: A key strategy involves reshaping the ideological fabric of Bangladesh's media landscape by promoting BNP-JeI-affiliated editors and sidelining secular professionals. This Islamization process seeks to normalize conservative, reactionary narratives in mainstream discourse while gradually erasing the secular and progressive legacy of 1971. By embedding Islamist ideologues in editorial leadership, the regime consolidates its alliance with religious extremists and ensures ideological alignment across influential media platforms.

Manufacturing Consent: The repression is also designed to create an artificial consensus in favor of the interim regime. Through censorship, editorial control, and selective amplification of pro-government voices, a tightly controlled media echo chamber is established. This manufactured consent aims to shape public perception, delegitimize protests or criticism, and present the regime as the only viable authority—even as it erodes democratic norms and engages in authoritarian practices.

Suppressing Electoral Accountability: With the electoral process indefinitely postponed and democratic institutions weakened, the regime relies heavily on media control to stifle demands for transparency and accountability. Investigative reporting, policy critiques, or coverage of opposition movements are blocked or criminalized, allowing the regime to operate with impunity. By silencing scrutiny, the media becomes a tool for prolonging authoritarian rule rather than a watchdog for democratic accountability.

VII. Media Ownership and Attacks

A Media-Friendly Legacy of the AL Government: During the BNP-led government's tenure from 2001 to 2006, only 4 private television channels were granted broadcast licenses—reflecting a cautious and restrictive media approach. In sharp contrast, the AL government between 2009 and 2024 pursued a far more liberal media policy. Under AL's governance, 29 new private TV channels were permitted to operate, signaling its commitment to media plurality and public discourse. This policy also encouraged the rapid growth of print and digital journalism, including a proliferation of newspapers and online news portals across the country. The AL government's open stance created space for diverse media voices, allowing greater freedom of expression and expansion of the media landscape.

Coercion and Violence Under the Interim Regime: Following the ouster of Sheikh Hasina on August 5, 2024,

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the media environment has drastically deteriorated. At least 9 private television channels have faced coordinated attacks or vandalism—often by actors linked to Students Against Discrimination (Now NCP), BNP, or JeI. These attacks are not random but part of a wider campaign to intimidate, silence, or coerce media houses that previously maintained neutrality or supported pro-democracy narratives. Simultaneously, these groups have extorted “protection money” from nearly all major private broadcasters, using coercive power to assert control. The atmosphere of fear and financial pressure has significantly curbed editorial independence, undermining the vibrant media ecosystem previously nurtured under the AL government.

VIII. Domestic and International Response

The suppression of media in Bangladesh under the interim regime has triggered mixed reactions at home and abroad. While civil society and institutional watchdogs attempt to resist, they face overwhelming intimidation and retaliation. Internationally, although condemnation has been voiced, tangible pressure remains minimal—partly due to limited access to credible ground-level information, as domestic outlets have been silenced or co-opted.

Domestic Landscape

Civil Society: Silenced and Intimidated: Bangladesh’s civil society has been systematically silenced. Activists, academics, and rights defenders operate under constant digital and physical surveillance. The looming threat of arbitrary arrest, defamation lawsuits, or violent reprisals has muted even the most outspoken voices. Independent civic engagement is rare, as any form of criticism is equated with subversion or sedition by the regime.

Media Reform Commission: Monitored and Marginalised: Attempts to uphold press freedom through institutional reform have been systematically undermined by the regime. Independent initiatives aimed at documenting media rights violations and advocating for accountability continue to exist, but their operations are heavily constrained. Constant surveillance, state intimidation, and public discrediting have severely limited their effectiveness. What was once a promising avenue for media oversight has been reduced to a token presence, incapable of exerting real influence in the current repressive climate.

Protests: Preemptively Crushed: Street-level resistance has been virtually extinguished. The regime deploys preemptive detentions, digital surveillance, and pro-government mobs to suppress any attempt at organized protest. The result is a landscape of fear where even peaceful demonstrations are deemed seditious, and the once-vibrant culture of civic activism has been reduced to silence.

International Reaction

Human Rights Organizations: Clear Condemnations: International watchdogs, including Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Amnesty International, and the Rights and Risks Analysis Group (RRAG), have strongly condemned the interim government’s ideological manipulation of the media and its structural repression of free speech. They have highlighted targeted arrests, judicial persecution, and the growing Islamization of editorial policies as critical threats to democratic norms.

Multilateral Bodies: Weak and Fragmented Response: Despite increasing evidence of systematic suppression, multilateral actors such as the UN and Commonwealth bodies have offered only weak and inconsistent responses. While verbal expressions of concern have been issued, few have implemented concrete pressure mechanisms or sanctions. The international response remains fragmented and ineffective.

Access to Ground Realities: Severely Compromised: A key reason for the weak international response is the compromised flow of information. With domestic media under constant threat of attack, shutdowns, criminal prosecution, and leadership purges, even willing outlets are too intimidated to publish objective reporting. As most international actors rely on open-source domestic media for situational awareness, the true extent of repression remains obscured—enabling the regime to operate with limited global scrutiny.

IX. Tactical Pressure to Curb Critical Journalism

While *Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star*—two of Bangladesh’s most influential newspapers—have generally aligned with the interim government and maintained a critical stance toward the AL during its tenure, they have nonetheless faced targeted intimidation campaigns. These were not triggered by consistent opposition to the regime but by the occasional publication of investigative or objective reports exposing rising radicalism or systemic failures. Such responses underscore the regime’s zero-tolerance approach to any deviation, however limited, from its manufactured narrative.

Orchestrated Demonstrations by Islamist Mobs: Radical Islamist groups operating under the banner of

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Tawhidi Janata organized public demonstrations in front of both *The Daily Star* and *Prothom Alo* offices. In a calculated act of disruption, a sit-in protest was staged in front of *The Daily Star* headquarters, with protesters deliberately offering Friday (*Jumma*) prayers on the entry and exit gates, effectively blocking access. Meanwhile, outside *Prothom Alo*'s office, demonstrators escalated the pressure further by slaughtering cows and preparing for a communal feast at the gate—an act designed to provoke, disturb, and humiliate.

State Complicity and Strategic Inaction: Although these demonstrations did not escalate into direct violence due to the deployment of armed forces and law enforcement personnel, the government's tacit support was evident. The protesters faced no legal consequences for their intimidation tactics. On the contrary, the state's inaction served as a clear signal of endorsement. The objective was psychological: to create a climate of fear and mental pressure that would discourage both media houses from publishing critical investigations or reporting on the growing nexus between Islamist forces and the interim regime.

X. Consequences and Risks

Erosion of Democratic Norms: The aggressive control of media under the interim regime has led to the collapse of democratic public discourse. Where once a pluralistic and contested media space allowed for diverse political opinions, now an echo chamber of regime-approved propaganda dominates. The delegitimization of dissenting voices—especially those aligned with secular or pro-independence values—has eroded the foundational principles of press freedom and public accountability.

Islamist Entrenchment in Media: The replacement of secular editors with BNP, JeI and NCP loyalists in key media positions has facilitated a steady Islamization of news content. Sharia-aligned narratives, anti-AL rhetoric, and subtle justifications of Islamist political agendas are becoming normalized. This strategic media Islamization not only reflects but accelerates the ideological shift in the country's political and cultural institutions.

Cultural Regression and Historical Amnesia: The suppression of secular, progressive, and liberation-war-rooted journalism has triggered a cultural rollback. Stories celebrating Bangladesh's pluralistic identity and 1971 ethos have been silenced or delegitimized, replaced by narratives that glorify religious orthodoxy or vilify past leadership. This engineered amnesia undermines national unity and weakens the social fabric, especially among younger audiences raised on disinformation.

Judicial Complicity and Institutional Decay: The judiciary, particularly institutions like the ICT, has been weaponized to serve political agendas. Secret rulings banning positive coverage of AL leaders and the criminalization of reporting on AL activities under anti-terror laws exemplify how courts are being used to legalize repression. This distortion of the legal system contributes to widespread impunity and undermines any remaining checks on executive overreach.

XI. Appeals to the International Community: Act Now to Restore Press Freedom in Bangladesh

Freedom of the press is not a privilege—it is the cornerstone of any democratic and civilized society. In the face of the unprecedented repression of media and speech in Bangladesh under its unelected interim regime, we call upon the international community to take urgent, coordinated action. Your voice and leverage are critical in holding this regime accountable and restoring democratic space. We urge the following immediate steps:

Demand the Repeal of Repressive Laws: We call on international actors—especially the UN, EU, Commonwealth, and key bilateral partners—to pressure the interim government to repeal or substantially amend laws that criminalize dissent and empower arbitrary censorship. This includes the Cyber Security Ordinance of 2024, the recent amendments of ATA, and ambiguous provisions of the Penal Code. These laws have become the legal instruments of authoritarianism and must be dismantled.

Insist on the Withdrawal of Politically Motivated Cases: We appeal for strong international condemnation and diplomatic engagement to demand the immediate withdrawal of fabricated criminal cases and FIRs filed against journalists, editors, and media professionals. These cases are politically driven tools of repression. Media licenses, digital access, and professional rights must be restored to those unjustly barred from practicing their trade.

Support the Formation of an Independent Media Protection Taskforce: We urge global press freedom groups, UN Special Rapporteurs, and human rights defenders to initiate the creation of an independent international taskforce. This body must monitor violations, document abuses, provide legal aid to persecuted journalists, and engage directly with the regime to demand systemic reforms. It should be equipped with field access, diplomatic backing, and enforcement capabilities.

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Impose Conditionality and Sanctions: We call on multilateral bodies and donor nations to adopt a policy of conditional engagement with the interim government, tying diplomatic relations, aid disbursement, and trade privileges to verifiable improvements in press freedom. In parallel, targeted sanctions and visa restrictions should be imposed on officials and institutions involved in orchestrating censorship, harassment, and media blackouts.

Provide Sustained Support to Journalists in Exile and Underground: We appeal to international NGOs, watchdogs, and media houses to expand their legal, financial, and digital security support to Bangladeshi journalists who have been forced into exile or are operating underground. These voices are vital to documenting the truth and countering the regime's information blackout.

Revive and Promote Cultural Resistance: We urge international cultural organizations, donor networks, and diaspora communities to fund and promote cultural content—film, music, theatre, literature—that preserves Bangladesh's secular, pluralist identity. Supporting artists, writers, and performers who resist rising extremism and revisionism is essential to safeguarding the nation's founding values and collective memory of 1971.

Launch an Independent International Fact-Finding Mission: To uncover the full extent of media repression, the international community should initiate an independent fact-finding mission—under the UN or a consortium of credible global rights organizations. This mission should be tasked with collecting on-the-ground evidence, interviewing victims and witnesses, and producing a detailed report on the systemic nature of censorship, legal persecution, and ideological restructuring of the media. Its findings can be used to guide international policy, advocacy, and accountability efforts.

Engage Tech Companies to Resist Digital Censorship: Major technology platforms (e.g., Meta, Google, X/Twitter, YouTube) should be urged by the international community to adopt stronger policies against government-driven digital repression. This includes resisting requests for content takedowns, account suspensions, and user data sharing when such requests are politically motivated or violate human rights norms. Platforms must also enhance protection for Bangladeshi journalists, activists, and independent outlets using their services.

Pressure Regional Powers to Uphold Democratic Standards: Key regional actors—particularly India, the UK, and the US—must be urged to move beyond passive diplomacy and actively advocate for press freedom in Bangladesh. These nations wield significant influence over the interim regime and must be encouraged to prioritize democratic principles in their bilateral engagements, aid programs, and strategic dialogues. Silence from regional powers enables continued authoritarian drift.

XI. Conclusion

The repression of the media in Bangladesh since August 5, 2024, reflects more than a clampdown on journalists—it signals the deliberate dismantling of democratic infrastructure. Through a combination of legislative overreach, judicial manipulation, institutional restructuring, and ideological coercion, the interim regime has weaponized the media space to consolidate power, silence opposition, and propagate a radical ideological narrative. What was once a diverse and pluralistic media environment has been hollowed out and replaced with an echo chamber designed to serve the political and religious agendas of the regime's unelected coalition.

This report has demonstrated that the targeting of journalists, criminalization of dissent, and state-sponsored intimidation are not isolated incidents, but part of a strategic campaign. The alignment of military-backed political forces with JeI elements marks a disturbing turn toward Islamization of national discourse. The suppression of secular and pro-independence voices—core to Bangladesh's 1971 legacy—is being carried out with chilling efficiency. Laws such as the ATA now blunt instruments to criminalize reporting on the opposition. Institutions like the ICT have abandoned impartiality, issuing opaque rulings that amount to political censorship.

The consequences of this repression are grave. The erosion of press freedom directly undermines public accountability, transparency, and the democratic process. Without independent media, corruption goes unexposed, extremist ideologies flourish unchecked, and authoritarian narratives dominate. The cultural regression, judicial complicity, and silencing of civil society further weaken the prospects for a peaceful, democratic transition.

International stakeholders—governments, media watchdogs, and human rights organizations—must move beyond statements of concern and adopt tangible pressure strategies. These may include conditional engagement with the interim government, support for persecuted journalists, and the establishment of an independent international media monitoring mechanism.

Bangladesh's future hinges on the restoration of free speech and press freedom. These are not merely rights to be defended—they are the foundations upon which a pluralistic, democratic society can be rebuilt. Reclaiming media autonomy is the first step in resisting authoritarian consolidation and safeguarding the spirit of 1971. Time is of the essence.

The author remains anonymous



WASHINGTON'S EMBRACE OF DELHI: IN THE WORLD SYSTEM OF POWER GAME, THORNS FOR YUNUS, GREEN LIGHT FOR HASINA

Professor Dr Shyamal Das

1. Introduction

It was a diplomatic embrace that spoke louder than any official statement. When Washington fell in love with Delhi, the political temperature of the entire subcontinent changed overnight. The much-praised new India–United States agreement—hailed in the name of “stability” in the Indo-Pacific—has, in fact, quietly redrawn the power map of South Asia, and not in favor of Bangladesh’s interim ruler, Dr Muhammad Yunus.

For months, Yunus assumed that Washington’s corridors echoed with sympathy for his government. But that embrace from America was not merely symbolic; it was a signal of restructuring—a reminder that neoliberal power has no permanent friends, only permanent interests.

As Yunus burned in the fire of strategic neglect, Sheikh Hasina—long criticized by Western “moral guardians”—suddenly returned to the center of global conversation: steady, confident, and seemingly rehabilitated in the court of justice. Washington’s warmth toward Delhi appears to have cast a cold shadow over Yunus’s shaky throne while lighting a new lamp along Hasina’s path to political return.

The 2025 India–U.S. security and trade agreement has created a new reality in South Asian geopolitics. Although the United States had long shown tolerance toward Bangladesh’s interim government in the name of a so-called “democratic transition,” recent developments—particularly Sheikh Hasina’s reappearance in international media—suggest that Washington’s gaze is now fixed not on Dhaka, but on Delhi.

Taken together, the 10-year India–U.S. security pact, tariff reductions, and the use of only soft diplomatic language toward Pakistan make it clear that the United States now prefers to view South Asian stability through an **India-led balance**. In this reality, Bangladesh’s current interim government (under Dr Yunus) faces a crisis of legitimacy on the one hand and regional isolation on the other.

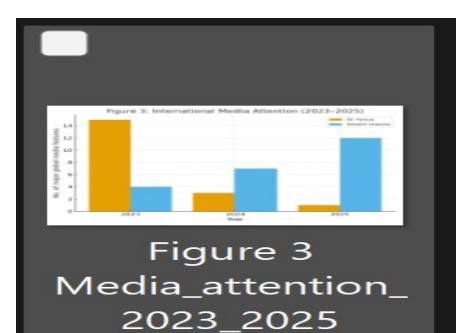
2. The complex workings of economics and its transnational political effects.

2.1: Geopolitical reality—India’s recent rise and America’s realignment

- U.S.–India 10-year security agreement (2025): Includes decisions to expand military equipment cooperation, cyber defense, and regional surveillance.
- U.S.–India trade and tariff reductions: The United States has called India a “trusted partner in critical supply chains” (U.S. DoC, 2025).

India-mediated stability model: In South Asia, the United States is now building an India-centric balance—that is, crafting a strategy around a stable regional power rather than around unstable or interim states such as Pakistan and Bangladesh.

We will try to unpack the logic behind the above through data. If diplomacy tells a story, data draws its map. Figure 1 shows that since 2015, U.S. trade with India has increased by roughly 90 per cent, while trade with Bangladesh has actually declined. Figure 2 illustrates a notable shift in the curve—the U.S. Strategic Engagement Index with India has increased from 58 to 87, while Bangladesh’s has declined below 40. And Figure 3 reveals the twist in the tale—where Dr Yunus, once a media star buoyed by Western sympathy, has now nearly disappeared from the headlines, while Sheikh Hasina has reappeared prominently in Reuters, Deutsche Welle, and The Independent. In short: trade embraced Delhi, strategy saluted it, and the global narrative quietly pivoted away from Dhaka’s recent past.



Now, let us come to the main part of today’s article. We observed that, alongside the India–U.S. agreement, another development occurred simultaneously in the Bangladesh–India context. After the coup that took place in Bangladesh in July and August, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina—while in India—gave interviews to three highly influential international outlets (Reuters, Deutsche Welle, and The Independent). This also amounts to a kind of conferral of

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legitimacy by the international media upon her political position. Now, let us explain why the India–U.S. dynamic means a “sideline” for Yunus but a “window of opportunity” for Hasina. For the reader’s convenience, we provide some theoretical and conceptual explanations for these reasons first; subsequently, they will be applied to the Bangladesh–India “sideline versus opportunity” interpretation.

2.1.a. Realism: the “anchor state” and reliability

In the Indo-Pacific balance, the U.S. objective is to contain/counter China. In this design, India is the anchor state. Therefore, Delhi’s preferences set Washington’s operating norms in the region. Who is reliable, stable, and delivery-capable in Bangladesh’s domestic politics, thus suddenly becomes very important.

Figure 1 (Trade) and Figure 2 (Strategic Engagement) show that interlock—or mutual “bonds of cooperation”—with India has risen rapidly; in other words, India-backed choices and lower transaction costs and risks from Washington’s perspective have influenced the relationship between the two countries.

Let us clarify further. What do the data and documents say that support the statement “U.S.–India interlock has increased because, in Washington’s view, transaction costs/risks have fallen”?

2.1.b. Trade interlock has increased rapidly (hard numbers)

“Trade interlock” refers to an economic and diplomatic linkage in which trade, investment, and supply chains between two countries are so intrinsically interdependent that a policy change or market shock in one has a direct impact on the other.

It is essentially an economic lock-in effect, meaning that breaking the relationship harms both parties. Trade interlock is really a combination of several propositions. It can be understood by the following equation:

Trade Interlock = Mutual Dependence + Policy Continuity + Low Transaction Risk.

An example: In 2024, total U.S.–India trade in goods and services was about \$212.3 billion, which is +8.3% higher than in 2023. This is direct evidence that the bilateral economic “interlock” is tightening rapidly. (*United States Trade Representative*)

Monthly merchandise-trade continuity (2024) shows volumes that are high and stable, reducing operational uncertainty. (*Census.gov*)

2.1.c. Tariffs and dispute settlement—reducing “transaction friction”

In 2023, the two countries resolved six WTO disputes together; India removed retaliatory tariffs (on numerous items, including almonds, apples, chickpeas/lentils). Lower tariff friction reduces business transaction costs and policy risk. (*United States Trade Representative + internationaltradeinsights.com*)

Foundational defense agreements—LEMOA/COMCASA/BECA raise interoperability and reduce cost/risk

- According to U.S. State Department notes, LEMOA, COMCASA, and BECA together have increased logistics provisioning, secure communications, and geospatial data-sharing—thereby boosting interoperability. (*State Department*)

An analytical document shows that LEMOA reduces operational costs for Indian forces, and under BECA/COMCASA, the U.S. shares vast data at “virtually no cost,” which brings down coordination transaction costs. (*CNA*)

2.1.d. Supply-chain “rules of the road”

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) Supply Chain Agreement took effect on February 24, 2024. Under this agreement, the U.S., India, and other partners undertake obligations regarding supply-chain monitoring, crisis response, and transparency standards. Joint rules/standards mean easier contract enforcement and lower policy-volatility risk. (*mti.gov.sg + State Department*)

2.1. e. Critical-tech interlock: iCET + semiconductor investment

Under the iCET framework, links in critical/emerging technologies, space cooperation, and the defense industry have deepened. Investment announcements by Micron and Applied Materials in India have provided the “hardware” for supply-chain diversification, reducing country risk and concentration risk. (*The American Presidency Project + The White House*)

In short, we learn that:

- As trade volumes rise, tariff disputes fall, logistics/data-sharing expand, and supply-chain rules are strengthened, together these four pillars have tightened the interlock.

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When logistics/comms/geo-data are interoperable and chains are standardized, transaction costs fall in contract execution, coordination, and information asymmetry; the risks of disputes/policy changes also decline. The cost-reduction logic of LEMOA/COMCASA/BECA is directly documented; IPEF's rules-of-origin-type governance also reduces ex-ante risk. (*CNA + State Department*)

Now, let us see how the above complex issues relate to the Hasina versus Yunus discussion.

- When Washington's operating logic is "low friction, low risk, high delivery," predictable partnerships along Delhi-aligned standards/corridors get priority. Under the Awami League, sustained coordination across ports/logistics/security can easily be perceived as India-backed, lower-risk preferences. By contrast, in an interim/ad-hoc regime, reduced institutional continuity raises transaction costs/risks—supporting our thesis. (See documentation under points 1–5 above.) (*State Department*) If you wish, I can insert these into your report as an "Evidence Box," with citation tags beside each point (e.g., USTR State/White House/US Census/CNA). Under Awami League rule, there are markers of long-term infrastructure/security coordination; under the Yunus regime, administrative fragility and uncertainty of survival raise the "unreliable partner" risk in the regional game. Result: Hasina = reliable; Yunus = high risk.

2.2. The "Two-Level Game" (Putnam): the link between external signals and internal legitimacy

External (Level I) strategic signals reshape internal (Level II) politics. The Washington Delhi "hug" is just such a signal:

- **Externally:** Priority to India; in Bangladesh, a "lower risk" actor is needed.

Internally: A shift in media/diplomatic tone makes a Hasina return narrative possible (Chart 3: Media Attention). This signal indicates "with whom Washington finds it easier to achieve its goals"—pricing Hasina up and Yunus down in the domestic **legitimacy market**. Let us discuss this a bit more in the light of game theory.

3. Neoliberal institutionalism: why stability is big capital

"Neoliberal institutionalism" means that in today's world, a state builds trust not merely through power or friendship, but through policy continuity, administrative stability, and technological capacity. By this theory, the more predictable a state is, the more preferred it becomes as a partner for investment, diplomacy, and security cooperation.

Example 1: Potholes and corridor politics

Imagine a portion of the India-to-U.S. cargo or supply chains runs through Bangladesh. To keep that corridor open, you need continuous policy, steady administrative competence, and infrastructural predictability. If the government changes midway and the new government says, "no more cargo on this route," investors get spooked, logistics are disrupted, and business shifts elsewhere. Such uncertainty appears to foreign partners as risk (policy inconsistency). Under Hasina, long-term policy continuity built this confidence; the interim character of the Yunus government creates fears of unexpected change for foreign partners.

Example 2: Data and cyber standards

Frameworks like IPEF or the QUAD today are not only about military or trade—they also work on data security, cyber rules, and digital trade standards. For instance, if Google or Tesla wishes to set up servers or a factory in Bangladesh, they want assurance that laws won't change abruptly, censorship or tax policy won't be erratic, and courts will secure their contracts. Under Hasina, such policy stability was comparatively stronger; the Yunus government's limited experience and uncertainty make foreign companies hesitate.

The upshot is that precisely because of neoliberal policy logics, the India–U.S. agreement and international frameworks like the IPEF prioritize governments that are stable, administratively competent, and predictable in their policies. In that setting, the Hasina government is the "**stable hand**," whereas the Yunus government is a "**transition risk**." This reality now makes Hasina's return to South Asia's diplomatic map both reasonable and likely.

4. The World System of Power: "delivery versus disruption"

Beyond the complex economic account above, the most important political explanation lies in game theory. Let us explain why, even if the Yunus government "shows obedience," the four major powers will ultimately refuse it and tilt toward Hasina. Remember, this is not merely a normative question; it is the practical politics of the **World System of Power**, where the bargaining of great powers and the functioning of regional corridors are decisive. Let us take the issues one by one.

4.1. The Consideration In the world system of power: "The system does not need a 'good boy,' but 'capable hands that deliver.'"

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4.1.a The four major actors—the United States, India, China, and Russia—are not in total conflict today; in South Asia, there is a notable trend of hedging and compromise. The goals are:

- Supply-chain and corridor security (ports, roads, rail, data/cyber)
- Risk predictability (policy continuity, honoring contracts, administrative capacity)

4.1.b In this global/regional set-up, the key is not who is more **compliant**, but whose **delivery** is more durable and stable. In this light, we must see how the differences between the two main players in our discussion affect the current context.

• **Yunus:** opportunistic, ideationally hollow, and capacity-deficient → corridor/contract risk rises. Even if Yunus grants corridors and other concessions at will in Bangladesh today, there has been widespread questioning at home and abroad regarding competence and legal legitimacy in these undertakings.

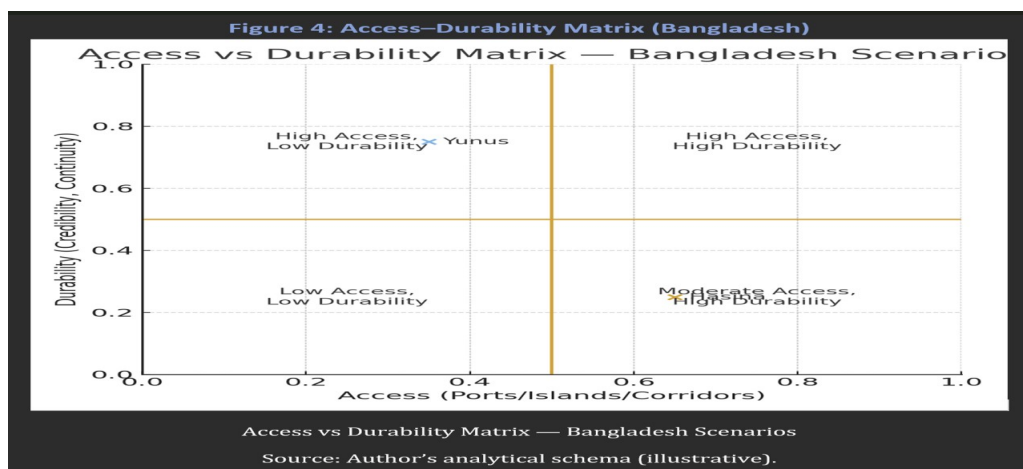
Hasina: predictable, with a durable delivery track record and far more effective at ensuring legal legitimacy; even if contracts have limits under her, they are more sustainable and legitimate, thereby reducing contract risk.

4.2 Not pro-U.S., but pro-stability: the structure of Hasina's acceptability

It is true that Sheik Hasina has in the past said “no” directly to the United States on ports/islands/corridors. Even so, the world system today buys pro-stability signals at a higher price, not “pro-U.S.” ones. The reason is that the great powers' aim is not direct access, but to keep long-term, lower-risk corridors running through multilateral or India-mediated frameworks. In this format, Dhaka can preserve its sovereignty while ensuring compliance with standards, customs, and cyber interoperability, which is more predictable under Hasina's administration.

Dr. Yunus can offer “access” on paper, but the lack of legitimacy and continuity in his government is not sustainable in the eyes of foreign partners. A deal struck today could be halted tomorrow in the courts, on the streets, or in politics—because of this high risk, the “high access, low durability” profile falls to the bottom of the list of acceptability. By contrast, Hasina offers “moderate access, high durability”—where the same outcomes can be achieved with less controversy and greater staying power under multilateral umbrellas, such as those involving India/Japan/ADB, without increasing direct U.S. presence.

Therefore, the currency of acceptability is not durability. By this logic, among the four major powers' common denominators, Hasina is the “stable hand,” and Yunus is the “volatile asset.” The matrix below indicates that reality.



Access vs Durability Matrix — Bangladesh Scenarios
Source: Author's analytical schema (illustrative)

5. In the language of game theory, the payoffs have changed

In the ongoing game within the world system of power centered on the Indian subcontinent and its region, we will discuss in some detail why Sheikh Hasina, in the eyes of the major international and regional actors (the U.S., India, China, Russia), ranks ahead of / is more acceptable than the local/regional alliances (BNP/Tarique, NCP, the Jamaat and Pakistan-linked blocs).

5. a. In simple terms, why both big and small actors will prefer Hasina (or dislike her less)

5.a.1. Stability and continuity

The great powers (U.S./India/China/Russia) want large projects, corridors, investment realization, and security coordination to endure in the long term. Hasina is administratively predictable; her policy continuity is recognized. The Yunus coalition—especially where BNP/Jamaat/Pakistan links exist—can exacerbate domestic instability and legal

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challenges, thereby increasing the risk for the great powers.

5.a.2. Legitimacy and public support

Domestic popularity and political equilibrium are important signals to major-power policymakers. If the officeholder enjoys higher acceptability among local people, foreign partners gain confidence in investment and security planning. According to current surveys/sentiment lines, the Awami League/Hasina remains the strongest; hence, major actors consider Hasina more acceptable. In the final section of the article, we will present robust empirical evidence on popularity.

5.a.3. Regional clearing

In India-oriented corridors and sea-based policies, Delhi wants Dhaka to cooperate “freely” but “predictably.” Hasina can establish effective interlocks with Delhi, fostering a sustainable mutual trust and benefit in that relationship; actors opposed to Hasina—especially Yunus and particularly the Pakistan/Jamaat camp—can generate potential conflict here. BNP also creates another conflict dynamic under the rules of this game, but among all actors, the interlocking relationships that the major powers have with Hasina/Awami League are far more favorable than with others.

5.a.4. Reducing legal and security costs

A coalition linked to Jamaat/Pakistan can carry allegations of terrorism, legal uncertainty, and international pressure—factors that raise foreign partners’ “cooperation costs.” Under Hasina, these risks are comparatively lower.

5.a.5. Multilateral options and cover

Hasina may not be directly “pro-U.S.”; even so, she can work through multilateral frameworks—India/Japan/ADB/JICA/IMF/World Bank—to secure consent domestically. This is advantageous to foreign actors (sovereignty preserved, outcomes delivered). Under the Yunus coalition, exclusive or controversial concessions can sometimes be extracted quickly, something the major powers dislike.

5.b Game Theory: Payoff / Acceptance Matrix

Table title: *Why each actor finds Hasina more acceptable (in brief)*

Actor	Why prefer Hasina	Why the Yunus-oriented bloc (BNP/Tarique, Jamaat, NCP, Pakistan) is unacceptable
United States	Stable corridor dependence; consistency in customs/data/cyber standards; feasible within multilateral frames	Legal/political risk; policy breaches on short notice; press-relational complications
India	Secure border/Northeast corridors; internal stability; India–Dhaka interlock	BNP partnership/Pakistan links heighten national-security concerns
China	Easier project articulation and contract enforcement; keep investments viable	Political instability endangers contracts
Russia	Continuity in energy/defense contracts; strategic predictability	If international pressure/organizational disorder rises, execution is obstructed
Bangladesh (domestic)	Sovereignty + social security; continuity of development	Short-term concessions; long-term damage and division

In short, under Hasina, there may be less access to assets such as corridors, ports, and islands, but a lower risk and greater durability, which foreign actors perceive as far more advantageous in terms of regional priorities. Under the Yunus-centric bloc, even if concessions or discounts (access to assets) are greater, the problems of durability and legitimacy make that option unacceptable to the great powers. We will discuss this further later.

5. c Example or case statement: Great powers do not fall in love with countries—they invest their money and security where there is **reliable delivery**. Hasina’s administrative continuity and local acceptability ensure reliability; therefore, India, the United States, China, and Russia—though they will employ different strategies for different reasons—will, in terms of interest, accept Hasina’s status. Conversely, if the Yunus bloc includes BNP/Tarique, NCP, Jamaat, and Pakistan links, political risk and legal uncertainty increase, so foreign partners will regard that alternative as of low acceptability.

Let the players be {U.S., India, China, Russia, Bangladesh-Regime}.

- Previously, the “Yunus card” offered some actors the convenience of soft pressure/moral posturing.

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- With the India–U.S. pact and the prioritization of IPEF/corridors, the payoff matrix has changed:
 - o **U.S./India:** want “lower risk + faster execution” → Hasina > Yunus
 - China/Russia (hedging):** want a “predictable partner” → lower deal cost with Hasina
- Result:** Keeping Yunus to extract “obedient” service does not yield a systemic payoff; choosing Hasina yields a higher total payoff.

5.d ‘Obedience’ versus ‘credibility’: why “mere compliance does not equal acceptability.”

- The Yunus government is “compliant” toward the United States—that is, willing to follow U.S. preferences, offering corridor/island agreements, and so on.
 - But it is not “acceptable,” because:
 - o it has no popular base,
 - o it has weak capacity, and
- It is unstable or opportunistic.

By contrast,

The Hasina government may not accept every U.S. condition, but it has institutional predictability, governance capacity, and popular legitimacy— Therefore, it is internationally “acceptable,” even if not “compliant.”

In brief

Concept	Meaning	Example
Compliant	Obeys instructions but lacks intrinsic strength	Yunus government
Acceptable	Does not obey every instruction, but is a stable, trustworthy partner in the world system	Sheikh Hasina

- **Compliance** (agreeing in word/gesture) ≠ **Credibility** (delivering on the ground).
- Foreign powers want: keeping schedules, legal assurance, and bureaucratic continuity.
- In the Yunus regime, there is a credibility gap for three reasons:
 - a) Weak legitimacy → risk of internal resistance/policy reversal; lack of public support.
 - b) Low capacity → slow implementation in ports/data/tax standards.
 - c) Uncertain continuity → long-term concessions/corridors become costly.

In Hasina’s prior experience, consistency and state capacity are proven, and legitimacy and public support are greater; as a result, major actors view her as a lower transaction-cost partner.

5.e. India’s veto-weight + America’s risk-minimization

- The India–U.S. strategic embrace means India’s preferences now set Washington’s norms.
- To run India-priority corridors (BBIN, Northeast, seaports), a stable Dhaka is needed → Hasina is the natural choice.

From the U.S. side, too: risk minimization → a predictable regime over “interim fragility.”

5.f. China–Russia hedge: ‘a stable counterpart is better’

- China wants corridor/industrial park/port deals with contract enforcement;
- Russia seeks long-horizon energy/defense financing.

Both follow a non-ideological logic: “the partner who gets things done”—by this test **Hasina > Yunus**.

5.g. Narrative/legitimacy market: external signals → internal pricing

- When international coverage and diplomatic tone shift, prices in the domestic legitimacy market move.
- According to Figure 3 (media visibility) and the argument: Yunus ↓, Hasina ↑ → external signals “price up” acceptability for Hasina at home.

5.h. Demonstrated popularity: “AL/Hasina remains the most popular”

- Selectorate theory says: a durable regime = large winning coalition + delivery of public goods.
 - Public sentiment: Awami > BNP > Yunus-Regime (overall trend) → seen by external players as lower risk.
- Popularity = a proxy for policy durability; hence, in the four powers’ cost-benefit calculus, signing off on Hasina is easier.

Here’s a faithful, line-by-line English translation of your passage:

One-line causal chain

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World System (US–India tilt + CN/RU hedge) → Corridor/Standard Priority → not Compliance, but Credibility needed → Yunus = capacity/continuity risk; Hasina = predictable delivery → External signal shifts legitimacy → Hasina acceptable; Yunus refused.

Four-Corner “Actor Shift”

Power	Primary interest	Dhaka preference (reason)
US	Risk reduction, IPEF norms	Hasina (predictable delivery)
India	Corridor/Northeast security	Hasina (interlock record)
China	Contract/infrastructure continuity	Hasina (contract enforcement)
Russia	Long-term finance/defense	Hasina (policy stability)

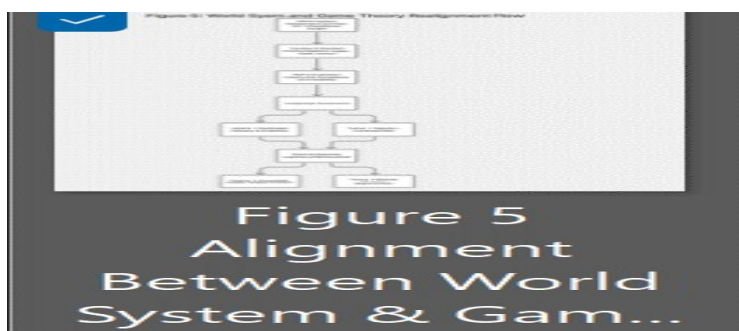
Political implications

- Even if Yunus displays “obedience,” the world system today prioritizes delivery.
- In the game-theory equation, the payoff shift has made Hasina the “least risk, most delivery” option. Add domestic popularity to that, and it further lowers the political cost for external players. Hence, the “common divisor” for the four big players is Hasina, and Yunus is a “high-volatility asset.”

6. Social power / narrative market: agenda-setting and the “legitimacy market”

International media are agenda setters. When Washington’s strategy turns toward Delhi, coverage becomes stability centric as well.

- Chart 3 shows: Yunus-visibility is decreasing, while Hasina-visibility is rising. The linkage is this: media narrative → diplomatic tone → investor sentiment → domestic legitimacy—one pipeline. As a result, Hasina is repriced in the market as the “responsible option,” while Yunus is a “high-volatility asset.” The discussion above demonstrates that, on the South Asian stage of power and interests, an alignment has emerged, with the game operating within the global system of power. We depict the whole matter below in Figure 5.



7. Sheik Hasina’s international re-entry

After a long silence, Sheik Hasina gave interviews to three international media outlets (Reuters, The Independent, DW) within a single week, which clearly amounts to a “diplomatic re-entry.”

- She said, “No election in Bangladesh is possible without the Awami League.”
- She directly questioned the “illegitimacy” of the current interim government. In her interview with DW, she said, “I am accountable to the people, not to foreign pressure.”

This is not merely personal defense; it is a policy message—that under the new India–United States equation, Sheik Hasina remains South Asia’s most popular and politically seasoned leader.

Why this is bad news for the Yunus regime

- **International distrust:** U.S. policymakers now recognize that a Yunus-led transition “cannot deliver stability.”
- **Pakistan card fails:** Yunus long sought Pakistan’s sympathy and U.S. forbearance; but the U.S. now situates Pakistan within an India-centric region.
- **Neoliberal logic:** The United States prioritizes interests, not individuals. An India-led South Asia is more profitable for the U.S. economically and strategically.

Legitimacy crisis: On social media (Facebook Sentiment Dataset, Das 2025), during July–October 2025,

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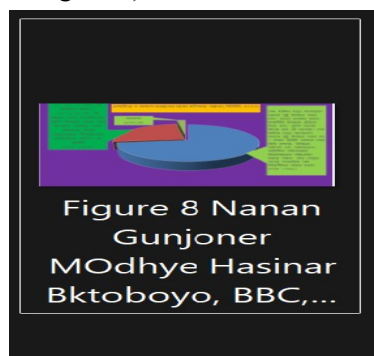
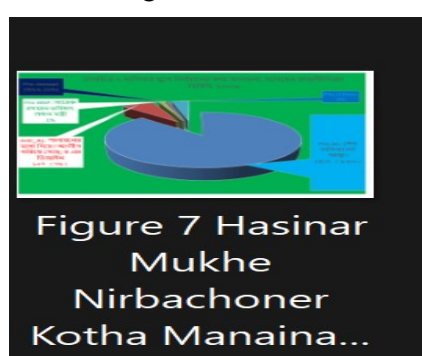
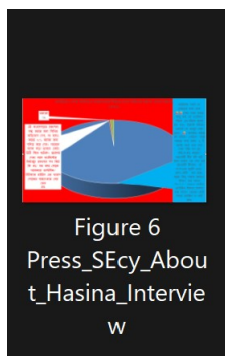
negative reactions toward the Yunus government exceed 70%, whereas positive reactions toward Sheikh Hasina are far higher, at 70–98%.

Here we briefly analyze public opinion on three Facebook news items, all related to Sheikh Hasina’s recent interviews:

“Press Secretary’s statement on the Prime Minister’s interview” (Prothom Alo): In the pie chart (Figure 6) of 1,436 opinions (1,436 people), the blue section (99% of opinions) shows that social-media users overwhelmingly rejected the Press Secretary’s comments; we present selected comments for readers here.

“Hasina’s talk of elections is improper, say politicians” (BBC): In the pie chart (Figure 7) of 1,609 opinions (1,609 people), the blue section (88% of opinions) shows that social-media users largely rejected the story; selected comments are presented here.

“Hasina’s statement amid various rumors” (BBC): Of a total of 5,176 people’s opinions, 73% directly expressed confidence in the Awami League and Sheikh Hasina (see Figure 8).



8. Finally, our theoretical conclusion

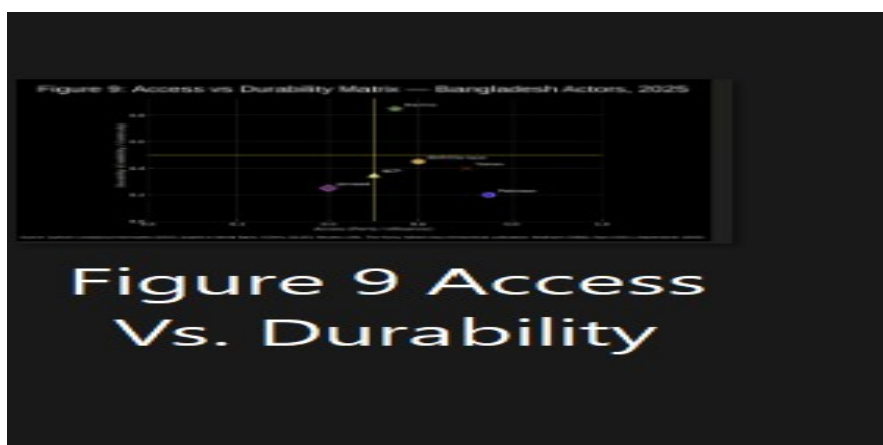
8.a. Game theory – Strategic Triangle

Player	Strategy	Payoff (Short-term)	Payoff (Long-term)
USA	Strengthen India; hedge Pakistan and Bangladesh	Stability in Indo-Pacific	Containment of China
India	Deepen U.S. alignment; marginalize unstable neighbors	Trade + Security gains	Regional leadership
Bangladesh (Yunus)	Depend on U.S. sympathy	Temporary recognition	Isolation
Bangladesh (Hasina)	Reassert legitimacy via an India-friendly equilibrium	Political resurgence	Strategic acceptance

The above analysis closely aligns with a fundamental concept in game theory—the Nash equilibrium—suggesting that Hasina has precedence over Yunus. Based on coordinates drawn from various organizations (e.g., World Bank, V-Dem, ACLED, Reuters), the acceptability of Hasina and Yunus is presented below, calculated by comparing asset access and durability. Compared to other competitors, although Hasina is less willing to grant foreign powers access to assets (Accessibility 0.40 for Hasina versus 0.70 for Yunus), her capacity and competence are far ahead in ensuring the durable sustainability of whatever is granted (Durability 0.85 for Hasina versus 0.40 for Yunus). By these two measures, Hasina’s acceptability is much higher (see * versus X).

Continued on Page 19

WASHINGTON'S EMBRACE OF DELHI: IN THE WORLD SYSTEM OF POWER GAME, THORNS FOR YUNUS, GREEN LIGHT FOR HASINA



8.b Cultural Inertia & Popular Legitimacy

Bangladeshi public opinion is still rooted in the 1971 independence-centric narrative; that cultural inertia grants political legitimacy to Hasina, but not to Yunus.

When foreign powers invest in a regime without public support, a legitimacy gap is created—which ultimately backfires (Scott, 1990; Keane, 2018).

The new India–U.S. agreement has changed South Asia’s power geometry. The United States now understands that the Yunus regime neither enjoys legitimacy nor ensures stability; by contrast, Sheik Hasina’s leadership, India-friendly posture, and public support are the necessary ingredients for stability in South Asia.

Conclusion

The recent strategic embrace between India and the United States has reset South Asia’s power geometry in a way that prioritizes durability, not access—i.e., policy continuity, administrative capacity, and social acceptability—over the superior currency. In this new balance, Dr. Yunus’s “high-access, low-durability” profile is synonymous with risk to international partners, while Sheik Hasina’s “moderate-access, high-durability” profile leads on the acceptability metric. The trade/engagement trends, media signals, and access–durability matrices in Figures 5–9 consistently point to the same conclusion: Washington–Delhi tilt \neq Dhaka-agnostic; rather, Delhi-anchored stability requires a predictable Dhaka, where Hasina is the “stable hand,” and Yunus the “volatile asset.”

In game-theory terms, the payoff matrix has shifted. The four major powers’ shared goals—corridor security, supply-chain rules, and contract enforcement—naturally bias them toward the partner with the lowest transaction costs. Even if debates over justice or moral posturing inflate the political atmosphere, in the real world, compliance \neq does not equal credibility. On paper, the Yunus camp may display “access,” but deficits of legitimacy and continuity make that access costly; by contrast, Hasina’s record discounts deliverable predictability—so in a Nash-like equilibrium, the Hasina choice emerges as the least-risk/most-delivery option.

This structural shift has been accelerated by signals from the narrative market. International coverage and diplomatic tone shifts (Figure 3) change prices in the domestic legitimacy market, pricing up Hasina and discounting Yunus. Bangladesh’s cultural inertia—the 1971-centered national narrative—already nudges the base of public support in one direction; that is, popular legitimacy is a proxy for policy durability, which further simplifies external stakeholders’ risk calculus.

Therefore, the three most pragmatic lessons for Bangladesh right now are—

1. Stability is currency: International partners do not buy “access-at-any-cost,” they buy predictable delivery.
2. India-anchored architecture: If Bangladesh can demonstrate continuity in BBIN/IPEF/logistics standards, India-mediated platforms reduce costs and raise acceptability.

Institutional continuity: Consistency across courts, contracts, customs/data standards lowers the risk premium and makes investment and security cooperation sustainable.

The bottom line in today’s South Asian game is that trust beats politeness; outcomes beat obedience. In this Delhi-facing phase of Washington’s strategy, the natural carrier of an outcome-centric, low-friction, high-durability path for Bangladesh is Sheik Hasina—hence both the cooling shadow over the Yunus regime and the green light ahead of Hasina are logical consequences of this World System of Power.

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WASHINGTON'S EMBRACE OF DELHI: IN THE WORLD SYSTEM OF POWER GAME, THORNS FOR YUNUS, GREEN LIGHT FOR HASINA

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EXTREMISM: INDIA, MYANMAR, NEPAL SHOULD BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT BANGLADESH

Probir Kumar Sarker

The rise of Islamist extremism in Bangladesh poses a growing threat to regional stability, particularly for its neighbors India, Myanmar, and Nepal. Over the past three decades, from 1992 to 2024, Bangladesh has witnessed the emergence and entrenchment of jihadist groups, many of which have historical ties to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami coalition.

These groups, operating under the banner of organizations like Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B), Ansar al-Islam, and others, have systematically targeted religious minorities, secularists, and regional actors while aligning with transnational terrorist networks such as al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

The recent interim government led by Muhammad Yunus has raised further alarms due to its perceived leniency toward these groups and potential geopolitical alignments with the United States, which could destabilize the region further through schemes like the proposed Rakhine corridor. India, Myanmar, and Nepal must remain vigilant as Bangladesh risks becoming a hub for jihadist activities that threaten their sovereignty and security.

Bring back Khilafat: Banned Islamist organisation marches in Bangladesh

The radical Islamic organisation Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT), banned since 2009, took out a 'March for Khilafat' in Dhaka. The rise of radical outfits under Muhammad Yunus's caretaker government is also a concern for India. India banned the HuT in 2024 and the NIA has arrested its members this year.

• Live TV



The radical Islamic organisation Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT), banned since 2009, took out a 'March for Khilafat' in Dhaka on March 7. (Image: AP)

licity allowed groups like JMB, HuJI-B, and Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) to establish training camps, often in collaboration with the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) in Bandarban. These camps, coupled with madrasa networks, became breeding grounds for jihadist ideology, drawing inspiration from al-Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood.

The 2001–2006 period saw over 1,100 attacks targeting Awami League members, leftists, secularists, and religious minorities, with hundreds killed. Even after the banning of JMB and HuJI-B in 2005, their ideological and operational remnants persisted, splintering into groups like Ansar al-Islam (the Bangladesh wing of al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), formed in 2014) and ISIS's Bangladesh branch (active since 2015).

The BNP-Jamaat Nexus and Extremist Growth

The roots of Bangladesh's militancy trace back to the early 1990s, when groups like HuJI-B emerged with ties to Pakistan's jihadist ecosystem. Founded by Bangladeshi veterans of the Afghan war against the Soviets, HuJI-B established itself in 1992, drawing support from Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh Khilafat Majlish, and other Islamist outfits.

Its operations, including the 1999 attack on poet Shamsur Rahman and the deadly 2004 grenade attack on an Awami League rally, were enabled by the political patronage of the BNP-Jamaat coalition government (2001–2006).

During this period, extremist groups like JMB flourished under the protection of MPs, ministers, and security forces, with JMB being founded in 1998 by Shaykh Abdur Rahman, a former Jamaat leader. JMB's 2005 coordinated bomb attacks across 63 districts, demanding Sharia law, underscored its ambition to dismantle Bangladesh's secular framework.

The BNP-Jamaat coalition's com-

Minority Repression Under the Touhidi Janata Banner

Extremist groups in Bangladesh have systematically targeted religious and cultural minorities under the pretext of establishing a Sharia-based state, often rallying under the banner of "Touhidi Janata" (God-fearing masses). Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Shias, Ahmadis, and Sufis have faced brutal attacks, reflecting the jihadists' rejection of Bangladesh's pluralistic heritage.

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EXTREMISM: INDIA, MYANMAR, NEPAL SHOULD BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT BANGLADESH

Notable incidents include the 2015 Kantaji Hindu temple bombing, the 2016 killing of a Buddhist monk in Bandarban, and the 2015 Bogra Shia mosque attack. Between 2013 and 2021, Hindus faced repeated communal violence, often linked to Jamaat's political agitation against the Awami League. Christians, including a Baptist pastor stabbed in 2015, and Ahmadis, targeted in a 2016 mosque bombing, have been labeled "heretics" by groups like JMB and ISIS.

Secular intellectuals and activists, particularly those criticizing Islamism, have been prime targets. The 2015 murder of Avijit Roy by Ansar al-Islam and the 2016 killing of LGBTQ+ activist Xulhaz Mannan highlight the jihadists' aim to silence voices of dissent. These attacks, often claimed by AQIS or ISIS, align with the broader ideology of establishing a Caliphate, rejecting secularism, and purging "un-Islamic" elements.

The Touhidi Janata narrative, propagated by leaders like Jasimuddin Rahmani and Mufti Harun Izhar, has fueled mob violence and legitimized jihadist campaigns against minorities and secularists, often with tacit support from Jamaat-aligned media like *Daily Amar Desh* and *Naya Diganta*.

Ideology, Targets, and Future Plans

The ideology of Bangladesh's jihadist groups is rooted in Salafi-Jihadist thought, drawing from al-Qaeda, ISIS, and the Muslim Brotherhood. JMB, for instance, advocates for a strict Islamic state governed by Sharia, rejecting democracy, secularism, and Western influences. Its founder, Shaykh Abdur Rahman, was influenced by his time in Saudi Arabia and connections with the Muslim Brotherhood, shaping JMB's vision of armed jihad. Similarly, HuJI-B's Afghan war veterans revived a militant ethos that aligned with al-Qaeda's global agenda.

Ansar al-Islam and ISIS's Bangladesh wing have expanded this ideology, targeting not only Bangladesh but also India's northeastern states, Kashmir, and Myanmar's Rakhine State through groups like Jama'atul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiya, formed post-2018 to unify jihadist efforts.

Their targets are diverse: religious minorities, secular intellectuals, security forces, and Western interests. The 2016 Holey Artisan Bakery attack, which killed 17 foreigners, underscored their aim to gain global attention and destabilize Bangladesh's economy. Future plans include expanding jihadist operations across South Asia, with leaders like Rahmani openly calling for armed struggle in India and Myanmar.

So-called journalist Mahmudur Rahman and social media influencers like Elias Hossain and Pinaki Bhattacharya amplify these calls, leveraging platforms to recruit and radicalize youth. The release of Rahmani and other jihadists under the Yunus government signals a worrying trend, potentially emboldening groups to escalate attacks and pursue their Caliphate vision.

Yunus Government and Jihadist Connections

The interim government under Muhammad Yunus, which assumed power after the August 2024 ouster of Sheikh Hasina, has raised concerns about its ties to jihadist groups and foreign actors. Advisers and leaders from Jamaat, Hefazat-e-Islam, and the Nagarik Party, alongside figures like Asif Adnan and Syed Ziaul Haque, have been linked to al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Hizb ut-Tahrir.

The release of Ansar al-Islam's Rahmani, who has openly boasted about orchestrating secularist killings, suggests a permissive environment for jihadists. Reports indicate that Yunus's regime, backed by the US, is aligning with Pakistan's ISI and Afghan jihadist networks, potentially to destabilize the region.

The involvement of Pakistan and ISI is particularly concerning. HuJI-B's historical ties to Pakistan's militant ecosystem, coupled with AQIS's for-

BBC NEWS বাংলা

মূলপাতা রাজনীতি সর্বাধিক পঠিত বিশ্ব অর্থনীতি স্বাস্থ্য খেলা প্রযুক্তি ভিডিও

নিষিদ্ধ সংগঠন হিযবুত তাহরীরের মিছিল পুলিশের টিয়ারশেল ও সাউন্ডগ্রেনেডে ছত্রভঙ্গ

কম ডেটা ব্যবহার করতে শুধু টেক্সট পড়ুন >



৭ মার্চ ২০২৫



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mation in 2014, point to a coordinated effort to use Bangladesh as a launchpad for regional jihad. The ISI’s alleged support for groups like Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and JMB further complicates the security landscape, with training camps in Chittagong and Cox’s Bazar reportedly hosting Rohingya militants alongside Bangladeshi jihadists.

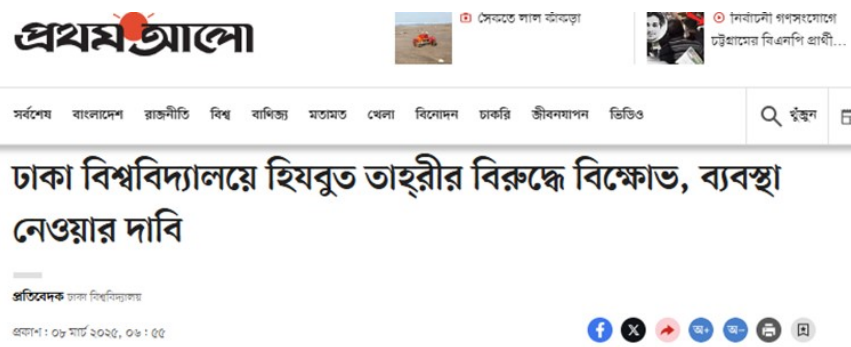
US Involvement and the Rohingya Crisis

The United States’ growing interest in Bangladesh, particularly in the context of the Rohingya crisis, adds another layer of complexity. Reports suggest that the US is exploring control over Chittagong Port and Saint Martin’s Island, potentially to counter China’s influence in the Bay of Bengal. The “Quad Ports for the Future” initiative and discussions about leasing Saint Martin’s for a military base have raised fears of Bangladesh becoming a geopolitical pawn.

Allegations of a US-backed plan to create a “Christian state” in parts of Bangladesh, Myanmar, and India, while speculative, echo concerns about foreign interference voiced by Sheikh Hasina.

The US’s support for the Rohingya crisis, including humanitarian corridors and engagement with ARSA, risks empowering jihadist elements. ARSA, linked to HuJI-B and ISI, has been involved in attacks in Rakhine, and its integration into Bangladesh’s militant ecosystem could destabilize Myanmar’s border regions.

The proposed Rakhine corridor, ostensibly for humanitarian purposes, could serve as a conduit for jihadist movements, threatening Myanmar’s sovereignty and India’s northeastern states.



বিজয়ুত তাহরীর প্রকাশ্য কার্যক্রম কেন্দ্রে আইনশৃঙ্খলা রক্ষাকারী বাহিনীর ‘ব্যর্থতার’ প্রতিবাদে ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ে গণতান্ত্রিক হামসংসদের বিক্ষোভ সমাবেশ। আজ শুক্রবার সন্ধ্যায় টিএসটির রাজু ভাষাও...
এখন আসো

out enabling jihadist groups. Nepal should enhance its counter-terrorism measures to prevent spillover. Bangladesh’s descent into extremism, fueled by the BNP-Jamaat nexus, jihadist groups, and geopolitical maneuvering, demands urgent attention. India, Myanmar, and Nepal must act decisively to safeguard their security, lest Bangladesh become a hub for regional destabilization.

The international community, particularly the US, must reassess its policies to ensure they do not inadvertently empower jihadists, while Bangladesh’s citizens deserve a transparent, democratic process to restore stability and pluralism.

Regional Dangers and the Path Forward

For India, Myanmar, and Nepal, the implications of Bangladesh’s extremist surge are profound. India faces threats to its northeastern states and Kashmir, where jihadist groups like AQIS and Jama’atul Ansar aim to incite violence. Myanmar’s Rakhine State, already volatile due to the Rohingya crisis, risks becoming a jihadist stronghold with ARSA’s involvement. Nepal, though less directly affected, must monitor cross-border militant activities given its proximity and porous borders.

The Yunus government’s apparent alignment with jihadists and foreign powers exacerbates these risks. The release of militant leaders, coupled with US military activities in Chittagong and Sylhet, suggests a dangerous trajectory. India, Myanmar, and Nepal must strengthen intelligence-sharing, border security, and diplomatic coordination to counter this threat.

India’s historical role in Bangladesh’s liberation underscores its responsibility to support a stable, secular neighbor, while Myanmar must address the Rohingya crisis with-

The Author, Probir Kumar Sarker, is a Journalist

REPORT ON GCDG-ORGANISED INTERNATIONAL VIRTUAL CONFERENCE ON TURNING POINT: BANGLADESH AFTER THE JULY-AUGUST UPRISING, 29 OCTOBER 2025



TURNING POINT: BANGLADESH AFTER THE JULY-AUGUST UPRISING

29 OCTOBER 2025 WEDNESDAY NEW YORK TIME 09:00 AM UK TIME 02:00 PM BANGLADESH TIME 07:30 PM CET 02:00 PM

INTERNATIONAL VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

CONFERENCE THEMES & SESSIONS

1. Rise of Religious Extremism and Regional Instability
2. Women and Minority Rights
3. Freedom of Expression and Journalism
4. Rule of Law and Democracy

For Registration: www.globalcdg.org/conference

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Speakers

Moderators

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Vote of Thanks

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This report consolidates testimonies from diplomats, scholars, journalists, and human rights advocates on the evolving political and humanitarian crises in Bangladesh following the July–August 2024 upheaval. The contributors warn of democratic backsliding, militarization of governance, rising religious extremism, and systematic persecution of religious, ethnic, and gender minorities, women, and journalists. Even though the then-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina did not resign, Article 106 of the Constitution was misinterpreted. As a result, parliament was dissolved, and an interim government was sworn in beyond the purview of the Constitution. Together, these perspectives form a comprehensive account of the erosion of Bangladesh’s secular and pluralistic identity and the urgent need for international engagement to restore constitutional order. The July-August 2024 movement in Bangladesh was initially portrayed as a spontaneous expression of public discontent. However, international observers increasingly suggest it was a

REPORT ON GCDG-ORGANISED INTERNATIONAL VIRTUAL CONFERENCE ON TURNING POINT: BANGLADESH AFTER THE JULY-AUGUST UPRISING, 29 OCTOBER 2025

carefully orchestrated campaign aimed at uprooting the country from its history through religious extremism coupled with political manipulation. This document presents a collection of reflections and testimonies from participants in international policy and human rights forums, offering a multifaceted analysis of Bangladesh’s ongoing crisis. Sessions of the International Virtual Conference: 1. Rise of Religious Extremism and Regional Instability 2. A Critical Analysis of The Fact-Finding Report of The United Nations Human Rights Office 3. Women and Minority Rights 4. Freedom of Expression and Journalism 5. Rule of Law and Democracy

Introductory Speech



Prof. Dr. Md. Habibe Millat
President
Global Center for Democratic Governance, Canada

In his introductory address, Prof. Dr. Md. Habibe Millat presented a comprehensive and evidence-based assessment of human rights violations in Bangladesh, covering the period from August 2024 to July 2025. His data reflected widespread political repression, the collapse of law enforcement, the destruction of historical memorials, and economic instability under the interim administration of Dr. Yunus. At least 637 individuals were killed in mob lynching incidents between August 2024 and July 2025. A total of 64 people died in extrajudicial killings while in the custody of law enforcement, and 23 political detainees affiliated with the Awami League died in the Government prisons. Dr. Millat reported that 230 Awami League leaders and activists were murdered between July 2024 and July 2025, and approximately 3,509,789 individuals, mostly Awami League Leaders, members, and supporters, were arrested between August 2024 and May 2025. Since August 2024, 121 members of Parliament, including 15 women MPs, have been detained with fabricated charges. Dr. Millat condemned the demolition of the Bangabandhu Museum, birthplace of Bangladesh’s independence, which was bulldozed in the presence of military and law enforcement personnel. Since August 2024, over 100 historic sites have been destroyed or looted, and more than 1,400 monuments commemorating independence have been damaged or demolished. He reported that 44 police officers were killed, 182 remain missing, and over 500 police stations were attacked, vandalized, or set ablaze, resulting in the looting of a few thousand firearms, law enforcement gear, communication equipment, and an ample storage of ammunition. Between January and September 2025, 325 children were murdered, 397 orphaned, and 837 abused. During the same period, 12,726 cases of violence against women and 405 rape cases have been recorded. Dr. Millat stressed that women’s and children’s rights are being gravely undermined nationwide.



From August 2024 to June 2025, there were 2,442 incidents of minority persecution. At least 13 minority individuals, including three indigenous people, were killed, and 20 minority women were raped. On Christmas Day 2024, 17 churches were set on fire. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, 103 violations were recorded, including 49 arbitrary arrests and the illegal seizure of 300 acres of indigenous land.

At least 396 LGBTQI+ persons were harassed or assaulted in 70 documented incidents between August and December 2024, reflecting a surge in gender-based hate crimes. The interim regime failed to publicly produce the resignation letter of the former Prime Minister, which renders its takeover process illegal, as it misuses Article 106 of the

Constitution and Supreme Court rulings. The Awami League, Bangladesh’s oldest political party, has been banned by ordinance, and its registration suspended by the Election Commission. Dr. Millat warned that religious extremism has sharply increased under the interim regime, with over 300 militant suspects granted bail despite facing serious terrorism charges. Censorship has been imposed across all media platforms. A total of 1,084 journalist accreditation cards were revoked; 216 journalists were charged in fabricated murder cases, and 14 journalists were arrested. Numerous media outlets face threats, vandalism, changes in management, and journalists being forced out, as well as the risk of closure. In one year, 353 factories closed, resulting in the elimination of 120,000 jobs. The National Human Rights Commission was dissolved on November 7, 2024, and a new commission has not yet been established.

The education of 200,000 students was disrupted as a victim of political vendetta, and over 8,000 professionals, including 800 lawyers, were harassed through fabricated cases and violent threats. Dr. Millat alleged that Dr. Muhammad Yunus, head of the interim administration, is using his position to expand his personal business interests. Ab-

REPORT ON GCDG-ORGANISED INTERNATIONAL VIRTUAL CONFERENCE ON TURNING POINT: BANGLADESH AFTER THE JULY-AUGUST UPRISING, 29 OCTOBER 2025

rupt dismissal of court fine of 66 billion taka against Grameen Communication; Tax exemption for Grameen Bank until 2029; Reduction of state ownership in Grameen Bank from 25% to 10%; Approvals for a Grameen digital wallet, export licenses, and Grameen University; Creation of Grameen Sterling, a joint venture between Grameen Bank and Sterling Enterprises, etc. are stated by Dr. Millat as serious conflict of interest and abuse of authority.

Dr. Millat criticized the UN Human Rights Commission's report on government excesses in subduing protesters during the July 5 to August 15, 2024, time period, citing editorial defects, methodological limitations, and biased information. He called for a revised and independently verified UN inquiry into human-rights abuses in Bangladesh.

Presentation on A Critical Analysis of The Fact-Finding Report of The United Nations Human Rights Office



Prof. Engr. Dr. Md. Abdur Rashid
Massey University (PhD.),
New Zealand

Dr. Mohammad Abdur Rashid, publication director of GCDG, a retired faculty member of Massey University of New Zealand, gave a talk on "Critical Analysis of the Fact-Finding Report of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) on Human Rights Violations and Abuses Related to the Protests of July and August 2024 in Bangladesh". In his talk Dr Rashid sharply criticized the report for its failure to follow UN editorial guidelines. He claimed that report failed to contextualise how the quota movement (or anti-discrimination Student Movement) was hijacked by opposition political parties, the Islamists and extreme leftist groups to destabilise an elected popular government to capture power through looting, burning, destroying KPI institutes and killing police, pro-government political supporters and innocent people. His conclusion was that the OHCHR report, suffer from methodological opacity, contextual imbalance, lack of rigorous analysis, lack of impartiality. The report's excessive emphasis on revenge violence, a narrative created by Prof. Yunus himself to justify violence and atrocities against Awami League, their supporters and the police, without examining the reasons behind the unprecedented atrocities and human rights violations, creates a distorted perception of blaming the victims while sparing the perpetrators. For a more credible and balanced human rights narrative, OHCHR should have integrated historical context, structural analysis, and verified evidence standards, ensuring that its reporting strengthens not obscures the pursuit of truth and justice in Bangladesh, facilitating a transition from the undemocratic Yunus Government to a democratic order. Finally, the report holds little to no substantive value for either the people of Bangladesh or the international community. Instead, it appears primarily aimed at serving the interests of Professor Yunus and his domestic and foreign allies, helping them consolidate power during the formative phase of the Interim Government.

Vote of thanks



Md. Golam Kibria Talukder
Executive Director
Global Center for Democratic
Governance, Canada

Dear Distinguished guests, speakers, colleagues, partners, and participants,

On behalf of the Global Centre for Democratic Governance (GCDG) and all co-organizers, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who participated in our day-long virtual conference on Bangladesh following the July–August Uprising.

Your engagement, insights, and dedication made this gathering an inspiring space for dialogue, reflection, and collective vision. The thoughtful discussions and critical perspectives shared throughout the day reaffirmed our shared commitment to justice, democratic renewal, and inclusive governance in Bangladesh. I am deeply grateful to our panellists, moderators, and organizing team for their tireless efforts in making this conference possible.

Most importantly, thank you to all participants who contributed their voices and ideas to this vital conversation.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all the co-organizers and media partners whose efforts made the GCDG Day-long Virtual Conference a resounding success.

As we move forward, GCDG remains committed to fostering informed analysis and constructive dialogue on Bangladesh's democratic future. Together, we can help shape a more just and accountable society.

Thank you all.



DECLARATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL VIRTUAL CONFERENCE ON “TURNING POINT: BANGLADESH AFTER THE JULY-AUGUST

We, the participants of the Conference, reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the universal principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We recognize the rights of the people of Bangladesh to enjoy freedom, justice, equality, and meaningful participation in governance. We emphasize that accountability, transparency, and fairness are crucial for achieving and sustaining lasting peace and democracy.

We express grave concern over continuing reports of human rights abuses, oppression of women, children, and minorities, the alarming rise of religious extremism, and restrictions on civil liberties and press freedom. In solidarity with the people of Bangladesh,

we declare:

1. **Restoration of Civil Rights and Judicial Independence** We call for the full restoration of civil, political, and religious rights, as well as the protection of fundamental freedoms. The judiciary must be independent and free from political interference to ensure equal justice for all.
2. **Accountability for Human Rights Violations** All reports of killings, detentions, torture, and violence against women, children, minorities, and political opponents must be investigated fairly and transparently. Every victim deserves justice.
3. **Freedom of the Press and Protection of Journalists** We strongly condemn media censorship and attacks on journalists. We call for an immediate end to intimidation, imprisonment, and censorship, and demand full freedom of expression and protection for all journalists.
4. **Combating Extremism and Safeguarding Regional Stability** Participants emphasize the need for united action against extremism, promoting inclusive governance, human rights, and regional cooperation to ensure lasting peace and stability in Bangladesh and the broader South Asian region.
5. **Free, Fair, and Inclusive Elections** We emphasize the urgent need for an inclusive, free, fair, and transparent national election under a neutral and credible caretaker government, ensuring the participation of all political parties and restoring public confidence in democratic institutions.

Final Commitment: We stand in firm solidarity with the people of Bangladesh in their pursuit of democracy, justice, and human rights. We call upon national, regional, and international actors— governments, civil society, and global institutions—to support a peaceful and democratic transition and to help rebuild faith in Bangladesh’s democratic future.

WORLD MEDIA WATCH

Commentary by Manirul Islam

On the same day on October 29, 2025, three different written/ email interviews of Sheikh Hasina, the former Prime Minister of Bangladesh in exile in India was published in AFP, The independent and Reuters. A synopsis on each interview and the link is given below:

Agence France-Presse (AFP) – (sourced from France 24)

In her first written interview since being toppled, Sheikh Hasina told Agence France-Presse that holding the next general election in Bangladesh without her party the Awami League, would be “sowing the seeds of future division” and would undermine the legitimacy of the vote. She specifically accused the interim administration under Muhammad Yunus of banning her party and preventing its meaningful participation, warning that this path risks deepening political polarisation in a country of 170 million people.

Sheikh Hasina also dismissed the charges she faces at the International Crimes Tribunal as a “jurisprudential joke,” insisting a guilty verdict had already been predetermined. While expressing condolences for those who died in the student-led uprising that toppled her regime, she rejected the notion that she had ordered the violence and instead painted the crackdown as symptomatic of a broader collapse in discipline.

<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20251029-fugitive-ex-pm-says-bangladesh-vote-risks-deepening-divide>

The Independent

In the interview with *The Independent*, Bangladeshi leader **Sheikh Hasina** firmly rejects any apology for the deadly crackdown on student protesters. While she expresses “deepest condolences” to the families of the victims, she denies issuing orders to shoot demonstrators, attributing the casualties instead to a breakdown in discipline among security forces. She calls the tribunal process against her, run by her political rivals, “a sham trial” motivated by vengeance rather than justice.

Sheikh Hasina also defends her decision to flee Bangladesh last year, saying staying would have put her life and those around her at risk, given her family’s history of political assassination. She accuses the interim government, led by Muhammad Yunus, of denying the Awami League a fair opportunity to compete in elections and undermining democracy.

https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/south-asia/sheikh-hasina-bangladesh-ict-sentence-b2854248.html?utm_source

Reuters

In the interview, Sheikh Hasina warned that millions of supporters of her party, the Awami League, will boycott the next national election after the party was barred from participating. She said the ban is “not only unjust, it is also self-defeating,” stressing that any government formed without her party’s participation in the election would lack legitimacy. She, now in exile in India after leaving Bangladesh in 2024, declared she would not return to Bangladesh unless the next government is formed through a genuinely inclusive electoral process that permits her party’s full participation.

Sheikh Hasina also addressed allegations against her and the Awami League, saying the proceedings against them are a “politically motivated charade” and that they were denied meaningful opportunity to defend themselves. While maintaining she and her family need not lead the party’s future, she insisted that the party will eventually return to Bangladesh’s political stage, whether in government or as opposition, but only within a framework of constitutional rule and stability.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/bangladeshs-sheikh-hasina-warns-mass-voter-boycott-her-party-barred-election-2025-10-29/>

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WORLD MEDIA WATCH

Doughty Street Chambers Article 15 Communication to ICC

In October 2025, Steven Powles KC submitted an **Article 15 Communication** to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) on behalf of the Awami League in Bangladesh. The filing requests that the ICC investigate alleged retaliatory violence beginning July 2024 against Awami League politicians, activists, and other perceived associates of the party. The document argues there is a **reasonable basis** to believe these acts constitute crimes against humanity, including murder, unlawful imprisonment, and persecution, and asserts that these abuses are unlikely to be genuinely prosecuted within Bangladesh, thus necessitating ICC intervention.

The communication details alarming claims: approximately **400 Awami League members** are said to have been killed since mid-2024, many allegedly by violent mobs, supported by video-verified witness testimony. Further, it describes mass arrests of politicians, judges, journalists, artists, and others seen as linked to the ruling party, with reports that **25 detained individuals died in custody**, sometimes showing signs of torture. The filing also documents a February 2025 crackdown—“Operation Devil Hunt” led by Bangladesh’s interim government, which allegedly arrested some 18,000 people over 12 days. The Communication argues that a 2024 immunity order issued by the interim government reflects state tolerance, if not support, for the violence, and calls on the ICC to open a formal investigation to hold perpetrators personally accountable.

<https://www.doughtystreet.co.uk/news/article-15-communication-filed-prosecutor-international-criminal-court-relation-alleged-crimes>

Brent Christensen, US nominee for Ambassador to Bangladesh Faces Senate Questions

At the October 23 Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, Brent Christensen — nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh — delivered his opening statement and fielded questions from Senator Pete Ricketts on U.S. policy priorities and Bangladesh’s growing ties with China. Watch the full exchange and learn how this nomination could shape America’s Indo-Pacific strategy.

[\(52683\) Brent Christensen Faces Senate Questions on Bangladesh, China Ties at Confirmation Hearing - YouTube](#)

Bangladesh-Pakistan military embrace gets tighter

Author: Chandan Nandi, Nov. 1 issue, The Northeast News

This development underscores a marked warming of military ties between Bangladesh and Pakistan, signaling a deliberate reset in their bilateral relations. The visit of a senior Bangladeshi general to Rawalpindi and the emphasis on “resilience against external influences” during talks suggest both countries are purposefully deepening strategic cooperation. ([dawn.com](#))

At a deeper level, this rapprochement reflects shifting geopolitical alignments in South Asia. Given Bangladesh’s more balanced posture following recent political change, the renewed defense engagement, particularly in areas like counter-terrorism, joint exercises, and intelligence may recalibrate regional power dynamics, especially about India’s influence. ([arynews.tv](#))

<https://nenews.in/neighbours/bangladesh-pakistan-military-embrace-gets-tighter-bdesh-army-adjutant-general-to-land-in-rawalpindi-on-nov-3/35251/>

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BACK PAGE শেষের পাতা

GRADUATES WITHOUT JOBS: WHY GEN Z MUST BRIDGE THE SKILL GAP

Latiful Kabir

For decades, Bangladesh has celebrated its progress in expanding access to education. More schools, more colleges, more universities—and more graduates each year. Yet the irony is stark: even as education rates rise, meaningful employment remains out of reach for millions of young people.

This paradox defines the reality of Bangladesh's Gen Z—the most educated generation in the country's history, but also one of the most uncertain about its future.

The Education Boom—and Its Blind Spot

In the last two decades, Bangladesh's literacy rate has surged, and university enrolment has multiplied. But as classrooms filled up, the connection between education and employment broke down.

The traditional system—centred on memorization and rigid curricula—prepares students to pass exams, not to solve problems. Employers across industries complain that many university graduates lack critical skills in communication, digital literacy, and teamwork.

For a generation raised on smartphones and social media, this mismatch feels particularly disorienting. Many Gen Z graduates find themselves with degrees but no direction.

The Skill Mismatch Problem

Global reports repeatedly highlight Bangladesh's growing *skills gap*. Employers in IT, manufacturing, and the service sector say that a huge number of entry-level applicants lack practical competencies—coding, business analytics, English fluency, or even basic project management.

This isn't just a Bangladesh problem. Across South Asia, the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)—defined by automation, AI, and digital transformation—is rewriting the rules of employment. Yet, education systems remain stuck in the industrial-age model, producing graduates for jobs that no longer exist.

The consequence is a generation that feels simultaneously overqualified and underprepared—a dangerous mix that fuels frustration, migration, and social unrest.

The Way Forward: Skills Over Degrees

For Gen Z, the shift in mindset begins here: education alone is not empowerment—*applicable* education is.

In the coming decade, skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, digital design, AI literacy, and emotional intelligence will define employability. Online platforms—Coursera, edX, Google Career Certificates—already offer opportunities to bridge that gap.

Lifelong learning is no longer optional. A university degree is just the beginning, not the guarantee.

Equally important is collaboration between academia and industry. Universities must work with employers to redesign curricula around real-world problems. Internship programs, innovation labs, and research partnerships can turn classrooms into incubators of experience, not just theory.

Vocational education, long dismissed as “second-class,” also deserves new respect. Electricians, technicians, and health aides will remain indispensable in a digitized economy. In Germany, Japan, and South Korea, technical skills form the backbone of national productivity. Bangladesh can learn from that model.

Latiful Kabir is a Bangladeshi-Canadian professional engineer.