

Resurgence of Extremism in Bangladesh During the Interim Government: An Assessment of Emerging Threats



8 August 2024 – 28 November 2025

RESURGENCE OF EXTREMISM IN BANGLADESH DURING THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT: AN ASSESSMENT OF EMERGING THREATS

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www.globalcdg.org

+19024491316

contact@globalcdg.org

58 Leaman Drive, Dartmouth, NS, B3A 2K9, Canada

Incorporated in Canada, Number- 1679529-3

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Preface

The period following 8 August 2024 has marked a profound turning point in Bangladesh’s internal security landscape. What was once considered a contained threat, violent extremism driven by radical Islamist networks, has resurfaced with renewed intensity, exploiting political uncertainty, institutional fragmentation, and a shifting ideological environment. This report, “Resurgence of Extremism in Bangladesh during the Interim Government: An Assessment of Emerging Threats” has been prepared to provide a clear, evidence-based assessment of this evolving situation for policymakers, security institutions, human rights bodies, and the broader international community.

Our objective is not merely to document isolated events, but to examine the deeper structural and socio-political dynamics that have enabled banned organisations, radical groups, and extremist ideologies to regain visibility and operational space. Through a combination of verified incident data, field observations, expert consultations, and historical contextual analysis, the report highlights emerging patterns that pose grave implications for Bangladesh’s secular democratic foundations and for regional stability.

This preface underscores the urgency of understanding the resurgence not as a series of spontaneous episodes, but as a coherent trajectory shaped by weakened counterterrorism capacities, ideological penetration into state structures, rising intolerance, and increasing threats to religious and ethnic minorities. The developments outlined here call for immediate, coordinated, and principled attention from all stakeholders to prevent further deterioration.

We present this report with the hope that it will serve as a constructive, timely resource for those committed to safeguarding human rights, strengthening democratic resilience, and ensuring long-term peace and security in Bangladesh and the broader South Asian region.

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Executive Summary

Since the installation of Professor Muhammad Yunus as Chief Adviser of Bangladesh's interim government on 8 August 2024, the country has witnessed an alarming resurgence of Islamist extremism. What began as a political transition promising reform and democratic restoration has instead produced profound institutional disruption, weakened security structures, and an environment in which radical organisations have re-entered public life with unprecedented confidence. This report provides a comprehensive assessment of the renewed rise of extremism during the Yunus regime, tracing its political, social, and regional implications.

The institutional reshuffling that followed the August 2024 transition most notably within the military, intelligence agencies, and counterterrorism units created an operational vacuum that extremist groups quickly exploited. Banned organisations such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir, Jamaat-e-Islami, and several hardline madrasa-based networks have mobilised openly through rallies, recruitment drives, and ideological campaigns. The public “March for Khilafat,” university-based radicalisation, and widespread digital propaganda reflect a systemic weakening of state control and surveillance.

Parallel to these organisational revivals, there is evidence of ideological infiltration of state institutions. Appointments of individuals with known Islamist sympathies to advisory, judicial, and bureaucratic roles, combined with the orchestrated legal targeting of secular civil and military officers, signal an erosion of Bangladesh's historically secular state identity. In local administration, passive compliance and fear of political repercussions have allowed radical actors to expand influence largely unhindered.

The social consequences have been severe. Violence, intimidation, and discrimination against religious minorities including Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, Ahmadis, and indigenous communities have escalated sharply, with thousands of reported incidents since the political transition. Civic freedoms have contracted as journalists, writers, and human rights defenders face mob violence, surveillance, legal action, and harassment for challenging religious conservatism. Meanwhile, moral policing and gender-based coercion by radical groups have undermined decades of progress on women's rights and cultural pluralism.

Regionally, Bangladesh's ideological shift has strained relations with India and created openings for Pakistan, Turkey, and transnational jihadist actors. The

weakening of counterterrorism cooperation and border security raises the risk of Bangladesh becoming a sanctuary for cross-border militancy and a hub for transnational jihadist ambitions. The rehabilitation of Jamaat-e-Islami and the strengthening of ties with foreign intelligence agencies that support Islamic extremism further threaten regional security and stability.

Despite mounting evidence, the Yunus administration has consistently denied the scale and severity of extremist resurgence, framing concerns as political exaggeration. This denial, combined with a lack of decisive action, has emboldened radical groups and deepened institutional paralysis.

The findings of this report indicate that Bangladesh stands at a critical juncture. Unless urgent corrective measures are undertaken restoring counterterrorism capacity, reasserting secular governance, protecting vulnerable communities, and rebuilding regional security partnerships the convergence of political permissiveness, ideological radicalisation, and foreign influence risks permanently altering Bangladesh's national character and transforming it into a focal point of Islamist extremism in South Asia.

Resurgence of Extremism in Bangladesh During the Interim Government: An Assessment of Emerging Threats

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Abstract

Since 8 August 2024, when Muhammad Yunus assumed control of Bangladesh's interim government, the country has experienced a pronounced resurgence of Islamist extremism. Extremist organisations – some previously banned – have re-emerged publicly, radical rhetoric has proliferated, and ideological influence is creeping into state institutions. Political instability weakened counterterrorism mechanisms, and ambiguous governance has created a permissive environment for this surge. Without decisive and principled action, Bangladesh risks undermining its secular foundations, threatening minority rights, and destabilizing regional security. The post-transition restructuring of state institutions particularly within the security and counterterrorism apparatus created a profound institutional vacuum. Banned extremist organisations such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir re-emerged publicly, staging large-scale rallies and accelerating recruitment across university campuses and digital platforms. Parallel mobilisations by Hefazat-e-Islam, Jamaat-e-Islami, and other hardline networks further solidified a multi-pronged Islamist resurgence that penetrated political, educational, and religious spheres. These developments have been compounded by allegations of ideological infiltration within advisory, judicial, and bureaucratic structures, raising concerns about the erosion of Bangladesh's secular state identity. Regionally, Bangladesh's ideological shift has strained relations with India, amplified cross-border security vulnerabilities, and opened channels for foreign influence from Pakistan, Turkey, and transnational jihadist movements. The weakening of counterterrorism cooperation and increased militant activity raise the risk of Bangladesh becoming a sanctuary for regional extremism.

Introduction

The political upheaval that followed the events of August 2024 marked a decisive turning point in Bangladesh's contemporary history. With the installation of Professor Muhammad Yunus as Chief Adviser of the interim government, the country entered a period of profound institutional uncertainty, ideological realignment, and socio-political volatility. While the transition initially promised a restoration of democratic norms, transparency, and reform, it has instead coincided with and arguably facilitated one of the most significant resurgences of Islamist extremism in the nation's recent past.

This report examines the multidimensional rise of extremism in Bangladesh under the Yunus regime, providing a comprehensive analysis of its political, ideological, social, and regional implications. What distinguishes the current wave from earlier cycles of militancy is not merely the reappearance of banned organisations, but the depth of their ideological penetration, the breadth of their mobilisation strategies, and the alarming permissiveness with which radical actors have been able to re-enter public life. The weakening of counterterrorism institutions, restructuring of the security apparatus, and persistent political denial have created an environment in which extremist groups operate with unprecedented confidence.

The resurgence has manifested across multiple arenas: public demonstrations by outlawed organisations, increasing radicalisation of university campuses, renewed mobilisation of hardline madrasa networks, political rehabilitation of historically militant factions, and growing transnational linkages with global jihadist movements. Simultaneously, extremist narratives have found space within state institutions themselves, raising concerns about ideological infiltration and the erosion of Bangladesh's long-standing secular framework.

The societal repercussions have been severe. Minority communities, women, and civil society actors face escalating threats, harassment, and violence. Journalists, writers, and activists critical of radicalisation encounter both legal repression and informal intimidation. Meanwhile, Bangladesh's foreign policy posture has shifted in ways that deepen regional insecurity, straining relations with India and creating openings for foreign intelligence agencies and extremist affiliates to expand their influence.

By tracing these developments and situating them within Bangladesh's political trajectory, this study seeks to illuminate the systemic risks now confronting the

state. It argues that unless decisive corrective measures are taken, the confluence of institutional weakness, political fragmentation, and ideological radicalisation may fundamentally alter the nation’s identity, governance structure, and regional role. The following sections analyse each dimension of this transformation in detail, beginning with the institutional disruptions that accompanied the August 2024 transition.

1. Political Transition and Institutional Instability

Yunus’s accession to power in August 2024 was followed by major restructuring across the military, security, and administrative apparatus. According to security analysts, the interim government sidestepped experienced counterterrorism professionals and, in most cases, replaced them with supporters of Islamic extremism, weakening agencies vital for monitoring and suppressing extremist activity ^[1]. This institutional turbulence was compounded by political denial: agencies nominally responsible for countering radical groups have been “crippled” by transfers, intimidation, or disempowerment, limiting their effectiveness ^[2]. Amid this vacuum, extremist actors identified and exploited openings, reactivating dormant networks under prior administrations.

2. Public Resurgence of Banned Islamist Groups

2.1 Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s Return

A defining symbol of the growing influence of Islamist ideology has been the re-emergence of Hizb-ut-Tahrir Bangladesh (HTB). Once clandestine, HTB has held open demonstrations, including a “March for Khilafat” in Dhaka, where participants openly chanted for a caliphate ^[3].

This boldness indicates more than mere ideological revival: it reflects extreme confidence in operational freedom. Local media reported that during a procession, hundreds of HTB activists defied bans, signalling a marked erosion of state control ^[4].

2.2 Key Aspects of Hizb-ut-Tahrir's Resurgence

HTB, a radical Islamist organization banned in Bangladesh since 2009 for promoting extremist ideologies and threatening national security, has demonstrably stepped out of the clandestine sphere.



Public Show of Force: The "March for Khilafat". The most prominent symbol of their renewed confidence was the public staging of the "March for Khilafat" rally. Defiance of Ban In a striking act of defiance, hundreds to thousands of HTB activists gathered openly in Dhaka, particularly near the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque, after Friday prayers in March 2025. This was reportedly the first such public rally since the group was banned. Ideological Demand: Participants chanted slogans like "Khilafat, Khilafat" (Caliphate, Caliphate!), openly demanding that the country's secular democratic system be replaced by an Islamic Caliphate governed by Sharia law. HTB rejects democracy and secularism entirely. Clashes and Suppression: Despite the open show of strength, law enforcement could not intervene meaningfully. In the March 2025 incident, clashes erupted when police set up blockades and used tear gas and sound grenades to disperse the crowds, leading to multiple injuries and arrests (over 10 injured, 36 arrested in one incident) ^[5]. Exploitation of the Vacuum: This boldness reflects their confidence in exploiting the security and governance vacuum created by the interim administration's restructuring and focus on trials against the former Awami League government.

2.3 Strategic Outreach and Infiltration

HTB's activities extend beyond street protests and indicate a calculated strategy of ideological infiltration and recruitment. Campus and Youth Focus HTB has a long history of targeting educated youth. Reports suggest the group is aggressively recruiting students at universities, holding discussion forums on caliphate ideals, and distributing radical literature.

This taps into the youth dissatisfaction prevalent after the 2024 political unrest. Digital Footprint: The organization has leveraged the current atmosphere to expand its online presence [6]. HTB-aligned content, radical lectures, and recruitment videos now circulate freely on social media platforms, a key tool for radicalisation and network building. Targeting Key Institutions: HTB's broader strategy aims to establish a network of secret cells and infiltrate the government and military to push its agenda from within, ultimately working toward the goal of legalizing its party and its aims. Their calls have also specifically aimed to gain support from the military.



2.4 Geopolitics and Security Implications

The open resurgence of HTB, a group with a global vision for a Caliphate, is not only an internal law and order issue but a regional security concern. Regional Instability Analysts warn that HTB's increasing visibility adds to the growing climate of Islamist consolidation, posing a threat of subcontinental extremism spillover and destabilizing neighbours, particularly India. India itself banned HTB in 2024 [7]. Institutional Weakness The failure of the interim government to pre-empt or effectively contain large-scale rallies by a banned outfit demonstrates significant gaps in the monitoring and handling of extremist organizations and a weakened security apparatus.

HTB's public return is a direct consequence of the post-2024 political transition, demonstrating the group's intent to exploit institutional turbulence to actively advance its core objective, the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate.

2.5 Campus Recruitment: A Key Battleground

Universities have become key battlegrounds. Extremist-leaning groups are reportedly recruiting students by organizing “discussion forums” on caliphate ideals and distributing religious literature. Meanwhile, online presence has exploded, with HTB-aligned content, radical lectures, and recruitment videos now circulating freely on social media platforms.

The proliferation of radical digital content is closely tied to renewed efforts to influence educational institutions, particularly universities, which are central to HTB's long-term strategy ^[8]. Targeting Educated Elites: HTB's strategy has historically focused on the intellectually inclined youth, aiming to create a core of elite members who can eventually infiltrate the government and military. Discussion Forums Extremist-leaning groups are reportedly utilizing university campuses to organize "discussion forums" that focus on radical concepts like the caliphate and Sharia governance, bypassing traditional surveillance. Political Dissatisfaction: The groups are tapping into the youth dissatisfaction that fuelled the 2024 uprising, offering a seemingly principled, religiously-mandated alternative to Bangladesh's historically secular political system. Leaflet and Poster Campaigns Despite being banned, the presence of HTB is publicly visible through leaflets, posters, and banners that appear around university campuses and major urban centres, marking a significant step out of clandestine operations ^[9].

2.6 Regime Inaction and Institutional Exposure

The Yunus government's response has been criticized as inadequate, creating a permissive environment for this expansion ^[10]. Weakened CT Units through post-uprising restructuring, which involved sidelining or transferring experienced Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) professionals, have left a critical gap in monitoring and digital forensics capabilities. Political Crackdown Focus: The interim administration's primary focus has been the high-profile trials and legal crackdowns against the former Awami League regime, diverting institutional energy and resources from proactive counter-extremism measures. Lack of Condemnation: The administration's general tendency to deny or downplay the severity of the extremist resurgence has been

interpreted by critics as an enabling factor, allowing the digital and campus networks of groups like HTB to operate with greater confidence.

The effective use of the digital space and university campuses allows extremist groups to

maintain high operational tempo and recruit new members, posing a profound and long-term threat to Bangladesh's security and secular character.



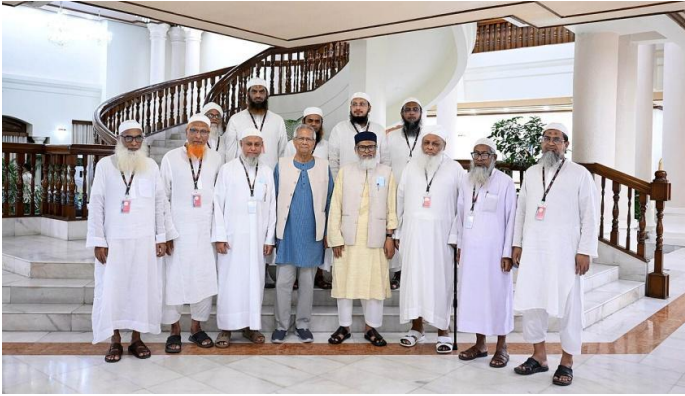
3. Broader Islamist Mobilisation

While HTB has gained attention, other radical and fundamentalist Islamist groups are also mobilizing. Hefazat-e-Islam: Clerics associated with Hefazat are reportedly affirming hardline agendas in madrasa preaching circuits, reconstituting their grassroots influence. Jamaat-e-Islami: Former militancy-linked figures from this group are being rehabilitated in political spaces, enabling a revival of their influence. Security analysts suggest cross-faction cooperation between Jamaat and other radical Islamist actors ^[11]. Transnational Extremist Ties: According to security think tanks, Al-Qaeda-affiliated and other international jihadi narratives are gaining resonance, exploited by local groups to legitimize their ideological resurgence ^[12]. All of these developments suggest a coordinated, multi-pronged Islamist revival rather than a sporadic re-emergence.

3.1 Hefazat-e-Islam: Reconstituting Grassroots Influence

Hefazat-e-Islam, an influential advocacy group primarily drawn from the country's vast network of Qawmi madrassas, has dramatically intensified its activities and influence since the August 2024 political transition.

Affirming Hardline Agendas: Clerics associated with Hefazat are reportedly affirming hardline agendas across extensive madrasa preaching circuits. This process is effectively reconstituting their grassroots influence across the country, particularly among the religious conservative



population. Political Engagement and Policy Dictation Following the fall of the former government, Hefazat played a role in the formation of the interim administration, with one of its deputy chiefs being

appointed as an Adviser for Religious Affairs. This proximity to power has enabled them to exert significant influence over policy, often leading the regime to capitulate to Islamist pressure. Policy Wins: The Yunus government, under pressure from hardline clerics, scrapped plans to hire music and physical education teachers for government primary schools, a move Hefazat had condemned as an "anti-Islamic agenda." Public Mobilization: The group held a "Grand Rally" in May 2025, one of its largest public shows of strength since 2013, to press a 12-point declaration that included demands to annul women's reform initiatives and to restore "faith in Allah" as a constitutional principle. Significance: Hefazat is effectively using its non-political platform to institutionalize conservative ideology into state policy and education, eroding Bangladesh's secular foundations from the ground up.

3.2 Jamaat-e-Islami: Political Rehabilitation and Cross-Faction Ties

The return of Jamaat-e-Islami (JIB) to open political activity marks a major shift, as the group was previously banned and its leaders were prosecuted for war crimes committed during the 1971 Liberation War.

Ban Lifted: The Yunus-led interim government lifted the ban on Jamaat-e-Islami and its powerful student wing, Islami Chhatra Shibir, in August 2024. This action immediately rehabilitated the organization politically, allowing it to hold one of its largest rallies in Dhaka. Militancy-Linked Figures Revived: Former militancy-linked figures from JIB are being

brought back into political spaces, enabling a revival of their influence and preparation to contest upcoming national elections. Shibir has a history of campus violence and extremist recruitment. Cross-



Faction Cooperation: Security analysts suggest there is a visible increase in cross-faction cooperation between Jamaat-e-Islami and other radical Islamist actors (such as Islami Andolan Bangladesh), creating a potentially formidable political bloc. They have staged joint protests demanding electoral reform, demonstrating a tactical unity despite longstanding doctrinal differences. JIB's rehabilitation, coupled with its historical ties to militancy and its strong organizational structure, injects a disciplined and ideologically radical force directly back into the political mainstream, greatly alarming regional security observers.

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3.3 Transnational Extremist Ties: Ideological Legitimacy



The vacuum created by the weakened counter-terrorism apparatus is facilitating the re-entry and exploitation of global jihadi narratives by local actors.

According to security assessments, Al-Qaeda-affiliated narratives are gaining resonance. The release of prisoners, including militants and figures associated with the local Al-Qaeda affiliate Ansar al-Islam, has created a tangible security threat. Al-Qaeda's official media wing, As-Sahab, even released a message praising the events in Bangladesh as a victory for Islam. Exploitation by

Local Groups: Local extremist groups are exploiting these international jihadi narratives to legitimize their own ideological resurgence. By framing their struggle within a global context, they enhance their recruitment appeal and operational confidence.

International Concerns: The rise of these transnational links has prompted international warnings of potential subcontinental extremism spillover. Foreign support, including alleged backing from Pakistan's ISI and Turkish funding for Jamaat, contributes significantly to Bangladesh's ideological realignment and its risk of becoming a "jihadist bridgehead." These three distinct mobilization paths Hefazat's grassroots institutional push, Jamaat's political rehabilitation, and the legitimizing cover of transnational jihadi narratives demonstrate a coordinated, systemic Islamist revival rather than isolated incidents

4. Ideological Infiltration of the State

Reports indicate that individuals with known Islamist sympathies or prior links to extremist movements have been appointed to advisory or bureaucratic roles within the Yunus government ^[13]. In some cases, these appointees are believed to advance radical ideological goals under the cover of governance. This pattern raises serious concerns about the ideological alignment of state institutions. The military, historically a bastion of secularism in Bangladesh, has not been exempt. There have been credible allegations of purges or legal cases against senior officers known for anti-extremism stances, fuelling fears that the Yunus administration is attempting to neutralize secular command structures ^[14]. Such moves could weaken institutional resistance to radicalisation.

Civil administrators in local and regional offices reportedly exhibit caution when dealing with radical groups. Interviews suggest many refrain from proactive engagement or enforcement of counter-extremism policies, fearing political repercussions or ideological backlash. This passive compliance effectively cedes space to extremist actors.

5. Social Impact: Minorities, Media, and Civic Freedoms

The social impact of the renewed rise in extremism under the Yunus interim government is characterized by a severe deterioration of security for minorities, a crackdown on civic freedoms, and the acceleration of gender-based moral policing. These developments collectively demonstrate a significant failure by the Yunus administration to uphold the principles of secularism and human rights it promised to restore.

5.1 Pressure on Minority Communities

Under the Yunus regime, religious minorities particularly Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians have faced increased harassment, threats, and intimidation. These incidents echo patterns of communal



violence seen during past periods of extremist resurgence ^[15]. Reports also suggest that the interim government has not adequately protected vulnerable communities, fostering a perception of impunity. The period following the political transition in August 2024 has seen a dramatic and documented surge in targeted violence against religious minorities particularly Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians and indigenous communities ^[16].

Surge in Attacks. The Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikyo Parishad (BHBCUC), a major minority rights group, reported 2,442 incidents of violence against minority communities between August 2024 and the first half of 2025. This includes 258 communal attacks in the first six months of 2025 alone, with 20 reported incidents of rape and 59 attacks on places of worship ^[17]. The Interim government, led by Chief Advisor Professor Muhammad Yunus, has been accused of adopting a strategy of denial, often describing communal attacks as "political incidents" or

"exaggerated propaganda" with political motives. This denial of the communal link is criticized for emboldening perpetrators by creating a perception of impunity. The lack of adequate protection by the government, as noted in reports, allows the incidents to echo "patterns of communal violence seen during past periods of extremist resurgence". Targeting Indigenous and Other Groups Beyond Hindus, Ahmadiyya Muslims, and indigenous people from the Chittagong Hill Tracts have also been affected by targeted mob attacks and arson [18].

5.2 Curtailment of Free Expression

Journalists, poets, and human-rights advocates critical of radicalisation are increasingly under attack. In one high-profile case, a poet was detained for allegedly "hurting religious sentiments," while



other activists face political and legal pressure when they speak out against religious conservatism [19]. Such suppression coincides with a broader trend of radical forces gaining visibility through media channels. The space for civil society, journalism, and free expression has rapidly constricted under the combined pressure of state repression and the rising influence of radical forces. Targeting Critics: Journalists, poets, and human rights advocates who are critical of radicalization and religious conservatism are increasingly subjected to political and legal pressure. A high-profile example is the arrest of poet Sohel Galib in February 2025 under the Code of Criminal Procedure for allegedly "hurting religious sentiment" through a poem, even as other writers and activists face similar charges [20].

Similarly, Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das was arrested on sedition charges in November 2024, sparking widespread protests and leading to activists directly questioning Professor Yunus on the legality and

justification of the arrest. Legislative Failure. While the interim government announced its intention to review and reform the repressive Cyber Security Act (CSA), the draft replacement legislation, the Cyber Protection Ordinance (CPO) 2025, has been criticized for replicating the problematic provision on 'hurting religious sentiment,' which facilitates the arrest of critics and activists ^[21]. In an incident against free expression, a book stall at the Amar Ekushey Book Fair was attacked after claims that it was selling books by the controversial author Taslima Nasreen ^[22]. Despite the Chief Advisor ordering an investigation, there is no indication that the perpetrators were held accountable, highlighting the state's failure to protect freedom of expression from attacks by private radical actors ^[23].

5.3 Gender and Moral Policing

Radical elements have begun to enforce conservative norms in public life. Reports describe instances of moral policing, including harassment of women for dress or behavior, and efforts to curtail liberal cultural practices. These dynamics undermine years of progress on gender rights and social liberalism.

Enforcement of Conservative Norms Radical elements, often mobilizing as groups like "Tawhidi Janata" or "Conscious Muslim Citizens," have effectively "almost legalized harassment of women in the name of 'moral policing'" ^[24]. Reports describe a spike in harassment of women for their dress or behavior in public life, alongside efforts to curtail liberal cultural practices. Backlash Against Reforms: The Women's Affairs Reform Commission, one of the reform initiatives established by the interim government, faced intense criticism from religiously motivated groups such as Hefazat-e-Islam and Islami Andolon Bangladesh ^[25]. Recommendations such as ensuring equal inheritance rights for women and establishing a uniform family law were met with calls for the commission's disbandment and public hate speech targeting women's rights advocates as "call girls" or "prostitutes". Rising Violence: The climate of instability and conservative resistance, combined with "deeply ingrained patriarchy, misguided religious interpretations, and weakened law enforcement," contributed to an alarming rise in violence against women.

The evidence points to the Yunus government's failure to protect vulnerable communities and civic space, a failure that directly enables the socio-cultural agenda of extremist forces.

6. Regional Security and Ideological Realignment

The Islamist upsurge in Bangladesh under the interim government led by Muhammad Yunus represents a major geopolitical shift, moving the country from a relatively stable security partner in South Asia to a potential fulcrum of Islamist geopolitics. This realignment is characterized by three critical external security implications.

The convergence of institutional weakness and the rehabilitation of radical parties is destabilizing not just domestic affairs but the entire regional security architecture.

6.1. Border Vulnerabilities and Cross-Border Infiltration

The rise of militant activity is intrinsically linked to the security of Bangladesh's long, porous borders, especially with India. Analysts warn that the institutional instability and focus on political purges have created a security vacuum, allowing radical groups like Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HTB) and other militant outfits to exploit the borders. This facilitates key extremist activities ^[26]. Recruitment and Sanctuary The country risks reverting to being a sanctuary for transnational terrorism, offering a base for groups to operate and recruit new members, particularly utilizing the vast Rohingya refugee camps as potential recruitment hubs. Historically, political turmoil in Bangladesh has led to the spillover of militant and insurgent movements across the frontier. The weakening of counter-terrorism cooperation, which was a hallmark of the previous administration, makes the borders more susceptible to cross-border infiltration ^[27]. India, which shares its longest land border with Bangladesh, views this development with extreme concern. The previous regime had actively countered Indian separatist rebels and Islamist terror networks, but the current upsurge threatens the security of India's northeastern states.

6.2. Anti-India Rhetoric and Diplomatic Strain

The ideological realignment is strongly manifesting in a deterioration of diplomatic ties, driven by increased anti-India sentiment among certain influential political and Islamist forces.

Major parties and Islamist voices, including those now politically rehabilitated (like Jamaat-e-Islami), are increasingly critical of India, reflecting a degree of public anti-India sentiment that intensified due to New Delhi's perceived support for the deposed regime ^[28]. Foreign Policy deviation: Under Yunus, Bangladesh is actively seeking to reduce its perceived long-standing dependence on India by redefining foreign relations. This includes warming ties and signing major cooperation agreements with regional rivals like China, Pakistan, and Turkey ^[29]. Extradition Demand: The interim government's demand for the extradition of the former Prime Minister, who was granted asylum in India, has created a severe diplomatic strain, forcing India to navigate a "narrow diplomatic line". This tension provides fertile ground for anti-India narratives to galvanize political support for the new, ideologically aligned domestic forces.

6.3. Foreign Support and Ideological Realignment

The shift in alliances has created channels for foreign actors both state and non-state to exert influence, accelerating Bangladesh's ideological and security realignment.

Pakistan's ISI and Terror Networks: There is evidence of improved relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan, including military training initiatives and diplomatic visits from high-ranking Pakistani officials. Security reports suggest that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is leveraging these warming ties to deepen its connections with radical Islamist factions like Jamaat-e-Islami, which has historically served as a conduit for ISI funding and influence in Dhaka ^[30]. Transnational Jihadi Inspiration: Local groups are increasingly drawing ideological inspiration from Al-Qaeda-affiliated and other international jihadi narratives, which they use to legitimize their domestic resurgence. This elevates the threat from localized militancy to a component of the broader global jihadist movement. Geopolitical Pivot: By pursuing closer military and economic

ties with Beijing, Ankara, and Islamabad as evidenced by Yunus's visit to China in March 2025 Bangladesh is signalling a move away from its previous security alignment with India and the West ^[31]. This geopolitical shift threatens to imperil the established security architecture of the region, potentially transforming Bangladesh from a partner into a source of regional instability ^[32].

If these trends persist, the consolidation of Islamist forces, coupled with external ideological and logistical support, could lead to Bangladesh becoming the gravest security threat in South Asia.

7. Regime Denial and the Incoherent Response

Despite mounting evidence, Yunus and his administration have consistently denied serious Islamist resurgence. In a public interview, Yunus claimed that “youth are neutral about religion,” dismissing fears of renewed militancy ^[33]. He has repeatedly portrayed radicalisation concerns as politically motivated or exaggerated. This denial has bred frustration among observers. Critics argue that the government is not merely failing to act it is actively enabling extremist ideologies by failing to condemn them and by neglecting the very institutions that can contain them.

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8. Key Incidents of Extremism Since August 2024

The Yunus regime has seen a spike in extremist activities, including sectarian clashes, attacks on institutions, and mob violence. Below is a chronological overview based on reported events.

8.1 August 24–September 25: Initial Unrest and Sectarian Clashes

In September, Shia-Sunni clashes erupted in multiple areas, linked to Hathazari Madrassa, the headquarters of pro-Caliphate Hefazat-e-Islam. Mobs chanting "Allahu Akbar" targeted minorities, evoking ISIS-style barbarism. Videos from Hathazari showed radicals spreading anti-Hindu and anti-India hatred ^[34].

In Chittagong, fires destroyed garment factories on October 16 and 18, 2025, amid suspicions of sabotage by extremists targeting economic

stability. These incidents contributed to economic disruption, with critics blaming Yunus for failing to curb radical elements.

8.2 October–November 2025: Escalating Violence and Trials

By October, military purges intensified. On October 22, 2025, trials began for 25 military officers accused of "crimes against humanity," part of an alleged effort to replace the secular army with an "Islamic Revolutionary Army" akin to Iran's IRGC. Over 150 officers were implicated, including top brass, amid disinformation campaigns discrediting the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) ^[35]. Communal violence surged, with 258 attacks on minorities in the first half of 2025 alone, escalating post-August. In Khagrachhari, riots in October were sparked by the rape of an indigenous schoolgirl by Islamic settlers, leading India to accuse the regime of blaming external forces for internal failures ^[36]. In November, bomb attacks targeted Christian sites in Dhaka: Holy Rosary Church, St. Mary's Cathedral, and St. Joseph's School. No arrests were made, heightening fears among Christians. Social media was flooded with calls for exterminating "infidels," including demands for beheadings ^[37].

The national crime statistics reveal a collapse of law and order: 4,177 murders were reported nationwide from September 2024 to October 2025, alongside 216 mob killings. The government officially confirmed 88 cases of violence against minorities by December 2024, although advocacy group figures were much higher ^[38].

Table 1: Selected Incidents of Extremism (Aug. 2024–Nov. 2025)

Location	Incident Description	Casualties/Impact
Nationwide	Post-uprising violence during transition	~1,400 deaths
Hathazari Madrassa	Shia-Sunni clashes; anti-minority rallies	Multiple injuries
Chittagong/Dhaka	Factory fires suspected as sabotage	Economic loss, deaths
Dhaka	Military trials begin for officers	Institutional purge
Khagrachhari	Riots over rape incident	Communal tension
Dhaka	Bomb attacks on Christian sites	Fear among minorities

8.3 Policy Shifts and Alliances Under Yunus

Yunus's regime has been accused of institutionalizing extremism through policy changes. A proposed "constitutional order" would elevate Yunus to a "Supreme



Leader" role, granting absolute authority and superseding the constitution, mirroring Iran's theocratic model. The "July Charter" justifies this as "revolutionary legitimacy," with NCP convener Nahid Islam declaring Yunus as the sole legitimate authority ^[39]. Alliances with Jamaat-e-Islami have deepened, with October 2025 meetings advancing coordination. This has emboldened extremists, with links to al-Qaeda and ISIS turning Bangladesh into a jihadist bridgehead. The regime's flexible stance on judicial accountability for extremists signals weakness ^[40]. Amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Act in October 2025 aimed to address Awami League abuses, but critics see them as tools for political crackdowns rather than genuine reform. The loss of 1,300 weapons during unrest has fuelled armed extremism ^[41].

Foreign involvement includes ISI desks in Bangladesh, arming militants with Pakistani groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed. Turkish funding supports Jamaat, while Rohingya camps serve as recruitment hubs for cross-border jihad ^[42].

8.4 Impact on Religious and Ethnic Minorities

Minorities, comprising less than 10% of the population (Hindus ~8%, Christians, Buddhists, Ahmadis), have borne the brunt of the resurgence. Attacks on Hindus and ISKCON devotees intensified, with campaigns branding them as "extremist Hindutva groups." By mid-2025, 2442 hate crimes were reported, with perpetrators enjoying impunity under Yunus ^[43].



Hindus face erasure of heritage, with mobs destroying temples and homes. In one year under Yunus, 27 minorities were killed, 20 cases of rape/sexual violence, and 59 attacks on religious

institutions. Christians reported bomb attacks without government response. Indigenous groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts suffer settler violence [44].

Amnesty International urged immediate protection, noting mob violence against Hindus and Ahmadis. The UK Parliament discussed anti-Hindu violence as recurrent. Despite this, some sources note sporadic communal incidents but claim minorities can practice freely, though evidence contradicts this [45].

8.5 Regional and International Implications

The rise risks regional instability. Bangladesh could become a sanctuary for transnational terrorism, threatening India, Myanmar, and ASEAN states. India has expressed concerns over border security and minority persecution, reiterating dialogue willingness amid extremism rise [46].

Pakistan's ISI revival in Bangladesh targets India's northeast. China's increased involvement under Yunus exacerbates this. The U.S. has been criticized for complacency, with Yunus's Western ties (e.g., Clinton Foundation) lending legitimacy. International observers warn of subcontinental extremism spillover [47].

ISI Revival and Hybrid Warfare Intelligence reports indicate a significant escalation of activity by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) following the 2024 political upheaval [48]. The ISI is reportedly weaponizing Bangladesh's territory for direct anti-India operations, establishing narcotics trafficking networks (leveraging Dawood Ibrahim's D-Company) and terrorist training camps on Bangladeshi soil [49]. ISI

handlers are training over 125 recruits, including Rohingya youths and cadres from terror organizations, for sabotage and infiltration into India's sensitive northeastern frontier. The lifting of certain security clearances for Pakistani nationals and cargo exemptions by the Yunus administration have facilitated this infiltration ^[50]. Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) Presence: Critics and former government officials allege that Pakistan-backed Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) is now operating freely in Bangladesh under the Yunus regime, with links even found to recent terror attacks in Delhi. This directly connects the internal political situation in Dhaka to India's national security concerns ^[51].

9. Outcomes and Risks for the Future

The current ideological and security trajectory under the Muhammad Yunus interim government presents three critical risks that threaten the democratic, secular, and geopolitical standing of Bangladesh. These outcomes highlight the failure of the administration to manage the political transition effectively and securely.

9.1. Theocratic Transformation and Loss of Secular Identity

The most profound risk is the systematic dismantling of Bangladesh's founding secular character, moving the nation toward a theocratic state governed by Islamist ideology.

Purging Secular Institutions: The regime is accused of orchestrating a systematic purge of the armed forces and intelligence agencies, notably the DGFI, by indicting secular-leaning officers under questionable charges. The alleged goal is to replace the professional, secular military with an ideologically driven "Islamic Revolutionary Army," similar to Iran's IRGC. This hollowing out of secular institutions eliminates the main constitutional check against radicalization. **Institutionalizing Extremism:** The political rehabilitation of Jamaat-e-Islami and the enabling of Hefazat-e-Islam and Hizb-ut-Tahrir grants these groups legitimate political and public space. Their influence is being institutionalized through policy pressure, leading to the erosion of gender rights and the curtailment of social freedoms.

The increasing political rehabilitation and policy influence of hardline groups like Hefazat-e-Islam and Jamaat-e-Islami risks turning Bangladesh into an "Islamist theocracy masquerading as democracy," akin to South Asia's next Iran. There is a real risk that Bangladesh's identity could shift fundamentally. As Islamist forces infiltrate political, social, and institutional spheres, the secular foundations of the state may erode.

9.2 Heightened Polarisation

Communal divisions have intensified under the Yunus regime, with secular voices systematically marginalized amid a surge in targeted violence. From January to May 2025 alone, over 258 incidents of communal attacks were reported in the first half of the year, predominantly against Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and Ahmadis, often justified by fabricated blasphemy charges or social media rumours. The Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council documented 2,442 such crimes from August 2024 to June 2025, including lootings, arsons, and assaults, with perpetrators enjoying near-impunity due to police inaction and slow prosecutions. A February 2025 UN report accused the interim government of failing to curb these attacks, noting over 76 cases against Hindus between November 2024 and January 2025. Political polarization exacerbates this: the Awami League's ban in early 2025 disenfranchised millions, while student-led groups and Islamists like Jamaat-e-Islami demand its permanent exclusion from 2026 elections, fostering a narrative of "traitors" among secular and minority communities. Protests, such as the November 13, 2025, Awami League rally in Dhaka, risk escalating into violence, with Islamist figures threatening "jihad against India" over perceived foreign backing. If unchecked, this could lead to civic fragmentation, as seen in the 637 lynchings since August 2024, undermining national unity and echoing the 2013 Shahbag protests' unresolved tensions.

9.3 Regional Destabilisation

Bangladesh's internal shifts under Yunus pose spillover risks to South Asia, amplifying Islamist consolidation, cross-border radical networks, and foreign ideological incursions. The regime's tolerance of groups like HuT

evident in their March 2025 "March for Khilafat" rally attended by over 2,000 has emboldened transnational ties, including with Pakistan's Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), where Bangladeshi youths have joined via Tablighi Jamaat routes. ISI-backed activities, including January 2025 visits to border areas, aim to revive pre-1971 networks, funding militants and altering Chittagong Hill Tracts demographics through Bengali Muslim settlements, heightening tensions near India's Tripura and Mizoram. Anti-India rhetoric, such as Jamaat leader Syed Abdullah Muhammad Taher's September 2025 call for five million youth to "fight for independence" against Delhi, has inflamed borders, with threats of jihad and resumed Pakistan-Bangladesh trade/port talks signalling a strategic realignment. China's expanding influence via investments and Yunus's March 2025 visit securing loan deferrals further destabilizes the Indo-Pacific, potentially turning Bangladesh into a jihadist hub akin to Afghanistan. For neighbours like India, this means escalated insurgency risks in the northeast, refugee influxes, and eroded maritime security in the Bay of Bengal, as warned in joint intelligence reports from August 2024 to March 2025.

10. Escalation of Mob Violence and Cultural Intolerance Under Bangladesh's Interim Government

Since the departure of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on August 5, 2024, and the formation of the interim government led by Nobel Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus, Bangladesh has witnessed an alarming surge in targeted mob violence and systemic harassment against artists, cultural minorities, and the country's pluralistic folk traditions, particularly the Baul and Sufi streams. Crucially, the interim administration has been widely criticized by rights groups for its lack of decisive action to halt this growing extremism and ensure the rule of law.

10.1 Key Incidents and Numerical Overview of Attacks

The violence and cultural crackdown since August 5, 2024, are not isolated, but reflect a deteriorating security situation where non-state actors feel emboldened to enforce religious agendas.

Target/Type of Attack	Key Data (Approximate Figures Since August 2024)	References/ Source Allegations
Sufi Graves/Shrine (Mazar) Demolitions	185 Sufi Graves/Shrine damaged, with reports of over 150 incidents of attacks and desecration at shrines across the country.	www.dw.com/bn/a-74069567
Mob Violence Incidents (All Types) (August 2024 to July 2025)	Over a thousand incidents of mob violence reported, resulting in at least 637 fatalities.	www.firstpost.com/world/bangladesh-under-yunus-mob-rule-and-mayhem-see-over-600-lynching-deaths-in-year-since-hasinas-fall-13919798.html
Hindu Temples/Minorities	152 Hindu temples damaged. The Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council documented 2,442 attacks between August 2024 and June 2025 (on minorities, primarily Hindus).	Wikipedia, Atlantic Council.
Cultural/Symbolic Damage	1,494 monuments & sculptures damaged/destroyed (e.g., Baul singer Rahul Ananda's home and 3,000 instruments were torched on August 5, 2024).	Wikipedia (Bangladesh post-resignation violence).

Target/Type of Attack	Key Data (Approximate Figures Since August 2024)	References/ Source Allegations
Arrested and Accused (Post-August 5, 2024 to May 2025)	Over 3,59,798 arbitrary arrests made, many on dubious charges (mostly against former Awami League supporters).	samakal.com/bangladesh/article/298473

10.2 Harassment and Arrest of Baul Singer Abul Sarkar

The recent incident involving Baul artist Abul Sarkar exemplifies the weaponization of 'religious sentiment' against folk artists.

On November 4, 2025, Abul Sarkar



performed at a Palagan (folk musical drama) event in the Jabra area of Ghior Upazila, Manikganj district. He was arrested by the Detective Branch of police on the night of November 19, 2025, during a music event in Madaripur district, and produced before the Senior Judicial Magistrate Court in Manikganj on November 20, where he was remanded to jail. The arrest followed a case filed on November 20 by local Imam Mufti Md. Abdullah of Ghior Bandar Mosque at Ghior Police Station, charging Sarkar with "insulting religion," hurting religious sentiments, and inciting communal unrest through alleged objectionable remarks about Islam and the creation of Allah during the performance. Critics, including fellow Baul artists and human rights groups, argue that the video evidence circulated on social media was a "fragmented clip" taken out of context from the full five-hour performance, intentionally distorted to create unrest and target syncretic folk traditions [52].



On November 23, 2025 members of the so-called 'Tawhidi Janata' a coalition of conservative Islamist groups including Hefazat-e-Islam and Khelafat Majlis attacked Bauls who

had gathered near the Shaheed Minar and Manikganj Press Club in Manikganj town for a peaceful human chain demanding Sarkar's release, injuring at least four people (reports vary between three and seven, with victims suffering head injuries from sticks and bricks, some requiring stitches at Manikganj District Sadar Hospital). Witnesses described the assault as a "medieval style" chase and beating, with police intervening late to disperse the crowd but failing to prevent the violence upfront. This incident is part of a broader pattern of Tawhidi Janata mobs disrupting cultural events, attacking minorities, and demolishing Sufi shrines since 2024, amid concerns over rising religious extremism post the ouster of the Sheikh Hasina government ^[53].

10.3 The Interim Government's Inaction and Rise of Extremism

A major point of contention is the perceived paralysis and lack of political will from the Muhammad Yunus-led interim government in addressing this surge in fundamentalist violence:

1. **Failure to Contain Mob Rule:** Despite numerous documented incidents of mob violence, including the attacks on minority communities and the recent assault on Abul Sarkar's supporters, the government has been unable or unwilling to contain conservative Muslim interest groups who have engaged in violence to press their demands.
2. **Perceived Impunity for Extremists:** Critics allege that the attackers, often identified as hardline groups like Hefazat-e-Islam or local 'Tawhidi Janata' mobs, are acting with impunity. For instance, an annual Lalon Fakir commemorative event in Narayanganj was

cancelled in November 2024 due to violent intimidation by members of Hefazat-e-Islam, without effective government intervention.

3. **Release of Alleged Extremists:** There are serious allegations that numerous individuals previously imprisoned on charges related to extremism and militancy have been released following August 5, 2024, further strengthening extremist elements and contributing to the growing climate of intolerance and violence.
4. **Bowing to Islamist Pressure:** The government has faced strong criticism for bowing to Islamist pressure by, for example, scrapping the hiring of music and physical education teachers in primary schools, after religious groups labelled music education as "un-Islamic." This decision is seen as a betrayal of Bangladesh's secular and pluralistic spirit.
5. **Misguided Defence:** When confronted about the violence, the Chief Adviser, Muhammad Yunus, offered a defence that the attacks were "political" and not communal, a stance that has been widely dismissed by rights groups as an "absolute abandonment of accountability" and a failure to recognize the persecution faced by cultural and religious minorities.

The period since August 5, 2024, has been characterized by a deterioration of law and order, a sharp rise in religiously motivated mob violence against proponents of folk spirituality and minority groups, and a striking failure of the interim government to uphold the constitutional rights to cultural expression and protection from non-state actors. This violence risks turning Bangladesh into a "Taliban state," as per observers, with artists like Abul Sarkar symbolizing resistance. For justice, immediate releases, arrests of attackers, and cultural safeguards are urged by Amnesty International and the local cultural organization.

Conclusion

Since 5 August 2024, Bangladesh has entered a perilous phase. Under the interim rule of Muhammad Yunus, Islamist groups banned or marginalized in prior years are returning with renewed vigour. The convergence of political uncertainty, weakened institutions, ideological reshuffling, and suppression of dissent is

producing one of the most significant extremist resurgences in the country's modern history.

What is unfolding is not a temporary disruption but a potential ideological transformation one that could compromise Bangladesh's secular traditions, aspired democracy, marginalize its minorities, and unsettle regional stability. The interim government's continued denial and inaction amplify these risks.

Time is not on Bangladesh's side. Unless decisive and courageous leadership emerges one that reclaims the secular spirit of the nation and re-strengthens its institutions the country may find itself irrevocably altered, possibly for generations to come.

The period from 8 August 2024 to the present under Muhammad Yunus's interim government has marked one of the most rapid and alarming ideological reversals in Bangladesh's post-independence history. What began as a student-led uprising promising democratic renewal and justice has, within months, morphed into a permissive environment where long-suppressed Islamist extremist forces Hizb-ut-Tahrir, Hefazat-e-Islam, Jamaat-e-Islami and its violent student wing Shibir, and even transnational jihadist narratives have not only resurfaced but gained unprecedented public confidence, political legitimacy, and institutional footholds.

The evidence is overwhelming and multi-dimensional: banned organisations now march openly for a global caliphate; universities and digital spaces have become fertile recruiting grounds for radicalised youth; hardline clerics dictate education and gender policy; previously prosecuted war-crimes-linked Islamists have been rehabilitated in the political mainstream; minority communities suffer systematic terror with perpetrators enjoying near-total impunity; secular officers are purged from the military and intelligence agencies; and Bangladesh's foreign policy pivots sharply toward Pakistan, China, and Turkey while anti-India rhetoric reaches fever pitch, accompanied by credible reports of revived ISI operations, terrorist training camps, and the weaponisation of Rohingya camps and border areas.

Professor Yunus and his administration's persistent denial dismissing documented attacks as "exaggerated" or "politically motivated," refusing to condemn banned groups, and prioritising vengeance against the Awami League over the restoration of law and order has not been mere negligence; it has functioned as active enablement. The systematic weakening of the very counter-










terrorism architecture that kept Bangladesh relatively stable for a decade and a half has created a vacuum that extremist forces have filled with astonishing speed.










If this trajectory is not arrested through deliberate, principled, and urgent counter-measures re-empowering professional security institutions, unequivocally reimposing bans on extremist organisations, ending the political rehabilitation of militancy-linked groups, protecting minorities and civic freedoms, and reversing the purge of secular officers Bangladesh risks crossing an irreversible threshold. A nation founded on the blood of 1971 as a secular, pluralistic republic could, within a few short years, complete its transformation into South Asia's next Islamist-dominated state: a de facto theocracy in democratic clothing, a haven and export hub for transnational jihad, and a direct strategic threat to India, the region, and global security.





















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+19024491316

contact@globalcdg.org

58 Leaman Drive, Dartmouth, NS, B3A 2K9, Canada

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