

# YUNUS ILLEGITIMACY BANGLADESH UNDER SIEGE



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**Editor**

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Dr. Rafiq Shahriar

# **Yunus Illegitimacy Bangladesh Under Siege**

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**Dedicated to**

Those who have been tortured and  
oppressed by political vendetta.



## Preface

This book arises from a moment of cataclysmic rupture in Bangladesh's recent history. The sequence of events that has unfolded since 5 August 2024 has not merely disrupted the distribution of political power; it has fundamentally disfigured state institutions, distorted public narratives, and mutilated the moral orientation of governance. What was initially framed as a political transition rapidly revealed itself as dislocation with a far-reaching crisis encompassing governance, legitimacy, the economy, justice, and social cohesion. This book represents an effort to document, interrogate, and critically analyze that multifaceted crisis.

The chapters assembled here are written against the backdrop of the interim government led by Nobel Laureate Dr. Muhammad Yunus—a development that, at its inception, was widely regarded as hopeful and received considerable international approbation. Over time, however, that optimism gave way to growing unease. Rather than a smooth progression toward democratic consolidation and political stability, Bangladesh experienced diplomatic disarray, economic deceleration, institutional erosion, and an alarming resurgence of religious extremism. Promises of reform increasingly receded beneath the weight of repression, uncertainty, and social fragmentation.

This book assesses the first year of Dr. Yunus's tenure, and that all articles rely exclusively on data collected

prior to August 2025. An effort will be made to produce a subsequent edition covering the entire period of his rule, at which point a clearer and more comprehensive picture may emerge.

This edited collection of scholarly articles and essays does not advance a singular or unified narrative. Instead, it brings together a range of critical perspectives—political, legal, economic, historical, and social—to examine what went wrong, why it went wrong, and for whom. Several chapters scrutinize the legitimacy and constitutional standing of the interim government, questioning whether it was grounded in a genuine popular mandate or whether it exercised authority through procedural ambiguity. Others analyze the erosion of democratic safeguards, including assaults on the judiciary, the press, academic freedom, and civil liberties.

A substantial portion of the book is devoted to the economic consequences of the transition: the slowdown in growth, the collapse of investor confidence, turbulence in the stock market, the destruction of local industry, and the broader perception of an “economic eclipse.” These analyses challenge prevailing global assumptions about technocratic competence and raise unsettling questions about governance conducted under the shadow of international patronage.

Equally central to this work is an examination of the human cost of the crisis. Articles focusing on women, children, ethnic and religious minorities, university teachers, and journalists document a disturbing pattern of repression, violence, and silencing. The destruction of cultural and religious heritage, the rise of mob violence and looting, and the normalization of fear are treated not

as isolated incidents but as manifestations of a deeper moral and institutional decay.

The volume also engages critically with history and collective memory. By challenging efforts to frame the July-August 2024 movement as a continuation of the Liberation War of 1971, contributors caution against the instrumentalization of national history for political purposes. At the same time, earlier periods—most notably the BNP–Jamaat era—are revisited to situate the current resurgence of extremism within a broader historical context.

Finally, this collection is marked by a tone of diminishing optimism. Moving beyond analysis alone, the chapters express profound concern about Bangladesh’s future—an anxiety widely shared among citizens who perceive the erosion of sovereignty, the hollowing out of institutions, and the repeated deferral of democratic aspirations.

This book is intended for scholars, journalists, policymakers, activists, and engaged readers who seek to understand not only what has occurred in Bangladesh since August 2024, but why it matters. It stands as a record of dissent, a warning against complacency, and an appeal to reclaim democratic accountability. Whether one agrees or disagrees with its arguments, the questions raised here are inescapable—for Bangladesh stands at a critical crossroads, and silence is no longer a neutral option.

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## **Acknowledgement**

The editor gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the writers to this collection—academicians, writers, journalists, and professionals from diverse disciplines—whose intellectual courage, methodological rigor, and ethical commitment have shaped this volume. Writing in a moment marked by political uncertainty and institutional strain, the contributors undertook the difficult task of critical inquiry with clarity and integrity, often at personal and professional risk. Their analyses, disagreements, and shared concerns together constitute the core strength of this book. The editor also extends his sincere appreciation to the publisher for recognizing the importance of this project and for providing a platform for independent, critical, and scholarly engagement at a time when such spaces are increasingly constrained.



# Bangladesh in Turmoil

*The Transcript of Yunus's Interim Government*

## 1. Constitutional and Legal Legitimacy

The Bangladesh Awami League was elected on 5 January 2024, formed the Government by taking oath on 11 January 2024. After a major protest against the Supreme Court's decision to uphold quota for the freedom fighters offsprings, through massive violent protest (mob violence against law enforcement agencies and destruction of public properties, the democratically elected Sheikh Hasina Government was toppled on 5 August 2024. Notably, Sheikh Hasina claims that she did not sign any resignation letter. The President of Bangladesh, Mr. Shahabuddin also publicly confirmed the information. Additionally, BNP Leaders, Coordinators of the Anti-Discrimination Movement took credit for killing law enforcement officials claiming their contribution to the movement.

Regardless, an Interim Government was appointed by the President allegedly taking an Advisory Opinion from the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh under Article 106 of the Constitution on 8 August 2024. Notably, the Constitution of Bangladesh does not have any provision on interim government. Importantly, when the Inter-Services

Public Relations (ISPR) division of the Bangladesh Armed Forces shared the names and identities of 626 people who took shelter in the cantonments across the country following the 5 August 2024 political turmoil, it was revealed that the Chief Justice Obaidul Hassan, and the next senior most judge of the Appellate Division Mr. Enayetur Rahim was in cantonment, and thus beyond the capacity to hold any hearing and issue any Advisory Opinion.

It has been argued by commentators and constitutional law scholars that such government does not have the legal and constitutional mandate. However, later the President of Bangladesh Muslim League, Advocate Mohsen Rashid filed a writ petition regarding the reference sent to the apex court and the method of opinion about the formation of the interim government and its oath on the ground that no reference could be sought on an issue that is not included in the constitution. The High Court bench of Justice Fatema Najib and Justice Sikder Mahmudur Razi rejected the writ petition on 13 January 2025<sup>7</sup> mentioning that it was filed based on misconception, malice and an intention to harass. Meanwhile, the Adviser's Council (the de facto Cabinet) approved a draft of the Interim Government Ordinance 2024 on 20 September 2024, however, it is yet to see light of the day.

Meanwhile at the Clinton Global Initiative's annual meeting in the United States in September 2024, Bangladesh's interim government Chief, Dr Muhammad Yunus, revealed that the mechanism for ousting Hasina was well planned. Dr Yunus stated, "It was a meticulously designed thing. It just didn't happen suddenly. Very well designed. Even the leadership

didn't know (him), so they could not catch him.” He unveiled the mastermind behind these actions. By acknowledging this subterfuge, Dr Yunus categorically told us a hidden story of miscreants who are actively conspiring against Bangladesh. However, there is also an immense possibility that Dr Yunus is directly involved in the processes and conspiracy to oust Sheikh Hasina and her government.

## **2. Law and Order Breakdown**

In just nine months under Muhammad Yunus's interim administration, Bangladesh experienced an almost total collapse of law and order. What began as a political transition quickly morphed into governance paralysis, rampant extortion, unchecked mob violence, and a demoralized security sector unable to enforce basic legal protections.

### **Indemnity for Criminal Activities in July-August**

On 14 October 2024, the home ministry issued a directive that saying no cases, arrests or harassment should occur against anyone involved in the student-public protests between 15 July and 8 August 2024. This has raised questions in some people about whether the police officers killed during that time will receive justice. Additionally, those affected by the killings, looting and arson across the country between 5 August and 8 might also be denied justice.

Earlier, Bangladesh observed the cancellation of two such indemnity legislation by the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. The first one is related to the assassination of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his

entire family except his two daughters who were living abroad including the former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The second one is related to the Operation Joint Drives directed by the BNP-Jamat government of 2001-06 led by Khaleda Zia. In both cases, in appropriate time the Supreme Court of Bangladesh invalidated their legality, and brought the perpetrators to justice.

### **Looting of State Arms**

In the immediate aftermath of the toppling of the Sheikh Hasina Government, mobs attacked and ransacked many police stations nationwide. According to Police Head Quarters data, 5,829 firearms and 6,06,742 bullets were looted from police, different police stations, and establishments. Of those, 3,763 guns and 2,86,082 bullets were recovered, meaning that 2,066 arms and 3,20,660 bullets remain missing. The guns include rifles (Chinese), SMGs, pistols, shotguns, teargas launchers, and signal pistols. The PHQ data shows 31,044 teargas shells, 1,455 teargas grenades, 4,692 sound grenades, 291 smoke grenades, 55 stun grenades, 893 multiple bang stun grenades, and 177 teargas spray were also looted. Of those, 22,139 teargas shells, 704 teargas grenades, 2,116 sound grenades, 213 color smoke grenades, 18 stun grenades, 533 multiple bang stun grenades, and 94 teargas sprays have been recovered so far.

### **Surge in Violent and Organized Crimes**

The looted weapons have fallen into the hands of criminals and are being used in crimes. Several police officers told daily Prothom Alo that the looted firearms and ammunition have

fallen into the hands of escapees from prisons, notorious criminals, extremists, radical groups, and teenage gangs, causing growing fear and insecurity among the public.

Brigadier General Syed Mohammad Motafer Hossain, the Inspector General of Prisons, informed the media at a press conference that 2,200 prisoners escaped from various jails during the July-August uprisings. Of those, 1,500 have been arrested, but 700 remain at large. Among the fugitives are 70 high-risk individuals, including terrorists, death-row convicts, and notorious criminals. Moreover, 174 high-profile prisoners including 11 top criminals have been released from jails. The fact that 700 escapees, including some of the country's most dangerous criminals, are still on the loose, and that firearms and ammunition have fallen into the hands of these criminals, has caused serious concern among police officers.

Capitalizing on the vacuum, armed gangs launched a “crime wave” in Dhaka that Al Jazeera likened to a Gotham without Batman. In January 2025 alone, police recorded 242 muggings—the highest in six years—alongside a spike from 231 to 294 recorded murders compared with January 2024. High-profile cases included a jewellery heist in which six masked assailants shot a victim at point-blank range. With police often standing idle as victims were attacked mere meters from officers, public confidence in formal law enforcement collapsed, and citizens formed armed vigilante patrols to defend themselves.

### **Mob Attack during Court Visit**

Following the toppling of Sheikh Hasina's government, Bangladesh plunged into mob-led retribution, with public

fury swiftly morphing into street justice. During this volatile period, individuals accused of affiliations with the Bangladesh Awami League were routinely attacked while in judicial custody or transit to court. Far from isolated incidents, these were recurring episodes of orchestrated public vengeance, often covered extensively by national dailies. Former Education Minister Dipu Moni, Deputy Sports Minister Arif Khan Joy, Law Minister Anisul Haque, Private Affairs Adviser to the prime minister Salman F Rahman, Former Judge of the Appellate Division AHM Shamsuddin Choudhury, Cultural Affairs Minister Asaduzzaman Noor and countless others affiliated with Awami League had to face this mob attack while going to the court for any hearing. Reportedly no action was taken against the attackers.

### **Mob Attacks on Awami League Supporters and Property**

In total 223 people have been killed through mob attack post 5 August 2024. Overwhelming majority of them are Awami League supporters, leaders and activists. Post 5 August 2024, a mob wielding bamboo rods and pipes beat suspected supporters of Bangladesh Awami League as they gathered to pray and mark the anniversary of the 1975 assassination of Hasina's father, independence hero Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, at Sheikh Hasina's old family home. Earlier on 7 August 2024, the death of 29 Awami League leaders, family members were reported following mob violence in Bangladesh. The Yunus Government did not take any step to ensure individual culpability of the perpetrators.

On 5 February 2025, a mob vandalized the home of Bangladesh founder and former PM Sheikh Hasina's father in Dhaka. On 3 April 2025, the residences of former Mayor of Sylhet City Corporation Anwaruzzaman Chowdhury and former Member of Parliament Shafiqul Alam Chowdhury Nadel were attacked and vandalized by a mob under the banner of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)'s student wing Chhatra Dal.

Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), a leading Bangladeshi human rights organization, said it had recorded at least 128 people killed by mobs in 2024. Of those, 96 took place from August onwards -- meaning roughly three-quarters of the killings occurred after the toppling of the Sheikh Hasina Government.

## **Spike in Crime**

In March 2025, it has been reported by daily Prothom Alo that according to the police headquarters, police members came under attack 225 times while on duty, and 70 of these incidents caught public attention. There were 24 reports of attacks on police in September, 34 in October, 49 in November, 43 in December, 38 in January and 37 in February. Apart from that, police members are being subjected to rude behaviour on the streets on a regular basis.

Analysis of the events shows in most cases the mob was created, followed by launching attacks. In some cases, professional criminals, political leaders and activists also played a role in creating mobs. Not only police came under mob attacks, common people also became victims of attacks or mass beating in several places. According to the rights organization,

Human Rights Support Society, 119 people were killed and 78 others were injured by mass beatings in at least 114 incidents. Data from the Police Headquarters reveals a sharp increase in violent crimes, including murders, robberies, and kidnappings, during the four months following the regime change compared to the preceding four months. Law enforcement agencies faced severe disruption, with 450 of the country's 664 police stations attacked and several set ablaze. Many police officials, including senior officers, went into hiding, leaving citizens vulnerable.

From 1 August to 30 November, 1,361 murders were reported nationwide, up from 1,158 recorded from 1 April to 31 July. Robberies also rose, with 464 incidents compared to 416 in the previous four months. Similarly, dacoity cases doubled, climbing from 123 to 209. Kidnapping incidents surged from 168 to 255 during the same comparative periods.

### **Attack on Government Officials including Law Enforcement Enforcers**

On 8 March 2025, relying on Police Headquarters Data, daily Prothom Alo reported that police members came under attack 225 times while on duty, and 70 of these incidents caught public attention. There were 24 reports of attacks on police in September, 34 in October, 49 in November, 43 in December, 38 in January and 37 in February. Apart from that, police members are being subjected to rude behaviour on the streets on a regular basis. Analysis of the events shows in most cases the mob was created, followed by launching attacks. In some cases, professional criminals, political leaders and activists also played a role in creating mobs. Not only police came under mob attacks, common people also became victims of attacks or mass

beatings in several places. According to the rights organization, Human Rights Support Society, 119 people were killed and 78 others were injured by mass beatings in at least 114 incidents. According to the police headquarters, at least 13 incidents were reported in January and February where the accused were snatched from the police. Police members were intimidated at police stations; threats were also made from the political stage and campaigns continued against them. On 28 February 2025, a video with the remarks of Sheikh Russell, younger brother of BNP's Khustia's Kumarkhali unit convener Sheikh Rezaul Karim, created outcry across the country. Sheikh Russell said openly at an event, "It does not matter what one did or whether one was with the Awami League. Everyone is our people. They are people of Chourangi. If police want to arrest anyone, they must do so with our permission. Other than this, if a single person is arrested, we will lay siege to the police station. There is nothing to see whoever was involved with whichever party." Until August 2025, the Interim Government has acknowledged the death of 44 police officials. However, there are claims that at least 3,000 police officials were killed. At least 637 police officials have been imputed, more than 3,000 police officials have been seriously hurt. Around 460 police stations around the country, 99 police outpost and investigation centers have been burned down. At least 1074 transport vehicle has been burned down as well. 52 police officials have been arrest, case has been filed against 1059 police officials. There are travel bans against 31 police, and 29 RAB officials before their conviction. 927 police officials are missing, 52 officials lost their jobs through forced resignation. Files of sensitive criminal cases have been reduced to ashes as well.

## Violence against Women

During Muhammad Yunus's regime, many women have faced scrutiny and moral policing regarding their clothing choices. So, the sense of insecurity among women has escalated significantly. According to police headquarters data, the cases of violence against women and children surged by 19.5 percent in just one month, from December to January. Between January and April this year, 87.56 percent of reported rape victims with known ages were children aged zero to 18 -- nearly nine out of 10 victims -- according to the latest data from Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK). Of 342 rape cases reported during this period, age data was available for 201 victims. Of them, 176 were minors: 40 were aged between zero and six; 65 between seven and 12; and 71 between 13 and 18. Of 84 reported incidents, age data was available for 32 victims -- 20 of whom were minors, including one under six. Attempted rape figures also reflect the severity of the crisis. Of 85 cases, 78 victims -- 91.76 percent -- were children, with 25 under the age of seven. According to Bangladesh Mahila Parishad's monthly media-monitoring report, 389 rape incidents were reported in the first quarter of this year, with 72 percent of the victims aged between zero and 18. Similarly, of 91 gang rape cases, 51 -- or 56 percent -- involved minors. The report also noted a sharp spike in rape incidents in March, which saw 163 reported cases, including 125 (nearly 77 percent) involving minors. In April, 111 cases were reported -- 83 of them (72 percent) involved children. Additionally, ASK data showed that Dhaka topped the list of reported incidents, with 45 cases, followed by Gazipur (20) and Narayanganj (17). Additionally, during

the Yunus regime, 1.8 million women have lost their jobs and degraded to the poor status.

### **3. Human Rights Violation**

#### **Religious Minorities**

In Bangladesh politics, Sheikh Hasina has been the pioneer of secularism and vanguard of minority rights. After the toppling of the Sheikh Hasina government, minorities in Bangladesh fell into deep problem as religious extremists attacked them for their support towards Sheikh Hasina. There has been 2184 incidents of communal violence in Bangladesh from 4 August to 31 December 2024 according to the report of the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council. Reportedly 9 died, 4 women were raped, and 38 persons were severely injured. Additionally, 69 temples, house of 915 individuals and commercial establishment of 953 persons have been ransacked and looted.

#### **Political Persecution**

Until August 25, at the public yet tacit approval of the Yunus government, in total 440 cases have been filed against Sheikh Hasina, out of which 297 are murder cases, 126 are attempt to murder cases, 1 special case in the International Crimes Tribunal, and 16 other miscellaneous cases.

Whenever Awami League activist tried to protest in the streets exercising their constitutional right to assembly and free expression, a mob of BNP-Jamat-NCP activists beat

them in the streets with the approval of the government. The government afterwards took no action against the mob.

On 31 August 2024, Manabadhikar Shongskriti Foundation reported that at least 268 cases have been filed against 1,94,000 people, mostly targeting Awami League leaders and activists including Sheikh Hasina. Until August 25 the number of cases has increased to 2337 false cases, and included around 1.5 million Awami League supporters and activists. Majority of these false cases bring murder charges. In these cases, around 450,000 names of individuals are mentioned, and unknown 1.1 million people are tagged.

After the toppling of the Sheikh Hasina government, around 107 Members of the Parliament are arrested and have been denied bails multiple times without any ground whatsoever. Among these 107 members of the parliament, there are ministers, whip of the parliament, deputy speaker, and technocrat ministers. Moreover, majority of the existing District Council Chairmen, Upazilla Council Chairmen, City Corporation Mayors have been arrested. According to the daily Samakal, more than 360,000 Awami League–affiliated individuals have been arrested in total.

The activities of the Awami League have been suspended through amending the Anti-Terrorism Act 2009 with sinister intention. Even the UN Human Rights Commissioner Volker Turk has expressed concerns about recent changes to legislation to allow the banning of political parties and organizations and all related activities. However, the Interim Government is yet to pay any heed to such concerns.

## **4. Destruction of Judiciary**

The 5 August 2024, uprising marked a turning point in Bangladesh’s political and judicial landscape. What began as a coordinated wave of student-led protests swiftly escalated into a systemic purge of the judiciary. On 10 August 2024, Chief Justice Obaidul Hassan abruptly resigned amid accusations that he had attempted a judicial intervention to facilitate the return of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Protesters, some reportedly mobilized through platforms linked to religious hardliners, accused him of collusion with the old regime and demanded his resignation—setting a 1:00 p.m. ultimatum for him and other senior judges.

In rapid succession, resignations followed across the judiciary, particularly targeting judges perceived to be sympathetic to the previous administration. In the wake of this orchestrated exodus, Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed—until then a judge of the High Court Division—was swiftly named the 25th Chief Justice of Bangladesh by President Mohammed Shahabuddin in response to the mob demand.

### **Reviving Jamaat-e-Islami**

In a move that defied the memory of Bangladesh’s liberation struggle and undermined decades of transitional justice, the Supreme Court revived the appeal of Jamaat-e-Islami, a group found guilty of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. By granting a legal foothold to a party historically linked to mass atrocities and radical ideology, the judiciary not only insulted the victims of 1971 but also empowered a new wave of extremist politics.

## **Violation of Right to Bail**

In October 2024, the judiciary revealed its increasing hostility toward legal neutrality when a two-judge High Court bench abruptly abandoned hearings on 789 anticipatory bail petitions—many filed by grassroots leaders and activists associated with the Awami League- the political opposition of the current government. This mass procedural desertion was not just a breach of judicial decorum; it was a weaponization of silence.

## **Forced Sidelining of 12 High Court Judges**

In a move that shattered any remaining illusion of judicial independence, Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed orchestrated the forced sidelining of 12 High Court judges in October 2024, not through formal inquiry or judicial discipline, but in direct response to mob agitation and ideological hysteria. Caving to demands from extremist student groups and politicized civil society outfits, Justice Ahmed placed the judges on “leave” based on vague allegations of affiliation with the previous Awami League government. These so-called charges—corruption, bias, and misconduct—were never tested in any tribunal, never scrutinized by any commission, and never afforded the basic protections of due process.

The situation escalated into a full-scale institutional disgrace when, on October 16, over a thousand members of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement stormed the Supreme Court premises, chanting slogans and demanding the purge of what they called “pro-Awami League fascist judges.” A faction

of Lawyers also joined in, not to defend the sanctity of the judiciary, but to call for the imprisonment of colleagues tied to the former ruling party. Rather than defending the judiciary from this outright assault on its autonomy, Chief Justice Ahmed capitulated the very next day, banning 12 judges from adjudicating. He offered no defense of judicial impartiality, no safeguard against trial by public frenzy. His actions set a chilling precedent: that judges could be exiled from the bench not through lawful process, but through ideological pressure and mob coercion.

## **Weaponizing the Supreme Judicial Council**

In December 2024, Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed took one of the most dangerous steps yet in consolidating control over the judiciary—he weaponized the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), transforming what was once a mechanism for safeguarding judicial integrity into a covert tool of political retribution. Under his supervision, the reinstated SJC quietly submitted confidential reports to President Mohammed Shahabuddin targeting a number of High Court judges who had been appointed during the Awami League’s tenure. The language of “impartiality” and “integrity” was cynically deployed to mask what was, in reality, an orchestrated purge of judges viewed as politically inconvenient.

No details of the allegations were made public. No opportunity for rebuttal was afforded to the accused. The entire process reeked of a backdoor inquisition, designed not to preserve the rule of law but to enforce loyalty to the new judicial-political order. The secrecy surrounding the reports

was not incidental—it was instrumental. By hiding the contents and recommendations, Chief Justice Ahmed ensured that political motives could masquerade as institutional scrutiny, shielded from public oversight and legal challenge. The Council, meant to uphold the constitution, had under his hand become an instrument of silent intimidation—a velvet noose around the necks of judges who dared to serve under a previous government.

Rather than strengthening accountability, Justice Ahmed has repurposed the Supreme Judicial Council into a judicial guillotine: arbitrary, opaque, and politically loaded. The message was unmistakable—past affiliations would not be tolerated, and the bench would be purged not by evidence or ethics, but by secret memos passed under the table of power.

## **Impunity for Lawyers Disgracing the Higher Judiciary**

In an incident that should have shaken the foundations of judicial dignity, High Court Justice Md Ashraful Kamal was brazenly assaulted in open court in November 2024—eggs hurled at him by a group of lawyers enraged by his remarks about former President Ziaur Rahman in a judgment that Ziaur Rahman was a military usurper— which is a true fact. This shocking act of courtroom vandalism took place not in the shadows, but during a live court session, under the gaze of Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed’s judiciary.

Yet, despite initial platitudes—Ahmed issued a press note voicing “concern” and pledging “necessary steps”—no concrete disciplinary action followed. As of 3 April 2025, there

is no public record of contempt proceedings, bar association sanctions, or even internal investigations against the attackers. The perpetrators, lawyers by profession but vandals in conduct, walked away untouched. The Chief Justice, who once famously issued contempt charges against police for far lesser offenses, has now retreated into silence when he is in charge of the entire judiciary.

This abdication of authority is more than procedural negligence—it is complicity by omission. The Supreme Court’s failure to respond decisively to an assault on one of its sitting judges has emboldened a culture of impunity within the legal fraternity and sown fear among judges expected to rule impartially in a polarized landscape. The inaction not only violated the sanctity of the courtroom but also undermined Article 35 of the Constitution, which guarantees due process and the right to legal representation—rights now routinely trampled under mob intimidation and selective silence.

## **Indemnifying the Chief Adviser Yunus and Political Elite**

On 11 August, 2024—the very day Justice Ahmed was appointed Chief Justice—Nobel laureate and interim chief adviser Muhammad Yunus was abruptly acquitted in a corruption case filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission. The message was clear: elevation to political leadership now guarantees judicial absolution. The pattern deepened in January 2025 when former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia saw her final corruption conviction overturned, erasing a decade-long prison sentence and clearing the path for her political re-entry.

Most damningly, the Supreme Court’s four-member bench—personally led by Chief Justice Ahmed—suspended the prison sentence of Tarique Rahman, long accused of corruption and criminal conspiracy, along with his associate Gias Uddin Al Manun. This decision, unaccompanied by transparent reasoning or public justification, amounted to a judicial pardon delivered from the highest seat of justice.

Adding to the litany, the High Court also acquitted Lutfozzaman Babor, a former state minister once convicted in a major cross-border arms trafficking case. Taken together, these rulings form not a coincidence, but a coordinated rehabilitation of political actors strategically aligned with the current interim government.

Chief Justice Ahmed’s tenure has thus far not only normalized selective justice—it has weaponized the judiciary to reward allies and cleanse the reputations of key players in the interim political order. This is not judicial independence; it is judicial surrender dressed in the garb of reform. The court has become less a forum of legal principle and more a stage for political theater—where justice is scripted in backrooms and verdicts serve political agendas.

Under Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed’s tenure, the judiciary has witnessed a troubling erosion of the fundamental right to legal representation, particularly for lawyers affiliated with the former ruling Awami League. The mass detention of 70 senior lawyers in April 2025, all linked to the Awami League, marks an unprecedented crackdown on legal professionals. These lawyers were made part of frivolous suits and criminal cases filed in the aftermath of the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government.

Despite these alarming developments, the Supreme Court under Chief Justice Ahmed has not issued clear directives to protect the rights of these lawyers or to condemn the extrajudicial methods employed against them. This silence stands in stark contrast to the judiciary's constitutional obligation to uphold the right to legal representation and to ensure that all individuals, regardless of political affiliation, have access to justice. Moreover, in an unprecedented manner, 84 pro-AL lawyers sent to jail over violence during mass uprising.

The judiciary's inaction in the face of mob violence and intimidation tactics has effectively sanctioned a climate where legal professionals are targeted for their associations, undermining the very foundations of a fair and impartial legal system. Chief Justice Ahmed's emphasis on institutional stability appears to have come at the expense of individual rights, raising serious concerns about the judiciary's role in safeguarding democratic principles during this turbulent period. If the judiciary cannot defend the right of even its least popular officers to practice law without fear, what remains of its independence?

## **5. State of Press Freedom, Freedom of Expression, and Academic Freedom**

Despite the judiciary's constitutional mandate to uphold freedom of expression under Article 39, the Court has failed to intervene as journalists face harassment, violence, and censorship.

Since the toppling of Sheikh Hasina's government, over 350 journalists have been harassed, with 74 cases of violence reported, 113 criminal charges filed, and press credentials revoked for 167 journalists. Media outlets perceived as sympathetic to the former regime, such as Daily Janakantha, Bangladesh Pratidin, Channel 24, and Somoy TV, have been targeted by mobs, leading to assaults, vandalism, and forced closures.

International observers, including the Human Rights Watch, have expressed concern over the judiciary's failure to protect press freedom. The lack of judicial response not only emboldens those perpetrating these attacks but also signals a troubling departure from the principles of justice and accountability.

## **6. Destruction of the Education Sector**

### **Suspension of the Activities of University Academics and Researchers**

On 3 August 2024, the pro-Awami League teachers' group at the University of Dhaka held a human chain demanding justice for all killings and destruction surrounding the quota reform movement. On the other hand, the pro-BNP-Jamat teachers' group demanded the government's resignation and justice for the killing of students under a neutral administration. Post 5 August 2024, the BNP leaning teachers at the instruction and support of the Yunus Government instigated their student wing leaders to stage protests against AL leaning teachers on the ground that they did not demand resignation of the

democratic government, rather they demanded justice for the killings. At least 70 academics at the top University of the country- University of Dhaka cannot enter classes, cannot work in their office spaces, and cannot work on their research projects. At the National University, one teacher and 19 officials have been forced into compulsory retirement.

Similar thing happened all across the country in major universities where the BNP-Jamat affiliated teachers suddenly took over the University Administration. For example, Jahangirnagar University, RUET.

Additionally, at 46 public and autonomous universities, all vice-chancellors, pro-vice-chancellors, and treasurers have been forcibly made to resign. A similar forced resignation campaign is underway at around 106 private universities.

## **Violation of Right to Education**

A total of 774 university students have been expelled, and 2,120 students are unable to access their campuses. Additionally, 313 medical students and 123 engineering students have been expelled. University of Dhaka has suspended 128 students without giving them an opportunity to be heard, and they have not even disclosed the report publicly which can demonstrate the individual culpability of each of the suspended one. In a similar way, Jahangirnagar University suspended 289 students, and Chittagong University has expelled 73 students.

In government colleges, 130,600 students have been deprived of their fundamental rights. Among them, approximately 19,590 students were injured in mob violence, and the authorities have

withheld the certificates of at least 52,240 students. In private colleges, around 200,350 students have similarly been denied their fundamental rights. Nearly 40,140 students have been injured in mob attacks, and the certificates of approximately 120,210 students have been withheld by the authorities. In polytechnic institutes, around 3,000 students have also been deprived of their fundamental rights.

In the HSC and equivalent examinations, the number of total candidates decreased by 81,882 compared to 2024. In the General Education Board, approximately 320,000 regular students (around 27%) of the 2023–24 academic year did not fill out the examination forms. About 39% of registered students in the Madrasa Education Board, and approximately 40% of students in the Technical Education Board (Vocational), also did not complete their exam form submissions.

## **7. Security Policy and Foreign Affairs**

Post 5 August 2024, Bangladesh is being run by multiple dual citizenship holders. They are running sensitive offices like National Security Adviser as well demonstrating the state of national security in Bangladesh.

Additionally, to suppress dissenting voices, the government has been harboring and supporting militant groups. Since 5 August, 312 convicted and recognized militants have been released on bail. Additionally, 70 militants have escaped from prison, bringing the total number of militants outside custody to 382. The legal definition of “militant” has also been altered to “saboteur.”

Wishing not to be named, several police officers told daily Prothom Alo that around 700 prisoners, who escaped during the July-August uprisings, are still at large. They said the looted firearms and ammunition have ended up in the hands of criminals, and these two issues have raised significant concern about public safety and law and order.

## **8. Cultural Heritage and Arts under Attack**

Within two and a half days since the toppling of Sheikh Hasina, the country has witnessed widespread violence, ransacking, and the vandalism of archaeological sculptures, statues, and murals of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Mob vandalized and set fire to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Mural and Bangabandhu Memorial Museum, the structure of Themis at the Supreme Court premises, Shadhinata Sangram Bhashkarjo at Fuller Road, the sculpture of Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin in Mymensingh, and the Mujibnagar Liberation War Memorial Complex in Meherpur. Miscreants vandalised part of the “Madhusudan Dey Smriti Sculpture” in front of Madhu’s Canteen on the University of Dhaka premises. In Mymensingh’s Zainul Park area, the sculpture of Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin in front of the Zainul Abedin Sangrahashala (art gallery) was damaged by a mob. Additionally, miscreants also broke down the 144-year-old Venus sculpture in front of Shashi Lodge the same day. Maharaja Suryakanta Acharya Chowdhury, one of the Muktagacha zaminders, built the lodge in 1880 after his adopted son Maharaja Shashikanta Acharya Chowdhury, at a cost of Tk 11 lakh. In Chattogram, the Sheikh Russel Aviary

and Eco-Park at Rangunia upazila was vandalized and looted for two consecutive days by miscreants.

Rare and centuries-old books in the Bir Chandra Public Library in Comilla met the same fate when a group of people participating in a victory rally set the 150-year-old library on fire and looted it. The house of musician Rahul Ananda on Dhanmondi Road No 32 was also targeted. About three thousand musical instruments were burned to ashes.

Threat to ‘burn everything’ halted Lalon Mela in Narayanganj in November 2024. Local protests and administrative restrictions forced the cancellation of the event. The tarpaulin at the venue were removed after threats were received to halt the ‘Mohoti Sadhusanga and Lalon Mela’, a festival held in memory of the mystic saint Lalon Shah in Narayanganj Sadar Upazila. Devotees who had travelled from distant places have returned, and the place, expected to be filled with Lalon’s philosophical songs, had to leave with in eerie silence.

Additionally, attacks on shrines have reached an alarming level after the toppling of the Sheikh Hasina government. Based on police findings, the chief adviser’s press wing on 18 January confirmed attacks on at least 40 shrines since 4 August. The Global Sufi Organization at a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club on 23 January claimed that at least 80 shrines had been attacked since August.

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## Legal Labyrinth: Navigating Legitimacy of Interim Government

Rebels who take over government by force of arms always advance altruistic reasons for their actions. The invocation of selfless reasons for taking over power is an attempt by the rebels to pass for reformers (if not ‘liberators’ or ‘messiahs’, at least ‘development dictators’) with a self-appointed mandate to effect sweeping economic, social and political reforms. But behind the altruistic reasons pleaded in justification of the take-over, however, self-interests always loom large.

—*Carlson Anyangew*, in *Revolutionary  
Overthrow of Constitutional Orders in Africa*

As the nation grapples with political upheaval, the legitimacy and constitutionality of Bangladesh’s current Muhammad Yunus-led interim government remain shrouded in ambiguity. One group of scholars has swiftly invoked the century-old theory of “revolutionary legality” and the “doctrine of necessity” to validate the interim government’s position. These experts argue that

extraordinary circumstances necessitate extraordinary measures, providing a legal basis for the current administration.

Meanwhile, another faction of legal minds wrestles with understanding the nature and extent of the interim government's mandate within the existing constitutional framework. These scholars caution against hasty conclusions, emphasizing the need to thoroughly examine constitutional provisions and precedents. A third group has turned to a fundamental constitutional principle, asserting that the mass revolution is the source of all power. They argue that popular support could legitimize the interim government, regardless of procedural irregularities.

However, these conflicting assertions have only muddied the waters, failing to prove the government's legitimacy. Moreover, given that the current interim government has taken the oath under this constitution and, hence, is bound to protect the value of the constitution, this adds further complexity to the mandate of the government. The following will shed a light on why:

## **Juxtaposition of revolution and democracy**

In 1920, in his *General Theory of Law and State*, Henry Kelsen argued that a successful revolution or coup d'état effectively ends the existing legal order and establishes a new one. For Kelsen, the success of a revolution or coup d'état hinges on two critical factors: (i) general acceptance by the people and (ii) obedience to the laws of the new rulers and enforcement by the courts. Kelsen was not particularly concerned whether the rebels had a valid reason for

their actions or were motivated by a truly democratic desire. In many politically unstable countries, Kelsen's theory is commonly used to justify extra-constitutional revolutions and subsequent constitutional changes. Yet, it does not help distinguish between a democratic re-constitution and a coup d'état.

The threshold for what constitutes a “successful revolution” in Kelsenian terms remains prickly. Take, for instance, Bangladesh's 1975 martial law regime. During the martial law proclamation, the judiciary continued to function within the constraints imposed by the military authorities. Crucially, Supreme Court judges were not required to take new oaths of office - a clear indication that the existing legal order was not entirely dismantled and replaced. The judiciary declared the legitimacy of the martial law regime based on Kelsen's theory. However, according to the late Professor Ershadul Bari, the events of 15 August 1975 in Bangladesh may not meet Kelsen's strict criteria for a ‘revolution’ since there was no cessation of the old order or establishment of a new order.

Fast-forward to present-day Bangladesh, and we see a similar pattern unfolding. The interim government and the newly appointed Chief Justice by the President have sworn their oaths under the Constitution. Although there were instances where students forced the Chief Justice and other Appellate Division judges to resign, courts continue to operate as usual, and there is clear continuity in the application of law. These factors strongly indicate that the Constitution remains the supreme law of the land, preserving Bangladesh's status as a constitutional democracy. Therefore, the legitimacy of the administration, which assumed power

following student-led mass protests, and the legality of their actions must face scrutiny under the very constitutional framework within which it operates and must be bound by Article 111 of the constitution.

## **Judicial ambivalence with Kelsen's theory in constitutional crises**

Courts worldwide have vacillated to fully embrace Hans Kelsen's theory of revolutionary legality, often treading a fine line between acknowledging revolutionary changes and maintaining legal continuity (citing the doctrine of necessity).

Its first notable use came in the 1958 *State v Dosso* case in Pakistan. This decision infamously paved the way for future military interventions in politics, potentially derailing the country's democratization process. In the *Asma Jilani* case, the court overruled the *Dosso* ruling. It held that Kelsen's theory was not universally accepted, and Kelsen did not attempt to formulate a theory favoring totalitarianism. Rather, he aimed to establish a pure theory of law as a collection of norms. The court emphasized that Kelsen's theory does not necessitate changes in legal norms for the daily concerns of judges, legal practitioners, or administrators.

This skepticism was further reinforced in the landmark case of *Begum Nusrat Bhutto v Chief of Army Staff and Federation of Pakistan* (1977). The court was not convinced that military intervention was inherently legal just because it was accepted and became effective. Even if the old Constitution is destroyed, it doesn't mean all legal and moral concepts have been destroyed just because they're not mentioned in the new legal order.

## Turning back to Bangladesh

Since the first proclamation of martial law in 1975, several Supreme Court cases have discussed Kelsen’s theory to justify the seizure of power by extra-constitutional forces, the suspension of the Constitution, and the abrogation of the judiciary’s power to uphold constitutional democracy.

From time to time, the judiciary echoed the conflicting interests between guaranteeing constitutional democracy and the extra-constitutional usurpation of power. Finally, the 2010 Appellate Division rulings in the Fifth and Seventh Amendment cases further solidified Bangladesh’s identity as a “democratic Republic” governed by “elected representatives”. Notably, the court declared that ‘any attempt by any person or group of persons, how high so ever, to usurp an elected government, shall render themselves liable for high treason.’

These judicial pronouncements catalyzed the Fifteenth Constitutional Amendment, introducing Articles 7A and 7B. Article 7A criminalizes any attempt to abrogate, repeal, suspend, or subvert the Constitution through force or unconstitutional means as sedition. Article 7B enshrines the immutability of the Constitution’s basic structure.

Previously, in landmark cases like Kudrat Elahi Panir and Anwar Hossain Chowdhury, Article 7 of the Constitution has been established as one of the basic pillars of the Constitution, which represents the “solemn expression of the will of the people” and “[i]t emphatically, without ambiguity, declares the supremacy of the Constitution.” (Kudrat-E-Elahi Panir v Bangladesh, para 72).

## **Practical considerations and the future of democracy and rule of law in Bangladesh**

The legality of Bangladesh's interim government stands on shaky ground following the repeal of the Thirteenth Constitutional Amendment. While the doctrine of necessity may offer a partial justification, this administration's unelected nature raises significant legitimacy questions about its mandate and duration.

Moreover, Bangladesh has historically been a parliamentary democracy, and the election represents the people's will. At the heart of our constitutional framework lies Article 7, a pillar of its basic structure, which mandates that the exercise of people's power must comply with constitutional provisions -- a mandate that can only be fulfilled through free and fair elections. This principle is not merely a guideline; it is the very essence of our democracy. The Constitution also provides a timeline for holding an election if the parliament is dissolved. According to article 123(3), a general election shall be held within 90 days of the dissolution of the parliament.

There is also a little murmuring about constitutional reform, which is deeply concerning for the future of democracy in Bangladesh. Traditionally, the authority to create or modify the constitution lies with the democratically elected representatives, in line with the principles established during the 18th-century American and French revolutions. Thomas Young, an influential figure in the American Revolution, articulated this concept in 1777, stating that "the people... are the supreme constituent power and therefore, their immediate [r]epresentatives are the supreme [d]elegate power." In a

constitutional democracy, the power to adopt and amend a constitution can only be delegated according to the provisions outlined in the constitution.

Bangladesh's constitution, a testament to our nation's democratic foundations, was crafted by 469 elected representatives who signed the Declaration of Independence following the 1970 general elections. The constitution pledges the "high ideals of nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism." The constitution's architects wisely included safeguards against hasty or ill-considered changes. Article 142 stipulates that any constitutional amendment requires a two-thirds majority in Parliament - a high bar deliberately set to ensure broad consensus for such fundamental alterations. In addition, our Supreme Court holds the responsibility to ensure any amendments passed by the Parliament do not violate the fundamental structure of the Constitution.

In light of these established principles, any attempt to suspend, revoke, or modify the Constitution without the involvement of elected representatives undermines our democratic values and aspirations. If undertaken by an unelected interim government or any group, such actions would not only violate the letter of the law but also betray the spirit of what our constitution represents.

The path forward is clear: Bangladesh must restore its democratic traditions and constitutional values by holding timely elections. Only through this can we ensure that the people's voice remains at the heart of our nation's governance.

# **Yunus Government and Questions of Constitutionality, Authority and Mandate**

## **Introduction**

One year has passed since the formation of the interim government in Bangladesh, yet the question of its legitimacy has grown more pressing with each day. Both the public and political parties have begun to challenge the assertion of Dr. Muhammad Yunus, the Chief Adviser of the interim government, that he holds the mandate to implement sweeping reforms and cleanse Bangladesh of the systemic issues accumulated during Sheikh Hasina’s 15-year rule. The legitimacy crisis is undeniable—the caretaker government’s initial “honeymoon period” has ended, and citizens now demand tangible progress on the grievances that sparked the so-called “second revolution.” This article examines the roots of the current government’s legitimacy deficit and explores potential pathways to restore democracy in Bangladesh—for the sake of its people.

## The Legitimacy of a Government: Legal Definition

The legitimacy of a government refers to its recognized authority to rule, based on legal, moral, and social acceptance by its citizens and the international community. A legitimate government derives its right to govern from established legal frameworks (such as constitutions and elections), public consent, and adherence to democratic principles. Max Weber's classical theory identifies three primary sources of legitimacy: **legal-rational** (rule through laws and procedures), **traditional** (hereditary or customary authority), and **charismatic** (leadership based on personal appeal) (Weber, 1947). Modern governments often rely on a combination of these, with democratic elections serving as the most widely accepted form of legal-rational legitimacy (Dahl, 1989).

However, legitimacy is not static—it depends on performance, accountability, and public trust. Governments that fail to deliver economic stability, security, or human rights protections risk losing legitimacy, even if they were initially elected fairly (Lipset, 1959). For example, authoritarian regimes may maintain power through coercion or propaganda, but their legitimacy is often questioned internationally due to lack of democratic participation (Linz, 2000). Conversely, governments facing coups or foreign intervention (e.g., Afghanistan post-2021) struggle with legitimacy despite previous legal recognition.

International recognition also plays a key role. The United Nations and foreign states often assess legitimacy based on adherence to international law, human rights, and democratic governance (UN Charter, Art. 4). A government lacking global

recognition (e.g., Taiwan) faces diplomatic and economic constraints, weakening its authority.

## **Issues of legitimacy of the current government**

### **Constitutional Legality**

The constitutional framework of Bangladesh presents significant obstacles to the formation of an interim government under Dr. Muhammad Yunus. The caretaker government system was abolished through the 15th Amendment in 2011, eliminating the constitutional pathway for non-elected transitional administrations (Hoque, 2021). For any interim government to be established now, it would require extraordinary measures: a constitutional amendment, which is virtually impossible without the ruling Awami League's parliamentary supermajority (Riaz, 2022); Supreme Court endorsement, which would be historically contentious given the judiciary's increasing politicization in recent years (Sarker, 2023); and likely military support, reminiscent of the 2007-08 caretaker government that took power with army backing (International Crisis Group, 2020). The current constitutional design deliberately centralizes power within elected institutions, making extra-constitutional transitions legally untenable without either institutional consensus or revolutionary circumstances (Khan, 2021).

### **Formation Process**

The formation process of this current government is faulty in nature. If mass protests forced the Prime Minister Sheikh

Hasina departure, the successor government's legitimacy would be judged by whether it followed constitutional Article 57 (orderly resignation and succession) or involved extra-legal mechanisms like military intervention (Ahmed, 2023). However, the current government has not exercised this process of legal issue. Critical to this process would be demonstrable support from a broad coalition encompassing major political parties (including both the Awami League and BNP), civil society leaders, and key institutions—a tall order given Bangladesh's polarized landscape (Bertocci, 2022). But Dr. Yunus has selected his man, who are very close to him, or suggested by vested interest group, which is very much faulty in nature. Historically, the military's role has been decisive in such transitions: the 1996 and 2007 caretaker governments operated with tacit army support (Rashid, 2021). While military backing could provide temporary stability for a Yunus-led administration, simultaneously has undermined democratic legitimacy and potentially trigger long-term governance crises (Hossain, 2023).

## **Domestic & International Recognition**

Domestically, Dr. Yunus has been facing an uphill battle for acceptance. The Awami League, as the entrenched political force, has rejected any non-partisan administration as unconstitutional (The Daily Star, 2023), while the BNP is viewing Yunus—despite his neutrality—as lacking a popular mandate (Dhaka Tribune, 2023). His failed 2007 political venture with Nagorik Shakti demonstrated his limited ability to mobilize partisan support (Yunus, 2010). Internationally, reactions is very much

split: Western powers like the US and EU are now cautiously endorsing Yunus as a reformist figure, given his Nobel credentials and anti-corruption stance (US State Department, 2023), but neighboring powers (particularly China and India) perceive his administration as destabilizing to regional interests (Observer Research Foundation, 2023). Global recognition is yet to be consolidated which would ultimately depend on whether the transition appeared voluntary (constitutional) or imposed (extra-constitutional), with the latter risking sanctions or isolation (Amnesty International, 2023).

### **Dr. Yunus’s Feasibility as Leader**

Dr. Yunus’s potential leadership suffers from two critical vulnerabilities. Politically, he has no experience governing or managing the machinery of state, having operated exclusively in the NGO and microfinance spheres (Yunus & Weber, 2010). His lack of a political base or party infrastructure is leaving him dependent on fragile alliances (The Economist, 2023). Legally, he remains embroiled in ongoing cases—including labor law violations and Grameen Bank governance disputes—that the Sheikh Hasina administration aggressively pursued (Human Rights Watch, 2023). These cases will be weaponized to delegitimize his authority or even remove him from office (Transparency International Bangladesh, 2023). Furthermore, his age (83) and the intense polarization surrounding his figure make sustained leadership challenging (New Age Bangladesh, 2023). While his moral stature might inspire initial public goodwill, the practical demands of governing a crisis-prone Bangladesh would quickly test his untested political capacity (World Bank, 2023).

## Some Critical Issues:

After Sheikh Hasina’s resignation on 5 August 2024 amid mass protests, Yunus was appointed Chief Adviser on 8 August, heading Bangladesh’s interim government—without the standard constitutional provision for a caretaker structure. Both the Appellate Division (Supreme Court) and the High Court later affirmed the government’s formation under the ‘doctrine of necessity’ ruling it legally valid and backed by popular will. But he has already become unpopular for the following reasons:

- Yunus’s administration set up 15 reform commissions in late 2024 focused on restructuring institutions like the judiciary, Election Commission, public administration, and constitutional framework. It also launched a Constitutional Reform Commission led by Prof. Ali Riaz, proposing a national constitutional council. As a unelected government, this current interim government has not any legal authority to form such committee. In this ground, he is exercising unauthorized and autocratic rule in the country.
- Despite earlier promises for polls by late 2025 or early 2026, the timeline has repeatedly shifted. Critics accuse Yunus of using structural reforms as a pretext to prolong governance without a popular mandate.
- Opposition and civil society disillusionment is huge now. The BNP initially supported Yunus, but relations soured over perceived bias toward the student-led National Citizen Party (NCP) and exclusionary electoral policies.

- Civil society groups and labor unions have protested against new ordinances enabling summary dismissals and media restrictions. All these activities have no legal basis. Moreover, the government is trying to establish a political party bypassing all rule and regulations.
- Human rights organizations have accused the interim government of mishandling or ignoring widespread communal violence post-August 2024, citing failure to protect ethnic and religious minorities. Human Rights Watch, Asian Human Rights Commissions have already raised their concern for the gross human rights violation in Bangladesh.
  - The nation faces economic downturn, rising inflation, and allegations of embezzlement. The government has proposed a special law to recover billions allegedly trafficked abroad—prompting mixed reactions among the public.

## **Conclusion:**

While Yunus’s interim government was legally validated and initially celebrated as a progressive, non-partisan transition, it faces a legitimacy crisis characterized by delayed elections, controversial reforms, growing suppression of dissent, and eroding public trust. The administration’s durability now hinges on whether it can deliver genuine institutional change and inclusive governance—or whether it risks replicating the authoritarianism it sought to replace. From the legal point of view this government is illegitimate and their actions are contrary of the constitution of the country.

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# **Disasters in Diplomacy and the Drift in Bangladesh’s Foreign Policy**

## **Introduction**

On 5 August 2024, the fall of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s government did not stem from a spontaneous popular uprising, but rather from a strategically coordinated effort involving Jamaat-e-Islami, its student affiliate Islami Chhatra Shibir, extreme Islamist groups and segments of the political opposition, aimed at engineering an unconstitutional regime change through mass mobilization and institutional disruption (FPRI, 2024; ICPS, 2024; Le Monde, 2024). The interim regime, led by Dr. Yunus, meant to be a neutral caretaker, launched ambitious reforms, but its handling of foreign policy soon revealed significant missteps. While its idea of recalibrating Bangladesh’s international posture was superficially promising, in reality, the government blundered in diplomacy, produced regional instability, and alienated key partners.

## **1. Diplomatic Disarray and Bureaucratic Power Plays**

Yunus's government reshaped the Foreign Ministry, abruptly recalling and reshuffling diplomats. For example, the transfer of Deputy High Commissioner Shabab Bin Ahmed to Kolkata was cancelled, causing tension with both diplomats and India (ThePrint, 2025). Simultaneously, the Bangladesh embassy in Myanmar saw its ambassador recalled without clarification, throwing bilateral ties with Naypyidaw into disarray (ThePrint, 2025). Such top-down moves indicated a politicization of diplomacy, undermining the professionalism essential for stable foreign relations (Wikipedia, 2025). The appointment of Dr. Khalilur Rahman as the High Representative on Foreign Affairs has been widely perceived as controversial and detrimental to Bangladesh's foreign policy decision-making for several key reasons. This move created confusion within the diplomatic corps and sparked concern over parallel power centers in foreign policymaking, eroding professional coherence and undermining Bangladesh's institutional credibility abroad (ThePrint, 2025).

Dr. Rahman's controversial public statements—including inflammatory remarks about India and vague comments about Western double standards—fuelled diplomatic tension, particularly with New Delhi and Brussels. His rhetoric was often perceived as ideologically driven, lacking the strategic subtlety necessary for managing delicate bilateral and multilateral relations (Firstpost, 2025b; South Asia Monitor, 2025). As a result, key partners became

increasingly cautious in engaging with Dhaka, contributing to a climate of mistrust. Furthermore, the overlapping roles between Rahman and Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain led to policy incoherence and contradictory messaging in key diplomatic engagements. This dual-command model alienated several embassies, led to delayed responses in negotiations (e.g., with the U.S. over tariffs and with India on the Hasina extradition issue), and weakened Bangladesh's ability to respond promptly to regional crises, such as the Myanmar border tensions.

## **2. Anti- India Rhetoric and Strained Bilateral Relations**

Under Yunus's leadership, relations with India soured. The interim government publicly accused New Delhi of fomenting unrest and instigating student protests (Firstpost, 2025b). These accusations emerged as Bangladesh's Foreign Affairs Adviser, MD Touhid Hossain, adopted a more confrontational tone toward India, prompting criticism of cross-border killings and water security issues early on (Stimson Center, 2024). The situation was exacerbated when statements by Indian media blaming Indian dams for floods amid protests (August 2024 floods) triggered hacktivist responses and diplomatic friction (Wikipedia; Le Monde, 2024). India responded cautiously, urging restraint, but the atmosphere became increasingly hostile, evidencing a sharp decline in relations.

### **3. Realignment with Global Powers— Unbalanced and Erratic**

One of the defining challenges of the Yunus-led interim government has been its inability to pursue a coherent and progressive balancing strategy among Bangladesh’s key global partners. While Dr. Yunus rhetorically emphasized the need for equidistant diplomacy with India, China, and the West, in practice, his administration’s foreign policy veered between erratic alignment and diplomatic overreach. Early in his tenure, Yunus focused heavily on rebuilding relations with the United States and Western allies—securing a \$3.5 billion World Bank aid package and pledges from USAID and European governments (Le Monde, 2024; *The Daily Star*, 2024). However, this western-leaning pivot was not strategically counterbalanced by sustained engagement with China, despite Beijing’s pivotal role in Bangladesh’s defense modernization, infrastructure investment, and regional diplomacy (Stimson Center, 2024). When Yunus eventually visited Beijing in March 2025, the outcomes were limited to symbolic commitments—such as a proposed 50-year river management plan and bilateral cooperation pledges—but no progress was made on key strategic or defense projects (The Print, 2025b; South Asia Monitor, 2025).

Relations with India, another critical partner, deteriorated rapidly due to accusatory rhetoric, inconsistent signaling, and the expulsion of key diplomats. The interim government’s failure to engage New Delhi constructively—especially on water security, border management, and the extradition request for Sheikh Hasina—further exposed the incoherence

of its regional approach (Firstpost, 2025b; ThePrint, 2025). Instead of promoting a progressive and pragmatic balance, the Yunus government appeared reactive and ideologically driven, marginalizing professional diplomacy in favor of personalized politics and selective alliances. The resulting perception among many international actors is that Bangladesh’s interim administration lacks a structured vision for long-term strategic balance, compromising both credibility and geopolitical leverage at a critical historical juncture.

#### **4. Rohingya, Myanmar, and Regional Security Missteps**

Managing the Rohingya crisis required careful diplomacy. The interim government proposed a highly sought-after “humanitarian corridor” across the Bangladesh–Myanmar border to support the Arakan Army, alarming Naypyidaw and potentially risking sovereignty disputes (ThePrint, 2025). The move backfired when Myanmar expelled Bangladesh’s Defense attaché in Yangon and recalled diplomats, leading to strained bilateral relations (ThePrint, 2025). Yunus also pursued rapprochement with rebel groups (e.g., Arakan Army), but without clear diplomatic safeguards, this initiative sowed uncertainties in regional stability and complicated ties with both Myanmar and India.

#### **5. Community Attacks, Media Crackdown & International Reputation**

Post-5 August, minority communities—especially Hindus—were subject to hundreds of attacks. The Bangladesh Hindu

Buddhist Christian Unity Council reported over 2,000 incidents in 52 districts, including fatalities (ICPS, 2024; FPRI, 2024). While Yunus visited temples to pacify communities, continued violence undermined his government’s credibility on minority protection—a key diplomatic concern for Western and regional partners.

At the same time, media freedom deteriorated. Travel bans against journalists, accreditation revocations, and the persecution of critical outlets, such as *The Daily Star* and daily *Prothom Alo*, as well as foreign-backed accusations, overshadowed professed democratic reforms (Wikipedia, 2025; Firstpost, 2025a). These actions damaged Bangladesh’s international image, particularly with democratic governments and multilateral agencies.

## **6. U.S. Tariff and IG’s Inefficiency**

The imposition of a 35% reciprocal tariff by U.S. President Donald Trump on Bangladeshi exports, effective from 1 August, has exposed a failure in Bangladesh’s economic diplomacy, particularly in defending its critical garment sector against aggressive trade policies (daily *Prothom Alo*, 2025; *Dhaka Tribune*, 2025). Despite a brief reprieve, the absence of strong, strategic negotiations with the U.S. Trade Representative and passive engagement with private sector stakeholders limited Dhaka’s leverage (*Dhaka Tribune*, 2025). As the tariff remains significantly higher than those imposed on Vietnam, China, or India, Bangladesh now faces potential loss of competitiveness, market share, and downward pressure on employment in the RMG industry (TBS News, 2025; daily *Prothom Alo*,

2025). The government’s diplomatic approach—premised on issuing statements and dispatching low-level envoys—failed to produce impactful outcomes. Without assertive engagement, leverage building, and robust trade negotiations, Bangladesh risked ceding ground to regional competitors, underlining the urgent need for reform in its foreign and trade policy apparatus.

## **7. Foreign Visits and Unrealized Outcomes**

Dr. Yunus embarked on a series of high-profile international trips early in his interim tenure, forged with the intent of enhancing Bangladesh’s global standing, securing economic and political support, and recovering misappropriated assets. However, these visits have yielded underwhelming results so far.

### **7.1 New York & Washington (UNGA, September 2024)**

Yunus used the UN General Assembly session in New York to present the “new Bangladesh” narrative and secured a pledge of US\$ 3.5 billion from the World Bank alongside supportive engagement from President Biden, European Commission officials, and heads of major UN agencies. Despite international goodwill, the trip fell short of turning aid into tangible reforms; domestic economic recovery similarly remained elusive and inflation persisted, eroding public confidence.

### **7.2 Beijing (March 2025)**

In March 2025, Yunus visited China, meeting President Xi Jinping. A flurry of MoUs were signed—covering investment,

river management, and infrastructure—with commitments including a 50-year river masterplan and a US\$ 2.1 billion package in loans, grants, and investments. Nevertheless, beyond press announcements, minimal follow-through has been seen; Chinese-backed infrastructure projects are still at the planning stage, and concerns persist over water-resource commitments.

### **7.3 London (June 2025)**

June’s UK visit was anticipated to deepen diplomatic traction and support asset recovery efforts. Yunus was awarded the King Charles III Harmony Award and met with the King and varied stakeholders, but notably failed to meet Prime Minister Keir Starmer—an embarrassment to the Bangladeshi diplomatic corps. The Awami League branded the visit “disastrous,” stating no concrete benefits accrued to Bangladesh. Requests for cooperation in freezing and returning misappropriated assets met with limited success—Starmer declined a meeting, and UK authorities have only issued selective financial freezes.

These diplomatic endeavors did not elevate Bangladesh’s profile, and they fell short of delivering measurable gains in investment, asset repatriation, or robust political backing. The persistent implementation gap highlights structural inefficiencies in Bangladesh’s foreign-policy machinery and diminishes the credibility generated by Yunus’s reputation.

## **8. Dr. Yunus in International Media**

Dr. Yunus faced intense scrutiny from international media over his sweeping reforms—particularly the controversial ban on the

Awami League—and several high-profile missteps highlighted the disconnect between his vision and its execution. During a question-and-answer session at Chatham House, his assertion that the ban was necessary for “national and political security” was met with skepticism, as critics pointed out he questioned whether the Awami League could even qualify as a political party due to allegations of violence and corruption, which came across as evasive rather than explanatory (bdnews24.com, 2025). Moreover, Yunus’s tendency to sidestep urgent inquiries by invoking vague “law-and-order challenges” and emphasizing unarticulated reform priorities left observers uneasy; his self-referential use of the term “Prime Minister” in casual remarks suggested overreach or a lack of clarity about his interim status (Reddit, 2025). International outlets like Reuters and The Guardian noted that while Yunus framed the ban and media restrictions as steps toward accountability, they instead appeared selective and politically motivated, eroding trust in his narrative of impartial reform and exposing how the complexity of transitioning from election to accountability has been underestimated on the global stage (Reuters, 2025; The Guardian, 2025). These blunders underscore the tension between his reformist ambitions and the limited institutional authority of a non-elected caretaker.

## **Conclusion**

The interim government has made critical foreign policy errors, including operating outside legal frameworks, politicizing its diplomatic corps, antagonizing India, undermining China’s development links, inciting disputes in Myanmar, mishandling minority and media issues, and overlapped personal foreign

connections. These missteps reflect a broader drift in policy—from principled balancing to ad-hoc, crisis-driven posturing. Without urgent diplomatic recalibration, Bangladesh risks regional isolation and serious damage to its global standing, undermining the democratic renewal it hopes to achieve through its interim stewardship.

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# **Contesting Liberation: Why the 2024 Movement is Not a Continuation of 1971**

## **Introduction**

In Bangladesh, the legacy of the 1971 Liberation War remains the moral and ideological foundation of political legitimacy—a sacred chapter in the nation’s history that continues to shape its identity and aspirations. It is against this deeply emotional backdrop that the architects and supporters of the 2024 movement against the government of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina have deliberately framed their struggle as a continuation of that foundational spirit—a second wave of resistance in the long fight for democracy. Yet, upon closer examination, this comparison proves not only historically shallow but fundamentally misleading. While the language of liberation and revolution is powerfully evoked, the 2024 movement lacks the philosophical depth, legal grounding, and unifying national purpose that defined the struggle of 1971. This analysis rigorously contrasts the two movements through historical, legal, and ideological lenses, demonstrating

that they are distinct phenomena—separated by their essential aims, their adherence to constitutional versus revolutionary legitimacy, and their vision for the nation. Where the Liberation War sought to create a state, the 2024 movement seeks to unseat a government. Where 1971 united a people against colonial subjugation, the current mobilization reflects deep—but domestic—political divisions. To conflate the two is not just an oversimplification: it risks diminishing the singular sanctity of the Liberation War while obscuring the true nature of today’s political contestation as a struggle for power within the framework of the state that 1971 made possible.

### **The core principles of the Liberation War:**

The 1971 liberation war has the following core principles which have made it an omnipresent, comprehensive and sacred to all Bengali people.

### **Philosophical Underpinnings: Identity, Secularism, and Self-Determination**

The Liberation War of Bangladesh was not merely a military or political conflict but a profound philosophical struggle centered on identity, autonomy, and the right to self-determination. At its core, the war represented the rejection of the Two-Nation Theory—the ideological foundation of Pakistan, which asserted that religious identity alone could define a nation. The people of East Bengal instead embraced a pluralistic, linguistic, and cultural nationalism, rooted in the Bengali language,

secular traditions, and a shared history of cultural syncretism. This vision stood in direct opposition to the West Pakistani establishment's efforts to impose a homogenized Islamic identity, which systematically marginalized Bengali culture, language, and political representation. The philosophical ethos of the liberation movement was encapsulated in Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's historic speech on March 7, 1971, which called for emancipation from oppression and affirmed the Bengali people's right to shape their own destiny. Scholars like Amartya Sen have argued that the conflict exemplified the dangers of reducing complex human identities to singular, rigid categories—a theme explored in his book *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*. The war thus became a battle for the soul of a nation, striving to establish a society based on democracy, secularism, and social justice.

## **Legal Justifications: International Law, Self-Determination, and Accountability**

From a legal perspective, Bangladesh's struggle for independence was grounded in the fundamental principle of self-determination, a right enshrined in the United Nations Charter and international law of 1966. The Pakistani state's refusal to honor the results of the 1970 general elections—in which the Awami League won a decisive majority—constituted a breach of democratic norms and provided legal and moral justification for secession. The subsequent military crackdown, launched through Operation Searchlight on March 25, 1971, involved widespread atrocities that amounted

to genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. These included the targeted killings of intellectuals, mass sexual violence, and the systematic destruction of villages and cultural institutions. International observers and jurists, such as those from the International Commission of Jurists, documented these violations, while diplomats like Archer Blood, the U.S. Consul General in Dhaka, explicitly condemned the actions of the Pakistani military in the famous Blood Telegram. The legal case for Bangladesh's independence was further strengthened by the sheer scale of human suffering, which invoked the responsibility of the global community to intervene in cases of grave humanitarian crises. Although Pakistan's actions were widely criticized, geopolitical considerations delayed full international recognition of Bangladesh until after its victory in December 1971.

## **Ground Realities: Suffering, Resistance, and Resilience**

On the ground, the war was marked by extraordinary human suffering, collective resistance, and unparalleled resilience. An estimated three million people were killed, and over ten million refugees fled to India to escape violence and persecution. The Pakistani military and its auxiliary militias (such as Razakars) engaged in systematic campaigns of violence, including the targeted elimination of intellectuals, farmers, students, and religious minorities. Women were subjected to mass sexual violence, with estimates suggesting between 200,000 and 400,000 rapes—a strategy intended to terrorize and destabilize the social fabric of Bengali society. Despite this,

the people of Bangladesh mounted a fierce and organized resistance through the Mukti Bahini (Liberation Forces), which included both civilian guerrillas and military defectors. Their efforts were complemented by international solidarity, particularly from India, which provided logistical support, refuge, and eventually direct military assistance. The war also witnessed the emergence of a vibrant cultural resistance, with artists, poets, and musicians using their work to inspire and unite people. Scholars like Nayanika Mookherjee have highlighted the long-term psychosocial impact of the violence, particularly on survivors of sexual assault, who were later honored as Birangonas (war heroines) in an effort to reclaim their dignity and place in history. The conflict culminated in a decisive victory on 16 December 1971, when the Pakistani military surrendered in Dhaka, paving the way for the birth of an independent Bangladesh.

## **Scholarly Presentation of the liberation war**

The legacy of the Liberation War continues to be analyzed and interpreted by scholars across disciplines: Amartya Sen emphasizes the conflict's significance in understanding identity-based violence and the necessity of pluralistic societies. Geoffrey Davis, an Australian physician, provided critical medical testimony and documentation of the atrocities, reinforcing claims of genocide and systematic sexual violence. Nayanika Mookherjee's anthropological work, *The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories, and the Bangladesh War of 1971*, explores the enduring trauma of survivors and the complexities of memory and justice.

The war remains a foundational narrative for Bangladesh, symbolizing the triumph of justice over oppression, unity over division, and hope over despair. Its principles of democracy, secularism, and human dignity continue to resonate in the national consciousness, even as the country grapples with the ongoing challenges of preserving this hard-won legacy. Authors and scholars termed this war as the war of independence of Bengali nation—political emancipation and economic freedom that started since the creation of Pakistan state.

## **2024 Political Movement:**

The 2024 political movement against the Sheikh Hasina government in Bangladesh marked one of the most intense waves of public dissent in recent history, rooted in deepening political, economic, and civic grievances. What began as a student-led quota reform movement quickly escalated into a nationwide uprising, fueled by government mismanagement and mishandling of the protests. The movement's momentum created space for multiple actors—both national and international—to leverage the unrest to challenge and destabilize the regime. Although the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) initially refrained from directly supporting the agitation, it sought to capitalize on the political crisis, while Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing, Shibir, played a commanding role in mobilizing students and ordinary citizens. At its core, the movement demanded the government's resignation, the installation of a neutral caretaker administration to guarantee free and fair elections, and immediate measures to address skyrocketing inflation, widespread unemployment, and entrenched corruption.

The protests were also an expression of growing frustration with what critics describe as authoritarian tendencies—ranging from the suppression of dissent and curbs on press freedom to the use of judicial and security apparatuses to sideline political opponents. The state’s response was characterized by arrests, allegations of excessive force, and internet blackouts, which drew sharp criticism from international human rights organizations. Economically, surging prices of essential goods and energy shortages further eroded public trust, while politically, the lack of a level playing field deepened polarization across the nation. The 2024 movement, therefore, was more than a response to immediate grievances; it reflected broader anxieties about democratic backsliding, accountability, and the erosion of participatory politics. How this crisis is resolved will profoundly shape Bangladesh’s trajectory—either paving the way for greater pluralism, inclusivity, and dialogue, or cementing a path toward further authoritarian consolidation.

### **The Claim: 2024 is a Continuation of 1971?**

Proponents of this view, primarily the opposition and its supporters, frame the 2024 movement through the same ideological lens as the 1971 Liberation War. Their argument rests on these key points: The Same Foundational Struggle: They argue that both movements are fundamentally about the same principle: the fight for democracy, self-determination, and the people’s right to choose their own government. They claim that the 1971 war was fought to escape the authoritarian rule of West Pakistan, and the 2024 movement is a struggle to escape an authoritarian system

that has developed within Bangladesh itself. The Same Spirit of Resistance: They draw a parallel between the spirit of the Bengali people in 1971 who rose up against an oppressive military regime and the spirit of the people in 2024 protesting against what they see as an oppressive, unelected government. The Same Adversarial Tactics: The opposition draws direct comparisons between the tactics of the Pakistani army in 1971 and the current government's actions, alleging the use of: State-Sponsored Violence: Citing alleged enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and police brutality; Suppression of Speech: Highlighting the control of media and censorship of dissent; Denial of Democratic Rights: Equating the Pakistani regime's refusal to hand over power after the 1970 election to the current government's conduct in the 2014 and 2018 elections, which major opposition parties boycotted or alleged were rigged. Ideological Betrayal: A core argument is that the current government, led by the party of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (the leader of 1971), has betrayed the core principles of the Liberation War: secularism, democracy, and social justice. Therefore, the 2024 movement is framed as an effort to "reclaim the spirit of 1971. All these narrative have no philosophical and legal ground. Their supporter just resemblance with the past historical events of Bangladesh.

## **The Counter-Argument: Critical Differences**

The assertion that the 2024 anti-government movement in Bangladesh is a direct continuation of the 1971 Liberation War is a powerful political narrative but lacks grounding in philosophical and legal reality. Philosophically, the 1971 war

was an existential struggle for sovereignty and the creation of a new state, rooted in the rejection of the Two-Nation Theory and the assertion of a secular, linguistic Bengali identity against a foreign occupier (Pakistan). It was a unified national movement driven by the pursuit of self-determination and foundational principles like democracy and secularism, as reflected in the historic 1971 proclamation of independence. In contrast, the 2024 movement is an internal political contest within the established state of Bangladesh, focused on regime change, electoral fairness, and governance reforms. It operates within the domestic constitutional framework and does not seek secession or invoke a new national identity but rather demands the fulfillment of the existing state's democratic promises (Ahmed, 2023; BBC, 2024).

Legally, the 1971 war was justified under international law through the right to self-determination, recognized by the United Nations Charter, and was precipitated by genocide and crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Pakistani military—a fact documented by international bodies like the International Commission of Jurists (1972) and witnesses such as Archer Blood (1971). The conflict resulted in the creation of a sovereign state. The 2024 movement, however, derives its legitimacy from domestic constitutional law, including the rights to assembly, expression, and electoral integrity under the Bangladesh Constitution. Its grievances—such as alleged electoral manipulation and suppression of dissent—are matters of internal governance and do not invoke international legal doctrines like secession or external self-determination (HRW, 2024; *The Daily Star*, 2024). Thus, there is no point to compare with the 1971 liberation war.

While the 2024 movement rhetorically invokes the “spirit of 1971” to claim moral high ground and mobilize support, the two events are fundamentally distinct: one was a war of independence against a foreign power, and the other is a political movement of some sections of people for democratic accountability within a sovereign nation and capture political power. After the removal of Sheikh Hasina, it has been proved that all the positions have been captured by the Jamat and BNP people without following any legal ground. It thus proved that they had the intention to capture political power and resources. The conflation of the two serves as a persuasive tool for opposition groups but overlooks the historical, philosophical, and legal chasm between them.

However, **philosophically and legally, the two movements are categorically different.** 1971 was an existential, anti-colonial war that created a state. 2024 is an internal, political struggle to determine who governs that state and how. Conflating the two, while rhetorically effective, overlooks their fundamentally distinct natures, goals, and places in the history and legal trajectory of Bangladesh. They argue the two events are fundamentally different in nature, context, and objective.

Feature	1971 Liberation War	2024 Anti-Government Movement
Nature & Goal	An armed struggle for independence and the creation of a sovereign state against a foreign occupying army.	A political movement within an existing sovereign state aiming for regime change and democratic reforms.

Feature	1971 Liberation War	2024 Anti-Government Movement
Adversary	The state of Pakistan and its military, a clearly defined foreign enemy.	The incumbent government of Bangladesh, a domestic political opponent.
Legal & Moral Basis	A fight for the right to self-determination, a fundamental principle of international law, in response to genocide and crimes against humanity.	A contest over electoral governance and political power within the constitutional framework of Bangladesh.
Unifying Identity	Unquestionably unified the Bengali populace (across most religions and classes) against a common foreign foe. Unity was absolute.	Deeply politically divisive. It is supported by one political bloc and opposed by another. There is no unified national consensus.
International Context	Fought during the Cold War; India provided direct military intervention and support; global opinion was largely sympathetic.	Occurs in a complex geopolitical context; international calls are primarily for dialogue and peaceful elections, not for supporting a secessionist movement.
Outcome Sought	Secession and the creation of a new nation (Bangladesh).	Reform of the existing nation (election integrity, democratic institutions, economic policy).

## Conclusion: A Powerful Narrative vs. Historical Reality

The claim that the 2024 movement is a continuation of 1971 is less a historical truth than a calculated political narrative. It serves as a powerful framing device for the opposition, allowing them to cloak their struggle in the sacred symbolism of the Liberation War—the nation’s most unifying founding myth. This rhetoric stirs deep emotional resonance and projects a

sense of moral legitimacy. Yet, historically and legally, the two events remain fundamentally distinct. The 1971 Liberation War was an anti-colonial secessionist struggle against a foreign oppressor. By contrast, the 2024 movement is an internal political contest within a sovereign state, centered on questions of power, governance, and democratic accountability. This raises a central contradiction: how can a movement claim to embody the spirit of 1971 when it is led by forces that once opposed Bangladesh's very existence? The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)'s longstanding alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami—a party directly complicit in atrocities during 1971, with several of its leaders convicted of war crimes—is not a minor political footnote but a profound moral paradox. To equate this coalition-led agitation with the Liberation War is, in essence, to distort history.

For the generation that sacrificed everything for independence, today's unrest is not a continuation of their struggle but a betrayal of it. The very elements that once collaborated with occupying forces now seek to destabilize the sovereign state built through blood and sacrifice. As one freedom fighter defiantly remarked: "We fought against the Pakistani army and their Razakar collaborators. Now, the heirs of those Razakars torch the very nation we created. This is not politics—it is an assault on our independence itself." Far from being a forward march toward democracy, the movement risks reopening old wounds and reviving ideologies that the Mukti Bahini fought to eradicate. It underscores the enduring challenge of protecting the legacy of 1971 against those who would exploit it for power while undermining the sovereignty it delivered.

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# **Assault on Bangladesh's Religious, Cultural, and Historical Heritage in Yunus's First Year**

After the fall of the Awami League government of Bangladesh on 5 August 2025, the country has been facing multiple crises across its whole premises with the emerging of the radicalist political powers in Bangladesh led by Dr. Muhammad Yunus, leader of a so called student backed government. The long cherished heritage and culture of Bangladesh get great threat in every path from the period and caused many difficulties. The period from August 2024 to August 2025 has been marked by a significant and concerning trend of demolitions and attacks on cultural and historical properties in Bangladesh. This destruction has been driven by a combination of political upheaval, communal sentiment, and a lack of effective legal enforcement. In the wake of recent political changes in Bangladesh, there has been a concerning surge in attacks on Sufi shrines, known as mazars or dargahs and heritage sites. These attacks, which include vandalism, arson, and looting, have been widely reported since August 2024.

## Major Incidents and Trends

Following the political unrest in August 2024, there was a widespread campaign of vandalism and demolition targeting around 1,500 sculptures, murals, and memorials across the country. 1,492 sculptures, relief sculptures (figures curved on a wall using ceramic or terracotta), murals and memorials being vandalized, set on fire and uprooted in 59 districts between 5 to 14 August. Most of the destruction and ignition occurrences happened on 5, 6 and 7 August. A total of 1,492 sculptures, relief sculptures, murals and memorials including 273 in Dhaka division, 204 in Chattogram division, 166 in Rajshahi division, 479 in Khulna division, 100 in Barishal division, 129 in Rangpur division, 49 in Sylhet division and 92 in Mymensingh division have destroyed, evacuated and blazed. A significant number of these were related to the Father of the Nation's Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Liberation War, but other cultural icons were also affected, including the statue of 'Venus' at Sashi Lodge, the statue of Lady Justice at the Supreme Court, and the Duronto statue of Shishu Academy. Mohammad Nasiruddin Memorial Bhaban in Old Dhaka, a historic residence that was partially demolished. This was seen as a politically and ideologically motivated effort to erase certain aspects of national history.

The demolition of Dhanmondi 32, historical house of Bangabandhu and Liberation War Museum One of the most prominent incidents was the partial demolition of Bangladesh. The miscreants set fire on Liberation War Museum of Agargaon and caused great loss. Apart these they set fire on the Independence Museum of Shurawardy Uddyan and looted

the historical valuables. Across the country the miscreants demolish Mujibnagar independence artifacts in Meherpur district, Bangabandhu's murals and so on.

## **Attack on Mazar and Shrines**

Sufism has a deep and profound history in Bangladesh, playing a central role in the spread of Islam and shaping the region's unique cultural and religious identity. The history of Sufism in Bengal can be traced back over a thousand years, and it remains a vital part of the country's social fabric today. Sufi saints and preachers began arriving in Bengal well before the establishment of formal Muslim rule. The first wave of Sufis came from Central Asia, Arabia, Iraq, and Iran, bringing with them a mystical and compassionate interpretation of Islam which has great influences to the people of Bangladesh and has hundreds of Sufi shrines and mazars throughout the country. The Sufis' message of love, tolerance, and equality resonated deeply with the local population, many of whom were marginalized under the existing social hierarchies. Their teachings often incorporated elements of local traditions, creating a syncretic form of Islam that was distinct from the more rigid legalism. This is a key reason why Sufism is so central to Bengali Islam. The Sufis established centers of worship and community called *khanqahs* and *dargahs*, which served as both spiritual centers and social hubs. The tombs of these saints, known as mazars, became pilgrimage sites and have remained important cultural landmarks for centuries.

Early pioneers include figures like Shah Sultan Balkhi in Bogra, Shah Sultan Rumi in Mymensingh, and Shah Makhдум Ruposh in Rajshahi, Hazrat Shahjalal in Sylhet,

Shah Paran and Bayezid Bostami in Chattogram, Shah Ali in Dhaka were often credited with miraculous powers and a deep understanding of local culture, which helped them connect with the populace that helped the Muslims political agencies to establish permanent rule in Bengal. With fostering the heritage Islam raised its flagship during the span from its inception and we are now in the spot. But after the turmoil changes occurred in 2024 in the country and the rise of the radical extremist group the syncretistic nature of Bangladesh has been endangered due to attacked on the several shrines and mazars in Bangladesh since August 2024 and have major threat to its populace. According to police report from January 2025, for example, documented 44 incidents of violence on 40 shrines since 4 August 2024. A Sufi organization named ‘Global Sufi Organization’ has claimed a higher number of attacks, stating that as many as 80 shrines have been targeted and attacked by the miscreants.

Due to political and ideological motivations many of these attacks have been done. Following the ouster of the previous government, religious hardliners have been emboldened, and some have targeted Sufi shrines, which they often view as promoting ‘un-Islamic’ practices due to their use of music (qawwali), offerings, and the veneration of saints. The attacks have affected a wide range of shrines, including both centuries-old and more recent ones. Specific incidents reported include; Hazrat Shah Paran Mazar Sharif in Sylhet, Buchai Pagla Mazar in Dhamrai, Dhaka, the shrine of Hazrat Syed Kalu Shah in Mymensingh, Shah Sufi Fasih Paglar Mazar of Gazipur was reportedly attacked and its valuables looted.

It was reported that miscreants carried out attacks at on the shrines including Goribshah Babar Mazar in Jashore, Fakir Charu Mizi Shah (R) in Noakhali, Baro Awlia in Chattogram, Dargah Mazar at Parulia of Palash in Narsingdi, Khazababa Shahsufi Abul Hasan Chisti Rawja sharif at Tarerpukur in Khulna, Shah Sufi Hazrat Abdul Quayum (R) in Sylhet, Noor Isar Darbar Sharif at Goripur in Mymensingh, Tetua Rawshan Shah Mazar, Goni Shah Mazar, Subedar Abdur Rahim Mazar, Abdul Jalil Mazar, Chandpur Darbar Sharif, Malek Shah Darbar in Cumilla, and Abul Kashem Hiajuri Mazar in Cumilla, Borhanuddin Biran Shah at Tejgaon Colony Bazar in Dhaka, Golap Shah Fijuddin Paglar Bari at Raipur in Narsingdi, Haider Ali Shah at Hazaribagh in Dhaka, Oli Pagla Mazar at Kazipur in Sirajganj, Syed Reza Sarwar Rajaji Chisty Mazar at Rupganj, Bhabbe Jannat Dewan Bagi in Narayanganj, Aynal Shah Mazar at Sonargaon in Narayanganj, Bibi Sokhinar Mazar in Thakurgaon, Altaf Shadhu Mazar at Shialkol in Sirajganj town, Bibi Sakhinar Mazar in Thakurgaon, Wasia Darbar Sharif in Manikgnaj, Al Jahangir Mazar at Daluar Char of Polash in Narsingdi, Akkel Ali Shah Mazar in Narsingdi, Koppa Paglar Mazar at Parulia of Polash in Narsingdi, and Hanif Shah Mazar at Monohardi in Narsingdi and Ashed Paglar Mazar in Shariatpur are among the shrines attacked. Threats and fears continuously exist to the mentioned Sufi shrines in Bangladesh though some of the organizations (Ganatantrik Bangladesh) and people protested on the vandalism and miscreant's activity already occurred.

Prof Muhammad Yunus, chief adviser of the interim government, on Saturday, announced strict legal action

against any hate speech and attacks on religious and cultural places and Sufi shrines. The interim government has stated that it has a ‘zero-tolerance policy’ towards these attacks and advisor Mahfuz Alam also stated government position regarding in favor of existing Sufi shrine in Bangladesh. Police have been ordered to take stringent action, and reports indicate that legal actions, including the filing of cases and the arrest of suspects, have been taken in many of the incidents and arrested 23 miscreants in those attack. The government has also initiated measures like arranging peace meetings and community policing efforts to address the issue locally but Attacks on shrines continue amid protests. Another attack was happened by the Towhidi Janata (Monotheistic Mass; those people who are engaged in protests, demonstrations, and political violences, centered around religious issues at various times in Bangladesh.) has set fire to a shrine after vandalising at the “Ismail Shah Baba” mazar in Barguna’s Amtali Upazila. Rahim Shah Baba Bhandari Mazar, Dinajpur was set fire by the organization of ‘Siratul Mustakim’ on 1 March 2025.

The political transition in August 2024 created a vacuum that religious hardliners have exploited to challenge and attack this deeply rooted cultural heritage. The crisis is not just a series of isolated incidents but a systemic threat to Sufi identity and practices. The attacks have been a significant blow to the country’s syncretic cultural heritage, where Sufi traditions have historically coexisted with other religious practices. These incidents not only damage historical sites but also threaten the safety and freedom of worship for devotees who follow Sufi traditions. Some shrines have been

forced to cancel annual events or traditional practices, such as devotional music programs, due to threats from extremist groups. The attacks have created an atmosphere of fear that has led to the cancellation or modification of traditional Sufi and folk festivals. Some shrines have been forced to cease their devotional music programs (qawwali) under duress. This has a scary effect on cultural expression and erodes a key component of Bangladesh's national identity. In summary, while cultural properties have been a cornerstone of Bangladesh's pluralistic identity for centuries, it is now facing a severe crisis. The recent attacks on historical sites, cultural properties and shrines, and the rise of religious hardliners pose a direct threat to the safety of devotees and the preservation of a unique and cherished part of the country's cultural heritage.

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# Crushed Voices: Inside Bangladesh’s Crackdown on the Media

Since the ouster of Sheikh Hasina’s elected government on 5 August 2024, Bangladesh’s interim regime has launched an aggressive and unprecedented assault on press freedom. This report offers a comprehensive account of the systematic suppression of independent journalism, the hostile capture of media institutions, and the deployment of both legal and extrajudicial tools to eliminate dissent and manufacture public compliance.

Backed by the National Citizen Party (NCP) and aligned with radical Islamist factions, the unelected regime has pursued a deliberate strategy to delegitimize secular voices and shield itself from accountability. To date, over 434 journalists have been targeted with fabricated criminal charges—many of them accused of spurious offenses, including murder. At least 41 remain in prison, routinely denied bail. Vaguely worded and politically motivated allegations such as “inciting unrest,” “spreading misinformation,” or “engineering consent for the previous regime” have become standard instruments of repression.

News organizations have been subjected to mass dismissals, forced editorial overhauls, and ideological purges, with control shifting to individuals affiliated with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI). The judiciary—particularly the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT)—has been weaponized to enforce an unofficial blackout on any reporting perceived to favor the Awami League (AL) or its leadership. A recent amendment to the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) has further criminalized coverage of AL-related activities, equating political journalism with acts of terrorism.

Even the country’s leading media outlets, such as daily *Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star*, have faced intimidation—including mob-led protests, orchestrated Islamist provocations, and sustained psychological pressure—all enabled by the regime’s silent complicity. Notably, even previously neutral media platforms have not been spared, pointing to a broad and deliberate campaign to silence independent voices.

Civil society remains muzzled, and international condemnation has thus far failed to translate into meaningful diplomatic consequences. This report also explores the ideological underpinnings of the repression: the increasing Islamization of public discourse, efforts to erase the secular legacy of 1971, and the dismantling of democratic oversight.

It concludes with an urgent appeal to international stakeholders to demand the repeal of repressive legislation, the dismissal of politically motivated cases, and the restoration of press freedom. Left unchecked, this crackdown risks entrenching authoritarianism and driving Bangladesh further from its democratic aspirations.

## I. Introduction

The political landscape of Bangladesh has undergone a profound transformation since the fall of the elected AL government on 5 August 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 and political ideologies have 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 International Crimes Tribunal (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 intersection 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**

**Journalists Accused in Fabricated Cases:** Since the interim government took control in August 2024, at least 434 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 41 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, half cooked propaganda reports, 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 5 August 2024, there has been a sharp escalation in physical violence against journalists in Bangladesh. At least 118 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 six 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 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. Allegations of corruption are frequently brought by the Anti-Corruption Commission as a means of intimidation.

**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 couple of 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. Over a thousand journalists across the country, including in Dhaka, have been dismissed from their jobs. These dismissals were neither followed due process nor justified by 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 fed with regime-approved narratives.

#### **D. From Newsroom to Courtroom: 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 Anti-Terrorism Act

(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 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

(Based on currently available data)

Form of Harassment	Count
Journalists killed-	10 (6 killed after 5 August, 2024)
Physical assaults-	118+
Arbitrary arrests-	42
Accused in fabricated cases=	434
Media personnel dismissed (Dhaka only)-	190+
BTV employees removed-	80+
Media personnel dismissed (across the country)-	1100+
Press accreditation card cancelled-	168
Expelled from press clubs nationwide-	101
ACC bank account inquiries-	73+
Accounts frozen-	100+
Travel restrictions-	300+
Barred from TV talk shows-	62+

Form of Harassment	Count
Barred from publishing columns-	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 expose 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

**Coercion and Violence Under the Interim Regime:** Following the ouster of Sheikh Hasina on 5 August 2024, 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. Far from being random these attacks are 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:** The country’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.

**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 daily *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 *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 daily *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 criminalization 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. 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. International Community Should Act**

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, the international community should take urgent, coordinated actions. Their voice and leverage are critical in holding this regime accountable and restoring democratic space.

International actors—especially the UN, EU, Commonwealth, and key bilateral partners—should exert pressure on 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.

There should be a strong international condemnation voiced and diplomatic engagements initiated demanding 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.

Global press freedom groups, UN Special Rapporteurs, and human rights defenders should 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.

Multilateral bodies and donor nations should 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.

International NGOs, watchdogs, and media houses should 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.

International cultural organizations, donor networks, and diaspora communities should 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. 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.

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.

Key regional actors—particularly India, the UK, and the US—should 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 5 August 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.

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# Extremist Resurgence under Interim Government

## Executive Summary

Bangladesh’s progress in fighting terrorism over the last two decades is now in serious danger under the interim government led by Dr. Muhammad Yunus. While government leaders claim there is “no terrorism” in the country, this view is contradicted by credible intelligence reports, police records, and warnings from foreign diplomats. The government’s actions—such as releasing convicted extremists, not opposing bail for dangerous individuals, and weakening key counterterrorism agencies—have created an environment where extremist groups can grow again.

In recent months, militants have joined mainstream Islamist political parties, rebuilt links with foreign terrorist networks, reopened training camps in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and started recruiting young people to fight abroad in Afghanistan and Pakistan. At the same time, the ability to fight terrorism has weakened because of poor coordination between agencies, the removal of skilled officers, and legal action taken against past security operations.

The risk is even greater because of the large number of missing guns, ammunition, and escaped high-risk prisoners from the 2024 unrest. Together, these factors—political protection for extremists, weaker security forces, and the spread of radical ideas—could push Bangladesh toward a situation similar to Afghanistan’s under religious rule. If urgent action is not taken now, future governments will have to deal with extremists firmly entrenched in politics, society, and even parts of the security forces, making the problem far more difficult to solve.

## **1. Methodology and Sources Caveat**

This article uses open sources, media reports, expert interviews, and limited confidential inputs. Information was cross-checked where possible, but some details could not be fully verified due to restricted reporting environments. Findings reflect the situation at the time of writing and may change as new information emerges. The inclusion of unverified elements is intended to highlight emerging risks rather than present definitive conclusions. Readers are advised to interpret the findings with awareness of these limitations.

## **2. Introduction**

Bangladesh’s fight against terrorism has been long and difficult, with moments of progress followed by dangerous setbacks. In the early 2000s, during the BNP–Jamaat government, groups like Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B) and Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) operated freely, often with political protection. This weakened law enforcement and

allowed extremist networks to grow unchecked.

When the Awami League returned to power in 2009, it adopted a zero-tolerance approach to terrorism and put strong pressure on these groups. The 2016 Holey Artisan Bakery attack—carried out by ISIS-linked Neo-JMB and killing 22 people, including 17 foreigners—was a turning point. The government launched a nationwide crackdown, arrested or killed many militants, dismantled their networks, and improved overall security. From 2017 onward, terrorist attacks in Bangladesh became very rare.

However, after the AL was removed in August 2024, many of these gains were lost. The interim government not only denied the presence of militancy but also took steps that helped extremists regain strength—such as releasing convicted militants, weakening dedicated counterterrorism units, and reducing cooperation between security agencies.

This report compares the current situation with the BNP–Jamaat era from 2001 to 2006. It shows how denial by the government, direct political support for extremists, and weakened institutions are allowing militant groups to rebuild quietly. The findings underline the urgent need for a long-term, coordinated, and politically independent counterterrorism strategy to stop Bangladesh from sliding toward extremist control.

### **3. Historical Context**

#### **3.1 The BNP–Jamaat Era (2001–2006)**

During the BNP–Jamaat coalition government, extremist groups such as HuJI-B and JMB grew stronger with both

open and hidden political support. Law enforcement agencies were often pressured by political leaders not to take action, and senior BNP figures were reported to have intervened to secure the release of arrested militants. This permissive environment allowed extremists to build strong networks, recruit members, and run training camps without fear of being stopped. As a result, Bangladesh saw some of its worst terrorist attacks, including the grenade attack on an opposition rally led by Sheikh Hasina, the 2004 attack on former British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury by HuJI-B, countrywide coordinated bomb blasts, and suicide attacks targeting judges, courts, and police in 2005 carried out by JMB. From 2001 to 2005, numerous such incidents shook the country. These events also damaged Bangladesh’s reputation abroad. U.S. diplomatic cables, later published by WikiLeaks, confirmed that banned militant groups enjoyed protection from top levels of government, further weakening Bangladesh’s counterterrorism credibility.

### **3.2 AL’s Counterterrorism Drive (2009–August 2024)**

When the AL returned to power in 2009, it declared a “zero tolerance” policy against terrorism, passed new anti-terrorism laws and rules, and launched a long-term campaign to dismantle extremist networks built during the BNP–Jamaat period. A major turning point came on July 1, 2016, when ISIS-linked terrorists attacked the Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka, killing 20 hostages—most of them foreigners. This tragedy led to the creation of specialized counterterrorism units such as the

Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit and later the Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU). The Rapid Action Battalion's (RAB) counterterrorism wing was strengthened, and intelligence capabilities were expanded in agencies like the Counter Terrorism Intelligence Bureau (CTIB) of the Director General Forces Intelligence (DGFI), the Special Branch's (SB) Counterterrorism Wing, and the National Security Intelligence's (NSI) Counterterrorism Unit. The government also established dedicated anti-terrorism tribunals to speed up the prosecution of terrorism-related cases. A nationwide crackdown followed, involving the police, RAB, and intelligence agencies. Over the next several years, many militants were killed in armed confrontations, hundreds were arrested, and extremist cells were dismantled. These measures forced radical groups into hiding and sharply reduced their ability to operate.

### **3.3 The Interim Government Shift (Post–August 2024)**

When the AL was removed from power in August 2024, an interim government led by Dr. Muhammad Yunus took over and quickly moved away from the strict counterterrorism approach of the previous government. Despite clear evidence of ongoing extremist propaganda, recruitment, training, and foreign links, the interim leadership publicly claimed there was no terrorism in Bangladesh. They dismissed even those attacks claimed in publications by ISIS and Al-Qaeda affiliates—such as *Dabiq*, *Rumiyah*, *Al-Balagh*, and *Ansar Media*—insisting these were staged events under the AL government

to score political points. Many convicted extremists were released on bail without opposition from state prosecutors. Specialized counterterrorism agencies lost their coordination and leadership as experienced officers were removed, and some were even arrested or forced to flee the country to avoid attacks by militants or harassment by government entities. Political space for extremist speech and activity widened, making the environment look alarmingly similar to the early 2000s under BNP–Jamaat rule. The interim government claimed that the absence of attacks in the past year proved there were no active terrorists. This argument ignored—or deliberately concealed—the fact that terrorist attacks are usually the final stage in a cycle that begins with radicalization, moves through extremism, recruitment, training, and preparation. These earlier stages are already underway, often in ways that are widely known and visible.

## **4. Key Emerging Threats**

### **4.1 Mainstreaming of Extremists**

Under the interim government, people and groups with a history of militant activity are being quietly accepted into mainstream Islamic political parties and networks. For example, the radical group Hefazat-e-Islam (HeI) openly promotes extremist ideas and has welcomed convicted terrorists like Mufti Jasim Uddin Rahmani and Maolana Abu Taher. Many members of the pro-Al-Qaeda (AQ) group Ansar-al-Islam (AAI), arrested multiple times since its creation in 2024, are now active again. Former Afghan war fighters who founded HuJI-B and were convicted are also being brought into political parties such as Bangladesh

Nationalist Party (BNP), Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), and HeI. This is similar to the 2008 attempt to rebrand the banned HuJI-B as the “Islamic Democratic Party” to gain political legitimacy. That effort failed due to strong domestic and international opposition. Today, the political climate is far more open to such integration, giving extremists more legitimacy and influence.

#### **4.2 Links to Foreign Terror Groups**

Bangladeshi extremist groups have long maintained foreign links, starting with HuJI-B, JMB, Neo-JMB, AAI, and Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT), which were connected to Al-Qaeda, AQIS, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), and ISIS. Now, some groups are actively building stronger ties with Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (IS-KP). These ties bring money, weapons, training, and ideological guidance from abroad, and create risks of joint operations that could destabilize Bangladesh as well as neighbouring India and Myanmar. The recent arrest of 36 Bangladeshi nationals in Malaysia for suspected links to ISIS and its networks in Bangladesh shows the seriousness of this threat. The longer these connections remain, the harder they will be to dismantle.

#### **4.3 Militant Training in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)**

The CHT has once again become a hub for militant activity. Extremist groups have set up training camps in this sensitive area, often working with Rohingya armed groups along the

Bangladesh–Myanmar border. In 2022–2023, security forces carried out major counterterrorism operations that dismantled the alliance between the Kuki Chin National Liberation Front (KNLF) and the pro-AQIS group Jamaat-ul-Ansar-Fil-Hindal-Sharqiya (JAFHS), arresting top leaders and seizing weapons. However, after August 2024, many of those arrested were released. The CHT’s remote terrain offers cover and escape routes across the border, making it difficult for security forces to act. If these camps are allowed to stay, the area could become a long-term militant base, threatening regional stability.

#### **4.4 Rohingya Terrorist Networks in Bandarban and Cox’s Bazar**

Bangladesh hosts over 1.2 million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar in 33 camps in Cox’s Bazar and one camp on the remote island of Bhashan Char in Noakhali. Within these camps, two militant groups—the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) and the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA)—are active again. Earlier, heavy security operations had forced them into deep forest areas and sharply limited their movements. Now, they have returned to the camps, where they are recruiting young Rohingya, training fighters, and collecting weapons and funds. Much of their funding reportedly comes from Pakistan’s ISI and some NGOs based in Pakistan and Turkey.

#### **4.5 Recruitment of Foreign Fighters**

There are increasing reports of young Bangladeshis travelling to the Afghanistan–Pakistan border to fight alongside the

TTP against Pakistani forces. This mirrors the Afghan jihad of the 1980s, when returning fighters formed militant groups in Bangladesh. Similarly, in recent years, Bangladeshis have gone to Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, while members of the Bangladeshi diaspora in countries like Canada, the USA, the UK, Australia, and Japan have played important roles in funding and supporting groups such as JMB, Neo-JMB, AAI, and HuT. This new wave of fighters risks creating another generation of battle-hardened extremists who could return as trainers, recruiters, and leaders for future militant operations.

#### **4.6 Online Propaganda and Spread of Extremist Messages**

Extremist groups in Bangladesh are increasingly using social media, messaging apps, and online platforms to spread radical ideas, recruit new members, and coordinate activities. Encrypted apps like Telegram, Threema, and Signal are being used alongside mainstream platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) to reach a wider audience. Pro-ISIS, pro-AQIS, and pro-TTP channels share videos, speeches, magazines, and infographics that glorify attacks, promote extremist ideology, and issue calls for action. Many of these messages are targeted at young people, using religious narratives, political grievances, and global Muslim solidarity themes to build support. Since August 2024, monitoring and takedown efforts by law enforcement have weakened due to reduced coordination and political will, giving extremists more space to operate

online. If left unchecked, these online campaigns could significantly speed up the radicalization process, turning virtual followers into real-world operatives.

## **5. Institutional Weakening**

### **5.1 Breakdown of Coordination**

The strong cooperation that once existed between counterterrorism agencies—such as CTTC, ATU, CTIB, NSI, SB, Police Head Quarters (PHQ), and Criminal Investigation Department (CID)—has been dismantled. Many skilled intelligence officers have been removed from these units and replaced with inexperienced staff. Human sources (HUMINT) that took years to build have been lost, breaking valuable channels of early warning. Since counterterrorism is no longer a government priority, the new officers are less motivated to gather intelligence or share information. Without a central system for intelligence sharing, each agency works on its own, leading to delays, duplication, and a greater risk of mistakes or leaks. In the past, joint task forces could detect and neutralize threats in days, but now potential plots can remain unnoticed for weeks or even months, giving extremists more time to prepare. This lack of coordination is not only a tactical failure but also a strategic gift to militant networks.

### **5.2 Targeting of Experienced Officers**

Many veteran counterterrorism officers with advanced training have been dismissed, suspended, or charged under false accusations. This includes personnel from PHQ,

RAB, CTTC, and CTIB. Some are in prison, others are in hiding, and some have fled the country to avoid arrest and harassment. These officers had valuable knowledge and trusted networks built over decades, including direct links to informants and undercover operatives. Their removal has left major leadership gaps that the inexperienced replacements cannot fill quickly, creating weaknesses militants can take advantage of. The fear of suffering the same fate now discourages current officers from taking bold actions against high-value targets. As a result, militant groups can operate more openly, knowing the state's most capable officers are sidelined or silenced.

### **5.3 Legal and Political Pressure on Security Forces**

Ongoing legal cases, including some at the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT), along with domestic charges, have lowered morale among security personnel. The government's public denial of terrorism further complicates their work by creating confusion over whether to act against extremist activity at all. While holding people accountable is important, portraying legitimate past counterterrorism operations as crimes damages the confidence of frontline officers. This fear of legal action makes them hesitant to act decisively, which can encourage militants to test the limits of state response. Officers now weigh the personal risks of action against their duty to protect the public, and too often, inaction wins. In this environment, extremists are emboldened to plan, recruit, and train with less fear of state disruption.

## **5.4 Loss of Operational Capability**

Many counterterrorism units have been reduced to little more than symbolic bodies. They lack resources, proper training for newly appointed staff, and clear guidance from top leaders. Without strong leadership or political support, these units now focus more on routine police work instead of specialized anti-terrorism missions. The absence of operational drills, scenario planning, and intelligence-led raids has further weakened readiness. Over time, this loss of capability reduces the state's ability to deter or respond to militant threats. If this trend continues, even a small coordinated attack could overwhelm current counterterrorism capacity, sending a dangerous signal to both domestic and foreign militant groups.

## **6. Security Risks from Looted Arms and Escaped Inmates**

### **6.1 Missing Firearms and Ammunition**

During the violent unrest of 2024, 1,419 firearms and over 263,000 rounds of ammunition were stolen from police stations and prisons. These weapons have still not been recovered and could easily end up in the hands of militants or dangerous criminals. If used in planned attacks, such firepower could cause large-scale casualties and overwhelm security forces. The weapons could also be sold or traded on the black market, spreading them across multiple extremist or criminal networks. This not only makes recovery harder but also increases the risk of cross-border trafficking. The longer these weapons stay in circulation, the more likely they will be used in organized attacks on security forces, political leaders, or public gatherings.

## **6.2 Mass Prison Escapes**

During the same unrest, 2,200 prisoners escaped from custody. While many have been caught, about 700 are still missing—including 70 high-risk militants and notorious criminals. These fugitives are not ordinary offenders; many have experience in planning or carrying out violent operations. Once free, they can reconnect with extremist groups or criminal syndicates that value their skills and contacts. Some may even take leadership roles in planning new attacks, using their knowledge of law enforcement tactics to avoid capture. Their freedom keeps alive the possibility of renewed violence at short notice. Each day they remain at large increases the likelihood that they will regroup, rearm, and rebuild their operational networks.

## **6.3 Heightened Threat Potential**

The mix of missing weapons and escaped militants is a dangerous combination. Together, they create perfect conditions for both small-scale and large-scale violent incidents. A single coordinated plan could lead to mass casualties or targeted assassinations. This situation also creates a psychological impact, making the public feel unsafe and damaging trust in state security. Criminal groups may become more confident, knowing the state has not recovered either the weapons or the high-risk fugitives. Without urgent action to track down both the arms and the escapees, national security could quickly deteriorate and destabilize entire regions. If left unchecked, this convergence of threats

could embolden extremist elements to operate more openly and expand their influence.

## **7. Strategic Implications**

### **7.1 Domestic Impact**

Allowing extremists to gain legitimacy is a serious threat to Bangladesh's secular traditions. If these groups grow stronger, they can influence laws, policies, and institutions to reflect their radical beliefs. This will push moderate voices out of politics and make it harder to have open and balanced discussions in the country. Over time, the national conversation could become more aggressive and intolerant toward diversity. Such changes would not only divide society but could also create more tension between different religious and cultural groups. If this trend continues, the very character of the Bangladeshi state could change from being inclusive and pluralistic to being dominated by one narrow ideology. This transformation would also make it much harder to reverse extremist influence once it becomes embedded in state structures.

### **7.2 Regional Consequences**

If Bangladesh starts moving toward a theocratic style of governance, the effects will not stop at its borders. Extremist networks in the region will feel encouraged, and counterterrorism cooperation between South Asian countries could break down. This could lead to more cross-border militant activity, with fighters, weapons, and propaganda moving freely across countries. Neighboring nations like India and Myanmar may face new waves of infiltration and radical influence. Such instability could trigger border

tensions, mistrust, and even military build-ups. The resulting insecurity would harm trade, people-to-people ties, and the overall stability of South Asia. In the worst case, the region could see a cycle of retaliatory actions and escalating conflict.

### **7.3 International Concerns**

Many Western countries are already worried that Bangladesh is becoming a safe place for extremist activities. If this continues, it could damage Bangladesh's global reputation and make other nations hesitant to engage economically or politically. Foreign investors may pull back, fearing instability, while governments might issue stricter travel warnings. These moves could slow down tourism, foreign aid, and economic growth. The country might also face more pressure in international forums, losing influence in trade and security negotiations. Over time, this could isolate Bangladesh on the world stage and weaken its ability to shape its own future in global affairs. This isolation could also make the country more dependent on a narrow set of allies, limiting its strategic options.

## **8. Threat Forecast and Scenarios**

### **8.1 Best-Case Scenario**

With quick and well-planned action, the government corrects earlier mistakes, brings back experienced counterterrorism officers, and restores cooperation between security agencies. This helps stop extremist groups from growing stronger, disrupts their recruitment efforts, and weakens their networks before they can fully recover. Attacks may still

happen, but they remain rare, small in scale, and are quickly stopped. International partners begin to trust Bangladesh's counterterrorism efforts again, which leads to better security cooperation and more economic opportunities. This scenario would also rebuild public confidence in state institutions and reduce fear among communities.

## **8.2 Most Likely Scenario**

If no strong policy changes are made, extremist groups will continue to slowly grow inside political, social, and state systems. They will spread their ideology, recruit members, and build links with foreign groups without triggering major violence in the short term. From time to time, they may carry out small but symbolic attacks to show they are still active, while focusing mainly on strengthening their long-term position. Over the years, extremist ideas could become part of normal political discussion, making it much harder for any government to remove them without paying a high political price. This slow but steady rise could quietly change the country's political culture before many even realize it.

## **8.3 Worst-Case Scenario**

Militant groups fully join mainstream politics and gain legal recognition while keeping their secret operational networks. Under political protection, they expand training, recruitment, and cooperation with foreign extremist organizations, leading to a major increase in violence. The instability could spread across borders, especially into India and Myanmar, forcing those countries to increase their military presence along the border. A large, deadly attack on civilians, foreign nationals, or critical infrastructure could occur, forcing the government

to respond in panic rather than with careful planning. In this scenario, both national security and Bangladesh's global reputation could suffer lasting damage.

## **9. Policy and Strategic Recommendations**

### **9.1 Tactical Actions**

#### **9.1.1 Reinstate Experienced Counterterrorism Officers**

Experienced officers from CTTC, ATU, DGFI, NSI, and SB should be reinstated and allowed to operate without political pressure. Years of expertise, deep knowledge of militant networks, and trusted contacts inside and outside the country are held by these officers. Advanced international training has been received by many, which can be used to restore strong intelligence-sharing with global partners. Their return would signal that expertise is valued again, boosting morale across the security sector. Past intelligence collected by these officers would be preserved and used to guide current operations. Operational readiness would be strengthened immediately, and public confidence in the country's counterterrorism capacity would be restored.

#### **9.1.2 Rebuild Inter-Agency Coordination**

The joint counterterrorism coordination system dismantled under the interim government should be reactivated, with secure channels for sharing intelligence to prevent leaks. A central command cell should be created to coordinate real-time operations across all agencies. Through this, wasted effort would be reduced, precision improved, and security gaps

closed. Faster and more united responses to emerging threats would be enabled. Resources could be pooled for high-risk operations, increasing efficiency. Accountability would also be improved, as no agency would be able to withhold critical intelligence without oversight.

### **9.1.3 Recover Looted Arms and Recapture High-Risk Fugitives**

Targeted operations should be launched by specialized teams to recover the 1,419 missing firearms, over 263,000 rounds of ammunition, and capture the 70 high-risk fugitives still at large. If these assets remain in circulation, militants and criminals would retain the means to carry out serious attacks. A sustained recovery plan would disrupt attack plots before they develop. Control over law and order would be visibly reasserted by the state. Public safety would improve as each weapon is recovered and each fugitive is caught. Valuable intelligence about wider militant networks would also be gained from captured fugitives.

### **9.1.4 Suspend Bail for Convicted Militants**

Bail approvals for individuals convicted of terrorism or linked to banned groups should be temporarily suspended until full security reviews are completed. The suspension should be applied in a legal and transparent manner to prevent allegations of political targeting. By keeping these individuals in custody, the risk of their reconnecting with militant networks or recruiting new members would be reduced. Opportunities

for planning attacks while free would be eliminated. Public confidence would be strengthened as it becomes clear that national security is prioritized over political considerations. Time would also be gained for dismantling their wider support systems.

## **9.2 Operational Initiatives**

### **9.2.1 Legal and Judicial Reforms**

Anti-terrorism laws should be amended so that political pressure cannot affect militant prosecutions. Witness protection programs should be strengthened to ensure safety for those testifying in terrorism cases. Special terrorism courts should be established to process dangerous cases quickly but fairly. This would prevent extremists from escaping justice through loopholes or political interference. Judges and prosecutors would be enabled to perform their duties without fear or bias. Public trust in the justice system would grow, making it harder for militants to operate openly.

### **9.2.2 Counter-Narrative and De-Radicalization Programs**

Community-based programs should be expanded to reach young people before extremist influence takes hold. Respected religious leaders, teachers, community elders, and survivors of terrorism should be engaged to counter extremist propaganda. These programs should be delivered in schools, mosques, and online platforms where radical messages often spread unchecked. Alternative viewpoints would be

offered, weakening the appeal of extremist ideologies. Skills, education, and opportunities would be provided to make militancy less attractive. Partnerships with NGOs, media, and social media platforms could further amplify positive narratives and reduce extremist influence over time.

### **9.2.3 Secure Border Regions and High-Risk Areas**

Specialized counterterrorism units should be deployed to the Chittagong Hill Tracts and other high-risk border areas to close militant training camps. Links between local extremists and Rohingya militant groups should be dismantled. Socio-economic development programs should be launched to give vulnerable communities alternatives to militancy. Intelligence-led patrols should target smuggling routes, recruitment hubs, and propaganda channels. Coordination with neighboring countries should be enhanced to block cross-border militant activities. Over time, increased stability and prosperity in these areas would reduce the chances of them becoming militant safe havens.

## **9.3 Strategic Posture**

### **9.3.1 Institutional Resilience Building**

Permanent counterterrorism agencies should be created with legal protection from political interference, along with their own budgets, staffing, and decision-making authority. These mandates should be enshrined in law to ensure they cannot be weakened by changes in government. This would guarantee continuous counterterrorism work regardless of political shifts. Skilled officers could be trained and retained, preventing

the loss of expertise. Quick, independent responses to threats would be enabled without political delay. International and public trust in Bangladesh's counterterrorism commitment would be strengthened.

### **9.3.2 International Cooperation and Intelligence Partnerships**

Closer work should be undertaken with regional partners such as India, Myanmar, and BIMSTEC, and global partners such as the U.S., EU, and INTERPOL. Intelligence should be shared on militant movements, funding channels, and training activities to disrupt threats before they spread. Joint exercises and officer exchange programs should be conducted regularly to build trust and improve cooperation. Counterterrorism operations would become faster, more accurate, and more coordinated. Extremists would find it harder to hide or cross borders undetected. Over time, global support systems for militancy could be significantly weakened.

### **9.3.3 Safeguarding Counterterrorism from Political Shifts**

Counterterrorism policy should be made part of a national security plan that remains in effect regardless of political leadership. Parliamentary committees with cross-party members should be created to oversee counterterrorism work and maintain continuity. This would prevent policy reversals or neglect due to political changes. Threat responses would remain consistent over time, reassuring both the public and international allies. Extremists would receive a clear message that political divisions will not weaken the fight against

them. Such depoliticization would make Bangladesh’s counterterrorism approach stronger and more stable in the long run.

## **10. Conclusion**

Over the past year, militant groups in Bangladesh have focused less on launching immediate attacks and more on quietly rebuilding their strength. This “consolidation phase” allows them to expand their recruitment networks, strengthen logistics, and secure funding—often without attracting much attention from the authorities. The longer they are allowed to grow in this way, the harder it will be to disrupt them in the future. One of the most concerning trends is how closely the government’s public statements now match the narratives used by extremist groups. By downplaying the threat of terrorism or echoing language that militants themselves use, state officials risk giving these groups a sense of legitimacy. This may reduce short-term violence, but it carries a much higher long-term risk—because it normalizes extremist ideas in politics and society. Over time, this can make extremist thinking seem like a reasonable part of public debate, further undermining secular and democratic values.

If no serious action is taken now, the next elected government will inherit a far more dangerous situation. Extremist networks could become deeply embedded in political parties, community organizations, and even parts of the security sector. Reversing that kind of influence will take years, cost significant resources, and require strong political will. To avoid this outcome, Bangladesh must act immediately.

That means restoring experienced counterterrorism officers, rebuilding cooperation between agencies, shutting down militant training and recruitment, and countering extremist propaganda both online and offline. It also means passing laws and building institutions that protect counterterrorism policy from political changes. The window for effective action is closing. Every month of inaction strengthens extremist networks, making future solutions more difficult and more costly. A united, non-political, and long-term approach is essential if Bangladesh is to protect its security, stability, and inclusive identity.

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# **Destruction of Judiciary, Academic & Journalistic Freedom, and Reign of Religious Extremist-Terrorists**

When Syed Refaat Ahmed took office as Chief Justice of Bangladesh on 11 August 2024, many hoped that his distinguished academic background and reformist image would signal a new era for the judiciary. The country, still reeling from the fall of the Awami League government just days earlier, stood at a political and constitutional crossroads. Amid demands for justice, accountability, and institutional integrity, the judiciary was poised to play a pivotal role in restoring public trust and protecting fundamental rights. Instead, Ahmed's tenure has been defined by a troubling silence in the face of targeted violence, legal double standards, and a chilling erosion of democratic safeguards.

This article will demonstrate how, under Chief Justice Ahmed's leadership, the Supreme Court has presided over an alarming slide into selective justice and institutional complicity. From mob assaults on sitting judges and lawyers to politically driven acquittals of powerful elites, the Ahmed court has failed to confront the worst excesses of the post-uprising

landscape. Even as journalists and academics face intimidation and reprisals, the judiciary has offered no meaningful refuge. This is not a story of a judiciary leading national reform—it is a record of abdication, where symbolic reform has obscured real, and often violent, breakdowns in the rule of law.

## **Politically Motivated Acquittals of Corrupt Elites**

The 5 August 2024 uprising marked a turning point in Bangladesh’s political and judicial landscape. What began as a coordinated wave of student-led protests swiftly escalated into a systemic purge of the judiciary. On 10 August Chief Justice Obaidul Hassan abruptly resigned amid accusations that he had attempted a judicial intervention to facilitate the return of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Protesters, some reportedly mobilized through platforms linked to religious hardliners, accused him of collusion with the old regime and demanded his resignation—setting a 1:00 p.m. ultimatum for him and other senior judges.

In rapid succession, resignations followed across the judiciary, particularly targeting judges perceived to be sympathetic to the previous administration. In the wake of this orchestrated exodus, Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed—until then a judge of the High Court Division—was swiftly named the 25th Chief Justice of Bangladesh by President Mohammed Shahabuddin in response to the mob demand.

The appointment of Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed was not a routine exercise of constitutional procedure but

the culmination of a meticulously orchestrated campaign of mob-led intimidation. The forced resignation of Chief Justice Obaidul Hassan—under explicit threats and time-bound ultimatums issued by protestors—constituted not a voluntary departure but a capitulation to criminal coercion. The simultaneous and systematic resignation of multiple Appellate Division judges further underscores the atmosphere of fear engineered by those mobilizing religious extremist sentiment. In effect, what unfolded was a judicial coup by proxy, executed not through formal state apparatus but through the calculated use of unlawful mob pressure. The elevation of Justice Ahmed, occurring at the precise moment the judiciary had been emptied of dissenting voices, reflects not a coincidence of seniority but a prearranged outcome enabled by the erasure of institutional resistance.

## **Unleashing Mob Violence and Religious Extremism**

Under Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed's leadership, the judiciary did not merely fail to contain the rise of religious extremism—it became a silent enabler of it. The power vacuum following the August uprising quickly devolved into a breeding ground for mob violence and sectarian terror. In November 2024, the politically charged arrest of Hindu leader Krishna Das Prabhu on trumped-up sedition charges ignited deadly unrest in southeastern Bangladesh. The clashes—fueled by religious animosity—left scores injured and resulted in the death of Saiful Islam Alif. Yet even as blood was spilled, the Supreme Court stood idle. Chief Justice

Ahmed’s court issued no restraining orders, launched no inquiries, and provided no constitutional relief—effectively greenlighting impunity for sectarian thuggery.

But judicial inaction soon turned into judicial endorsement. In a move that defied the memory of Bangladesh’s liberation struggle and undermined decades of transitional justice, the Supreme Court—under Justice Ahmed’s direct oversight—revived the appeal of Jamaat-e-Islami, a group found guilty of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. By granting a legal foothold to a party historically linked to mass atrocities and radical ideology, the Chief Justice not only insulted the victims of 1971 but also empowered a new wave of extremist politics. What unfolded was not judicial neutrality—it was a betrayal cloaked in robes, where the highest court in the land became complicit in legitimizing the very forces that thrive on fear, violence, and religious division.

## **Turning a Blind Eye to Mob Attacks on Accused During Court Transit**

Since assuming office on 11 August 2024, Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed has presided over a judiciary that has not only lost control over the rule of law—but has actively abdicated its duty to protect those entitled to constitutional safeguards. Following the toppling of Sheikh Hasina’s government, Bangladesh plunged into mob-led retribution, with public fury swiftly morphing into street justice. During this volatile period, individuals accused of affiliations with the former regime—particularly allies of the Awami League—were routinely attacked while in judicial custody or transit to court.

Far from isolated incidents, these were recurring episodes of orchestrated public vengeance, often covered extensively by national dailies. One such report, published on 15 September 2024, details an attempted assault on a former cabinet minister en route to a Dhaka court, foiled only by last-minute police intervention.

What stands out with chilling clarity is the complete silence of the Supreme Court under Chief Justice Ahmed. Not a single directive was issued to bolster security protocols for the accused. No *suo moto* rulings. No institutional condemnation of the violence. No warnings to law enforcement for dereliction of duty. This was not mere inaction—it was moral desertion at the highest level of the judiciary. By turning a blind eye to these violations, the Chief Justice permitted mob violence to fester as a substitute for due process, thereby eroding the foundational principle that every accused—regardless of political affiliation—is entitled to a fair trial and state protection. In any functioning democracy, the judiciary stands as a bulwark against mob rule. Under Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed, it became a passive witness to its rise.

Under Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed, who took office on 11 August 2024, the Supreme Court of Bangladesh has been scrutinized regarding its capacity to safeguard accused individuals during their transportation to court in the context of mob violence. This period succeeded the removal of Sheikh Hasina’s government on 5 August 2024, characterized by extensive unrest, including assaults on individuals linked to the ousted regime. This analysis utilizes Bangladeshi newspapers in English and Bangla, alongside contextual examination, to

assess significant incidents and the judiciary’s response, or absence thereof, as of 3 April, 2025.

A separate incident pertains to allies of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, although details are less thoroughly recorded. Reports from English outlets such as *Dhaka Tribune* and Bangla publications like daily *Jugantor* indicate that there were sporadic attacks on Awami League affiliates en route to courts during August and September 2024, coinciding with public outrage regarding the actions of the previous regime. On November 30 2024, it was reported in several national dailies that former cultural affairs minister Asaduzzaman Noor was allegedly assaulted by injured students involved in the July-August movement when he was taken to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) from jail for treatment. Reportedly no action was taken against the attackers.

## **Systematic Denial of Bail to Political Opponents**

### **High Court’s Arbitrary Rejection of Anticipatory Bail**

In October 2024, the judiciary under Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed revealed its increasing hostility toward legal neutrality when a two-judge High Court bench abruptly abandoned hearings on 789 anticipatory bail petitions—many filed by grassroots leaders and activists associated with the Awami League—the political opposition of the current government. This mass procedural desertion was not just a breach of judicial decorum; it was a weaponization of silence. By walking away mid-hearing, the bench left hundreds of citizens exposed

to arbitrary arrest, denying them even a minimal chance at legal protection. These were not faceless figures—they were known political actors caught in the crosshairs of a post-coup vendetta, and their petitions represented a final lifeline in an increasingly lawless system.

Far from upholding institutional integrity, Chief Justice Ahmed responded not with a demand for accountability, but with quiet complicity. His decision to “reconstitute” the bench—without explanation, inquiry, or sanction—functioned as a paper-thin procedural fix designed to deflect scrutiny. Meanwhile, accusations of favoritism, bribery, and deliberate political targeting surfaced among the legal community, leading to open confrontations between lawyers and judges. Yet, once again, the Chief Justice remained silent. His failure to discipline or investigate the judicial misconduct not only emboldened further abuses but confirmed a chilling truth: under his leadership, the High Court had ceased to be a forum for justice and had become an instrument of political reprisal.

## **Suspension of High Court Judges**

In a move that shattered any remaining illusion of judicial independence, Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed orchestrated the forced sidelining of 12 High Court judges in October 2024, not through formal inquiry or judicial discipline, but in direct response to mob agitation and ideological hysteria. Caving to demands from extremist student groups and politicized civil society outfits, Justice Ahmed placed the judges on “leave” based on vague allegations of affiliation with the previous Awami League government. These so-called charges—

corruption, bias, and misconduct—were never tested in any tribunal, never scrutinized by any commission, and never afforded the basic protections of due process.

The situation escalated into a full-scale institutional disgrace when, on 16 October, over a thousand members of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement stormed the Supreme Court premises, chanting slogans and demanding the purge of what they called “pro-Awami League fascist judges.” A faction of lawyers also joined in, not to defend the sanctity of the judiciary, but to call for the imprisonment of colleagues tied to the former ruling party. Rather than defending the judiciary from this outright assault on its autonomy, Chief Justice Ahmed capitulated the very next day, banning 12 judges from adjudicating. He offered no defense of judicial impartiality, no safeguard against trial by public frenzy. His actions set a chilling precedent: that judges could be exiled from the bench not through lawful process, but through ideological pressure and mob coercion.

Worse still, while judges were silenced, pro-opposition lawyers—also targeted by the same mobs—were left unprotected, unaddressed, and vilified without institutional defense. In effect, Chief Justice Ahmed sanctioned a political cleansing of the judiciary, allowing street-level radicalism to dictate the bench’s composition and casting a long, dark shadow over the future of Bangladesh’s legal system.

## **Weaponizing the Supreme Judicial Council**

In December 2024, Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed took one of the most dangerous steps yet in consolidating control

over the judiciary—he weaponized the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), transforming what was once a mechanism for safeguarding judicial integrity into a covert tool of political retribution. Under his supervision, the reinstated SJC quietly submitted confidential reports to President Mohammed Shahabuddin targeting a number of High Court judges who had been appointed during the Awami League’s tenure. The language of “impartiality” and “integrity” was cynically deployed to mask what was, in reality, an orchestrated purge of judges viewed as politically inconvenient.

No details of the allegations were made public. No opportunity for rebuttal was afforded to the accused. The entire process reeked of a backdoor inquisition, designed not to preserve the rule of law but to enforce loyalty to the new judicial-political order. The secrecy surrounding the reports was not incidental—it was instrumental. By hiding the contents and recommendations, Chief Justice Ahmed ensured that political motives could masquerade as institutional scrutiny, shielded from public oversight and legal challenge. The Council, meant to uphold the constitution, had under his hand become an instrument of silent intimidation—a velvet noose around the necks of judges.

Rather than strengthening accountability, Justice Ahmed has repurposed the Supreme Judicial Council into a judicial guillotine: arbitrary, opaque, and politically loaded. The message was unmistakable—past affiliations would not be tolerated, and the bench would be purged not by evidence or ethics, but by secret memos passed under the table of power.

## **Orchestrated Attacks on Justice Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik**

On 24 August 2024, Justice Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik—a former Supreme Court judge and once a vocal critic of BNP founder Ziaur Rahman and an emblematic figure of the judiciary—was brutally attacked by a politically charged mob while being escorted to court in Sylhet. What began with chants and jeers quickly escalated into a savage assault: he was punched, kicked, pelted with eggs and shoes, and dragged up the courthouse steps while bleeding profusely. The attack left him critically injured, including a ruptured testicle that required emergency surgery.

Despite the blatant criminality of this act—an attack on a former Supreme Court judge in broad daylight, on court premises, in front of police officers—there has been deafening silence from Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed. Nearly eight months since the incident, not a single institutional condemnation, protective directive, or inquiry has been issued by the Supreme Court under his leadership. The symbolic weight of this silence cannot be overstated: in the face of a violent lynching attempt on one of its own, the apex court chose not justice, but submission.

Worse still, Justice Manik was promptly remanded to jail by a lower court under Section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code, despite the absence of a formal complaint from the Border Guard Bangladesh—another disturbing sign of a judiciary weaponized against individuals tied to the former regime. That the mob was composed of pro-BNP lawyers and demonstrators

who coordinated their presence at the courthouse only reinforces the notion that this was not a spontaneous outburst, but an orchestrated act of political vengeance.

Chief Justice Ahmed’s refusal to denounce this atrocity—committed under his watch, within the shadow of the very court he leads—amounts to tacit approval. His silence has emboldened recurring mob justice, compromised judicial dignity, and sent a chilling message to every judge, retired or sitting: allegiance to rule of law over ruling government’s interest will be punished, and the court will do nothing to protect you.

### **Egg Assault on Justice Md Ashraful Kamal in Open Court and Impunity for Perpetrators**

In an incident that should have shaken the foundations of judicial dignity, High Court Justice Md Ashraful Kamal was brazenly assaulted in open court in November 2024—eggs hurled at him by a group of lawyers enraged by his remarks about former President Ziaur Rahman in a judgment that Ziaur Rahman was a military usurper—which is a objective fact. This shocking act of courtroom vandalism took place not in the shadows, but during a live court session, under the gaze of Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed’s judiciary.

Yet, despite initial platitudes—Ahmed issued a press note voicing “concern” and pledging “necessary steps”—no concrete disciplinary action followed. As of 3 April 2025, there is no public record of contempt proceedings, bar association actions, or even internal investigations against the attackers.

The perpetrators – lawyers by profession but vandals in conduct – walked away untouched. The Chief Justice, who once famously issued contempt charges against police for far lesser offenses, has now retreated into silence when he is in charge of the entire judiciary.

This abdication of authority is more than procedural negligence—it is complicity by omission. The Supreme Court’s failure to respond decisively to an assault on one of its sitting judges has emboldened a culture of impunity within the legal fraternity and sown fear among judges expected to rule impartially in a polarized landscape. The inaction not only violated the sanctity of the courtroom but also undermined Article 35 of the Constitution, which guarantees due process and the right to legal representation—rights now routinely trampled under mob intimidation and selective silence.

Ahmed’s retreat into bureaucratic reforms and vague institutional platitudes, while judges are assaulted and lawyers openly threatened, reveals a troubling pattern: symbolic leadership without spine. When faced with a direct test of his commitment to judicial independence, Chief Justice Ahmed blinked.

### **Politically Motivated Acquittals of Corrupt Elites**

During Syed Refaat Ahmed’s tenure as the Chief Justice, the Supreme Court of Bangladesh has presided over an astonishing spree of acquittals for high-profile political elites—each case more revealing than the last in its timing, beneficiaries, and implications for judicial integrity. Rather than heralding a new era of accountability, the post-uprising

judiciary has become a revolving door of impunity for the politically powerful.

On 11 August 2024—the very day Justice Ahmed was appointed Chief Justice—Nobel laureate and interim Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus was abruptly acquitted in a corruption case filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission. The message was clear: elevation to political leadership now guarantees judicial absolution. The pattern deepened in January 2025 when former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia saw her final corruption conviction overturned, erasing a decade-long prison sentence and clearing the path for her political re-entry.

Most damningly, the Supreme Court’s four-member bench—led by Chief Justice Ahmed—suspended the prison sentence of Tarique Rahman, long accused of corruption and criminal conspiracy, along with his associate Gias Uddin Al Manun. This decision, unaccompanied by transparent reasoning or public justification, amounted to a judicial pardon delivered from the highest seat of justice.

Adding to the litany, the High Court also acquitted Lutfozzaman Babor, a former state minister once convicted in a major cross-border arms trafficking case. Taken together, these rulings form not a coincidence, but a coordinated rehabilitation of political actors strategically aligned with the current interim government.

Chief Justice Ahmed’s tenure has thus far not only normalized selective justice—it has weaponized the judiciary to reward allies and cleanse the reputations of key players in the interim political order. This is not judicial independence;

it is judicial surrender dressed in the garb of reform. The court has become less a forum of legal principle and more a stage for political theater—where justice is scripted in backrooms and verdicts serve political agendas.

## **Complicity in Suppressing Academic Freedom at his Own Alma Mater**

While Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed parades judicial reform and integrity on the national stage, his silence on the suppression of academic freedom—just steps away from his Supreme Court chamber—speaks louder than any reformist rhetoric.

Since August 2024, scores of academics—many from the University of Dhaka’s Law Department, Ahmed’s own alma mater—have faced dubious charges ranging from sedition to administrative misconduct. Their real offense? Not joining the coup attempt against an elected government, or their potential ability to criticize the authoritarian excesses of the interim government. Though the specifics remain undocumented in full, faculty and student reports paint a grim picture of retaliatory proceedings that eerily echo the tactics of the very regime Bangladesh claims to have overthrown.

The epicenter of this repression, the University Dhaka’s Faculty of Law, sits less than a mile from the Supreme Court. And yet, by April 2025, neither a single *suo motu* action nor a public rebuke has emerged from the bench of Chief Justice Ahmed—a man whose own career was built on this very institution’s commitment to critical thought and dissent.

Despite touting a “zero tolerance” approach to corruption and hosting international meetings on judicial independence, Ahmed has remained conspicuously unmoved on academic freedom—even as university administrations recycle the same tools of harassment once wielded by the ousted Awami League. No writs. No inquiries. No constitutional safeguarding of Article 39 rights.

This judicial abdication is not merely symbolic; it is systemic. While the Supreme Court managed to prioritize politically convenient acquittals for elites and high-profile bail dramas, it could not muster the will to protect academics facing professional exile. In stark contrast to Ahmed’s 2019 human rights advocacy and high-minded lectures, his inaction now serves to normalize administrative vendettas against scholars.

If silence is complicity, then the Chief Justice has chosen a side. And it is not with the intellectuals who once made Dhaka University—and the nation’s judiciary—a moral compass.

## **Endorsing the Violation of Lawyers’ Right to Representation**

Under Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed’s tenure, the judiciary has witnessed a troubling erosion of the fundamental right to legal representation, particularly for lawyers affiliated with Awami League. The mass detention of 70 senior lawyers in April 2025, all linked to the Awami League, marks an unprecedented crackdown on legal professionals. These lawyers were made part of frivolous suits and criminal cases filed in the aftermath of the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government.

This incident is not isolated. In October 2024, the legal wing of the Jatiya Nagorik Committee demanded action against lawyers supporting the Awami League, with protest leaders calling for their arrest within 24 hours. Subsequently, in November 2024, a lawyer known for representing Awami League clients was assaulted outside a courtroom, compelling him to temporarily cease his practice.

Despite these alarming developments, the Supreme Court has not issued clear directives to protect the rights of these lawyers or to condemn the extrajudicial methods employed against them. This silence stands in stark contrast to the judiciary's constitutional obligation to uphold the right to legal representation and to ensure that all individuals, regardless of political affiliation, have access to justice.

The judiciary's inaction in the face of mob violence and intimidation tactics has effectively sanctioned a climate where legal professionals are targeted for their associations, undermining the very foundations of a fair and impartial legal system. Chief Justice Ahmed's emphasis on institutional stability appears to have come at the expense of individual rights, raising serious concerns about the judiciary's role in safeguarding democratic principles during this turbulent period. If the judiciary cannot defend the right of even its least popular officers to practice law without fear, what remains of its independence?

## **Conclusion**

Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed's tenure has unfolded as a paradox: outwardly committed to reform and institutional

stability, yet inwardly complicit in the erosion of fundamental rights and judicial integrity. Under his watch, Bangladesh’s judiciary has tolerated or enabled mob violence against judges, politically motivated acquittals of elites, attacks on lawyers’ right to representation, and a sweeping crackdown on the press. Despite bold rhetoric, Ahmed’s court has remained largely mute on violations at his own alma mater, the University of Dhaka, where academics face retribution for dissent. His selective activism—prioritizing structural reforms while neglecting individual justice—has bred a judiciary that appears detached from the lived realities of repression and political vendetta. In failing to respond with urgency to such grave assaults on judicial and democratic norms, Ahmed has cast doubt on his own legacy. His silence, particularly when proximity and power demanded intervention, has transformed the Supreme Court from a constitutional bulwark into an accessory to institutional decay. This moment called for a Chief Justice who would rise above political winds and protect the republic’s conscience. What it received instead was a figure of restraint, watching history unfold from the steps of the courthouse.

### Reference:

- **“Hindu houses, businesses attacked in 27 districts”** *The Daily Star* – August 6, 2024.
- **“Attempted assault on former cabinet minister en route to Dhaka court”** *National Dailies* – September 15, 2024.
- **“Former cultural affairs minister Asaduzzaman Noor allegedly assaulted by students at BSMMU”** *National Dailies* – November 30, 2024.

- **“Retired Justice Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik attacked by mob on Sylhet court premises”** *Contextual Examination* – August 24, 2024.
- **“High Court Justice Md Ashraful Kamal assaulted with eggs in open court”** *Press Note/Contextual Record* – November 2024.
- **“Mass detention of 70 senior lawyers linked to Awami League”** *Legal Records* – April 2025.
- **“74 cases of violence and 113 criminal charges filed against journalists”** *Media Reports/Human Rights Watch* – Post-August 2024.

# Minority and Women Rights During the Interim Government

## Introduction: The Dawn of Hope

In 2024, Bangladesh witnessed a remarkable political and social awakening led by its Gen-Z students. Fueled by a vision for a more equitable and just society, their movement captured the national imagination with a powerful, unifying slogan: “The Country for All” (*Shobar Jonno Desh*). This cry was a direct challenge to the systemic corruption, political cronyism, and deep-seated discrimination that plagued the nation. The movement was not merely for electoral fairness but represented a deeper yearning for the restoration of the secular, pluralistic, and democratic ideals enshrined in the spirit of the 1971 Liberation War.

However, one year on, the initial euphoria has given way to a palpable sense of anxiety, particularly among religious minorities and women. The movement was stolen by the Islamists and vested interest groups who vandalized all established institutions that represent the symbol and spirit of liberation war. Despite the movement’s lofty goals,

there is a growing perception that the country is losing its secular fabric, and the human rights situation for vulnerable groups has not seen the transformative improvement many had hoped for. This paper argues that the failure to institutionalize the gains of the 2024 movement has led to a continuation, and in some cases an exacerbation, of the very discriminations the protesters sought to eliminate, resulting in a crisis of confidence that is driving skilled minority citizens to emigrate.

## **Understanding the Gap between Aspiration and Reality**

The trajectory of the 2024 movement can be analyzed through several sociological and political theories. According to Social Movement Theory, the Gen-Z movement fits the model of a “new social movement,” focused on issues of identity, democracy, and quality of life rather than traditional class-based economic conflicts. Its decentralized, leaderless structure, powered by social media, was a source of strength during the protests but became a weakness in the post-movement phase. The lack of formal leadership or a political party to translate demands into policy left a political vacuum, allowing traditional power structures to reassert themselves.

According to the concept of “Majoritarian Ethnic Democracy”, states maintain a democratic framework for the majority group while systematically marginalizing minorities. Despite its secular founding principles, Bangladesh has shown tendencies toward majoritarian nationalism, where

the identity and interests of the Muslim-Bengali majority are often privileged in state policy and public discourse. The 2024 movement challenged this but did not dismantle the underlying institutional and ideological structures. Instead, the rightist and Jamat has had it momentum to get political power and imposing the Sharia-based law in the country which will undermine the aspiration of the minority and progressive women in the country.

## **The Plight of Minorities: A Legacy of Insecurity Persists**

The promise of “The Country for All” rings hollow for many in the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and indigenous communities, who continue to face persecution in many parts of the country. Bangladesh Awami League holds its philosophy of political pluralisms and secularism. However, after the ousting of Sheikh Hasina, the interim government has provided every scope to the fanatic groups to carte mobs and vandalize the places of sufies, peer and other progressive people in the country. Meenakshi Ganguly, Deputy Director of Asia Division at Human Rights Watch mentions. “The interim government appears stuck, juggling an unreformed security sector, sometimes violent religious hardliners, and political groups that seem more focused on extracting vengeance on Hasina’s supporters than protecting Bangladeshis’ rights.” Indeed, thousands of incidents against the minorities and women have been directed that has eroded the spirit of liberation and secular society. Key incidents and trends can be presented as follow:

## Communal Violence:

During this interim government period, Bangladesh witnessed a disturbing rise in attacks on religious minorities. Rights groups and local media documented widespread incidents of vandalism, arson, and physical assaults targeting Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian communities across the country. The Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council reported 2,442 incidents of attacks on minorities between August 2024 and June 2025, including killings, sexual assaults, temple demolitions, and destruction of homes. In the first few weeks after the interim government was formed, at least 205 separate incidents were recorded across 52 districts. However, Bangladeshi police claimed that of 1,415 verified complaints, roughly 1,234 were politically motivated rather than purely communal, and only 20 cases were confirmed as explicitly communal attacks. This discrepancy highlights the difficulty of distinguishing between political retaliation and religious hatred in a highly polarized context. The following are the incidents directed against the minority people during this interim government:

- Minority-owned houses and temples were attacked and looted in several districts, with Hindu families reporting forced displacement.
- In Narayanganj and Chattogram, mobs set fire to shops and desecrated religious sites, prompting emergency deployments of security forces.
- Social media played a role in spreading rumors and inflammatory content that fueled panic and violence.

While large-scale pogroms have decreased, incidents of temple vandalism, land grabbing of minority-owned properties, and intimidation during religious festivals continue to be reported by organizations like Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) and Odhikar. On 26 and 27 July, a mob damaged at least 14 homes belonging to members of the Hindu minority in Rangpur district, and there are continuing violations against minority communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Another report says, Following Hasina's resignation, rioters attacked her supporters, including Hindus, Ahmadi Muslims, and ethnic minorities, resulting in violence that killed over 200 people. Criminals and opposition supporters attacked shops, homes and places of worship. Many Muslims protected minorities and criticized the attacks. The Hindu report that 258 communal attacks in Bangladesh in the first half of 2025 which is seriously alarming. Civil society groups like the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council (BHBCUC) have claimed that attacks against religious minorities in Bangladesh have continued under the interim government.

## **Targeting the Hindu Community**

The Hindu community, in particular, continues to describe targeted violence and fear since the July 2024 protests. In November 2024, an estimated 30,000 Hindus protested in Chattogram, calling for the interim government to offer protection from attacks and harassment. Protestors additionally urged the government to drop sedition charges against 19 Hindu leaders, whom authorities accused of disrespecting the Bangladeshi flag during a previous protest

in October. Among those accused is Hindu priest Krishna Das Prabhu, also known as Chinmoy Das, who was arrested in November 2024 and denied bail in January 2025, leading to renewed protests and clashes that resulted in the death of a Muslim lawyer. Following the killing of the Muslim lawyer, reported incidents of intimidation and attacks in Hindu neighborhoods increased. In May 2025, the Supreme Court granted a stay on a High Court order granting Das bail. Some notable incidents against the Hindu communities are as follow:

- According to BHBCUC in the first three months of 2025, a total of 92 incidents took place targeting religious minorities. This includes 11 murders, three rapes, 25 attacks on temples, and 28 instances of vandalism.
- Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), a Bangladeshi human rights organization, reported a total of 48 attacks against religious minorities from January to April 2025, including 25 attacks against Hindu statues.
- Hindu women have stopped wearing bangles and bindis to avoid being harassed. Bangladeshi media sources also continue to report some instances of violence, vandalism, and harassment against religious minorities.

## **Digital Vigilantism and Hate Speech**

Social media platforms are increasingly used to target religious minorities with hate speech and false accusations of blasphemy, often leading to real-world violence and police

complaints under the Digital Security Act. After the July 2024 protests, misinformation and disinformation saturated the news environment, particularly related to attacks against religious minority communities, which have created a climate of fear. Such disinformation falsely claimed that certain Hindu temples were attacked, circulating fabricated videos of arson or Hindu women being attacked. Human rights organizations similarly say that social media and misinformation continue to contribute to attacks against religious minorities. Additionally, journalists in Bangladesh reporting on religious freedom issues expressed concerns about harassment from mobs and more conservative Islamic groups. In November 2024, for example, a mob accused news sources like *The Daily Star* of promoting ideals they considered “contrary to Islam,” including secularism and women’s rights. The attackers demanded that these newspapers be closed if they did not apologize for their “anti-Islamic positions.”

### **Systemic Disenfranchisement:**

Discriminatory laws and practices, such as the Vested Property Act (a continuation of the earlier Enemy Property Act), continue to be used to dispossess Hindu families of their land, undermining their economic security and sense of belonging. Between 6 August and 25 September, 2024, police lodged cases against 92,486 people, most of them related to murder. Nearly 400 former ministers, members of parliament, and other Awami League officials have been named in over 1,170 cases, which also include hundreds of unnamed individuals. The report by RRAG identified serious violations, noting that

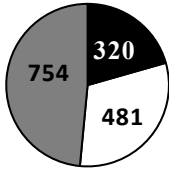
more than 272,000 individuals—primarily political opponent—have been implicated in 1,598 criminal cases within the first 100 days of Yunus’ administration. The organization reported that between 19 September and 1 October, at least four Indigenous people were killed, and more than 75 others were injured. Leaders of the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council claims that 2,010 incidents of communal violence took place across the Muslim-majority country between Aug. 4 and 20, 2025. The Yunus-led government disputed the claim, saying that most of the incidents were caused by “political reasons” and not by communal issues. However, different sources confirmed that most of the cases were directed against the minority and opposing political people.

## **The Status of Women and girls: Progress and Peril**

The Gen-Z movement was notably inclusive of young women, who were at the forefront of the protests. However, the broader landscape for women’s rights remains complex and troubling. Bangladesh is currently facing a grave escalation in gender-based violence, marked by a surge in rape and sexual assault cases. This trend has intensified under the administration of the constitutionally illegitimate interim government, where legal accountability has weakened, and institutional safeguards have deteriorated significantly. Bangladesh grapples with shocking surge in sexual violence:

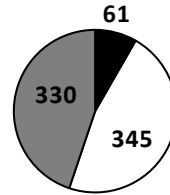
- According to verified media reports, from January to June 2025, a total of 481 cases of rape were reported nationwide. Among these:

## Women



■ Murder □ Rape ■ Others

## Children



■ Murder □ Rape ■ Others

- 345 victims were children, highlighting a disproportionate targeting of minors
- 106 cases involved gang rape, indicating the organized and aggravated nature of many assaults.
- 17 victims were murdered following the assault, illustrating a pattern of extreme brutality and intent to eliminate evidence or silence survivors.
- 1,555 women and girls were reported to have experienced violence in the first half of the year alone, encompassing both physical and sexual abuse.

The Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities (HRCBM) mentioned that Bangladesh is facing an alarming wave of sexual violence, particularly targeting women and children from minority communities like Hindus, Christians, Buddhists and others. According to the Rights Body, the violence has reached pandemic proportions under the Muhammad Yunus-led interim government. HRCBM noted that “342 rape cases were officially recorded in less than three months during

the first quarter of 2025, with 87 percent of the victims being girls under 18 years of age”. According to the rights body, these horrifying figures represent only the tip of the iceberg, and the true number runs into thousands, which is hidden by silence, fear, and state inaction. The following table shows the scenario of women rights violation during this interim period.

## Violence against Women and Girls in Bangladesh: Key Statistics (2024 – Mid-2025)

Category / Period	Key Statistics	Specific Details & Breakdown	Source / Reference
March 2025 (General Violence)	<b>442</b> women & girls faced violence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 125 girls and 38 women were raped.</li> <li>• 36 were gang-raped (including 18 girls).</li> <li>• 2 girls were raped and murdered.</li> <li>• 55 girls and 15 women survived attempted rape.</li> </ul>	Human Rights Organizations' Compilation
First Half of 2025 (Trend)	Sharp increase in reported cases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jan-Apr 2024: 5,795 cases.</li> <li>• Jan-Apr 2025: 7,028 cases.</li> </ul>	Bangladesh Police Records
Full Year 2024 (Rape)	<b>558</b> total rape victims.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 284 victims (approx. 51%) were minors.</li> <li>• 130 victims were gang-raped.</li> <li>• 40 victims were killed after rape (including children).</li> </ul>	Human Rights Society of Bangladesh ( <a href="http://hrssbd.org">hrssbd.org</a> )

Category / Period	Key Statistics	Specific Details & Breakdown	Source / Reference
Jan-Oct 2024 (General Violence)	<b>2,197</b> women & girls subjected to violence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Included 830 rape incidents nationwide.</li> <li>• 39 women were killed after rape.</li> <li>• 7 victims died by suicide as a result.</li> </ul>	Human Rights Organizations' Compilation
2024 (Bangladesh Mahila Parishad Survey)	<b>364</b> rape cases analyzed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 220 victims (majority) were minors.</li> <li>• Gang rape victims: 49 minors &amp; 99 adults.</li> </ul>	Prothom Alo
October 2024 (Monthly Snapshot)	Over <b>200</b> women & girls were tortured.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 44 rape cases (including 14 minor girls).</li> <li>• 4 dowry-related murders.</li> <li>• 4 incidents of child marriage.</li> </ul>	Dhaka Tribune

## Political Participation vs. Social Reality

While Bangladesh has had a female head of state for decades, this has not trickled down to empower most women at the grassroots level. In addition, over 8,600 people were reportedly arrested in a crackdown in February called “Operation Devil Hunt,” many of them allegedly Awami League supporters. BBC news reports that “There is no law and order. And Hindus are being targeted again”. The religious minority people hardly get any scope to participate in any procession and inform their conditions to the authority. The media is also controlled by the Islamist groups that hinder presenting the information of minority repression.

## The Burden of Digital Laws

The Digital Security Act (DSA), despite its intended purpose, has been used to harass and imprison women who speak out online against harassment or injustice, creating a chilling effect on freedom of expression (Amnesty International, 2024).

**Table 2: Selected Indicators on Women’s Security  
(Based on Secondary Data)**

Indicator	Pre-2024 Trend	Post-2024 Observation (Initial 12 Months)	Source
Reported Rape Cases	Consistently high (~1,000+ per year)	High in increase before the previous regime	ASK, 2024 Annual Report
Use of DSA against Women	Increasing	Continued use to silence female activists and victims	Amnesty International, 2024
Women in High-Level Govt. Posts	Stable but limited	The condition is deteriorating, not improving as promised.	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
Economic Participation Rate	Slowly increasing	Structural barriers remain and increasing	World Bank, 2025

## Position of Women and Minorities in Government Position

Based on recent reports and surveys, it is evident that both women and minority groups in Bangladesh have been systematically marginalized in political participation and social protection under the current interim arrangements. For example, in six

major reform commissions formed between 2024–2025, out of fifty total members, only five were women, representing merely around 10 percent participation, and no members were drawn from religious or ethnic minority communities. This exclusion highlights how decision-making spaces remain dominated by male and majority voices, with women and minorities sidelined from shaping key reforms. Although the Women’s Reform Commission proposed progressive measures such as expanding parliament to 600 seats with directly elected reserved constituencies for women and ensuring that each political party nominates at least 7 percent female candidates in general seats, the structural underrepresentation persists. The situation of minorities has been even more concerning in terms of security. According to the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, from 4 August to 20 August, 2024, there were over 2,010 incidents of communal violence, followed by 174 more incidents between late August and December, which included 23 deaths, sexual assaults, arson, and widespread vandalism. Despite these alarming figures, a VOA survey found that while 64.1 percent of respondents believed the interim government provided better protection to minorities compared to previous administrations, 33.9 percent of minority respondents felt that their safety had actually deteriorated. This paradox underscores both the heightened vulnerability of minorities and the uneven perception of security improvements.

Together, these statistics illustrate how women continue to be underrepresented in formal political structures while minorities remain vulnerable to violence and exclusion, leaving both groups cornered in a fragile socio-political landscape.

Moreover, the government systematically ignored the women and minority political leaders while discussing political issues. The interim government vehemently emphasizes on Islamic political parties where women and minority representation is nil.

## **Conclusion: The Nation At A Crossroads**

The 2024 Gen-Z movement was a watershed moment that revealed a deep-seated public desire for a Bangladesh that truly lives up to its founding promise of secularism and equality. The slogan “The Country for All” was a powerful articulation of this vision. But it was a device by the vested interest group to divert the attention of the mass-people who came outside and protested against the government of Hasina. Now, they have understood their mistake that it was a movement of Jamat and Shibir to fulfil their long desire of capturing political power and work for pro-Pakistani motive. During this one year of the movement much has been cleared to the people that it was not a honest movement, but was a deep conspiracy against Sheikh Hasina.

One year later, the nation stands at a crossroads. The anxiety among minorities and women, coupled with the emigration of skilled citizens, is a stark indicator that the movement’s aspirations have yet to be translated into tangible institutional and social reform. The “secular flavor” of the nation is indeed under threat, not necessarily from a single policy, but from a persistent culture of majoritarian impunity and a state apparatus that has been slow to protect its most vulnerable citizens.

For “The Country for All” to transition from a slogan to a reality, sustained political will, legal and institutional reforms

to protect minority rights and women’s safety, and a conscious effort to promote a national identity based on civic rather than religious nationalism are urgently required.

### Reference:

- **Minority-owned houses and temples attacked and looted in several districts” *The Daily Star* – August 6, 2024.**
- **205 separate incidents of communal violence recorded across 52 districts” *Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council* – August 2024.**
- **• 30,000 Hindus protest in Chattogram calling for protection from attacks” *Media Reports* – November 2024.**
- **• Hindu priest Chinmoy Das arrested and denied bail leading to renewed clashes” *Legal Records* – November 2024.**
- **• Mob accuses The Daily Star of promoting ideals contrary to Islam” *The Daily Star* – November 2024.**
- **• 2,010 incidents of communal violence reported across the country” *Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council* – August 4–20, 2025.**
- **• 481 cases of rape reported nationwide, including 345 child victims” *Verified Media Reports* – January–June 2025.**
- **• 8,600 people arrested in crackdown called Operation Devil Hunt” *BBC News* – February 2025.**
- **• 258 communal attacks recorded in Bangladesh in the first half of 2025” *The Hindu* – 2025.**

# Tricky Patriarchal Response to Tragic Child Rape: Women’s Safety and the Law in Bangladesh

From January to June 2025, a staggering 1,555 women and girls in Bangladesh were subjected to violence. Among them, 481 were raped, including 345 minors. Even more horrifying, 106 victims—including 62 girls—were gang-raped, and 17 women and girls were brutally murdered following assault. These are not isolated cases; they are part of a relentless pattern. In just six months:

- 51 women including 35 girls faced sexual harassment,
- 34 women including 25 girls were stalked or verbally abused, and
- 320 women were murdered, including 61 girls.

The data, presented in Figure 1, reveals a particularly chilling reality: minor girls are excessively affected by rape and sexual violence compared to adult women. These grim figures are drawn from the January–June 2025 report by *Bangladesh Mahila Parishad*, the country’s oldest and most respected women’s organisation.

### Figure 1: Women and Child Repression (January-June)2025

Behind these statistics also lie real human tragedies. For instance, in March 2025, during the sacred month of Ramadan, an eight-year-old girl from Magura Sadar Upazila was raped by a man who was—her sister’s father-in-law. She later died from her injuries in a military hospital at Dhaka. This monstrous act shocked the nation and triggered mass protests, especially among students. Public outrage was fierce, but justice has yet to be delivered. No trial. No accountability. No closure yet.

In response to public pressure, the government moved swiftly—but superficially. Amendments were made to the *Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000*, with promises of harsher penalties. But when examined closely, these legal changes reveal a disappointing truth: the reforms are cosmetic, not corrective. Take the revision of Section 9(2). Before the 2025 amendment, this section mandated:

If the victim of rape dies as a result of the rape or from any act following the rape, the offender shall be punishable by death or life imprisonment, and liable to a fine not less than one lakh taka, with no upper limit.

This meant judges could impose significant financial penalties—potentially millions of taka—based on the circumstances of the crime and the economic status of the offender. Further, the minimum penalty was one lac taka in any case. However, the 25 March 2025, amendment replaced this provision with:

...the offender shall be punishable by death or life imprisonment, and liable to a fine not exceeding twenty lakh taka.

## **The consequences of this revision are alarming:**

- No minimum fine is now required, meaning the court can technically impose zero financial penalty.
- The maximum fine is capped at twenty lakh taka, removing the court's discretion to impose a harsher penalty, even in egregious cases.

In short, what was presented as a stricter law is, in fact, a dilution of justice. The government's response to the rape and death of a child was not bold reform—it was bureaucratic appeasement. While people marched on the streets demanding justice, the legal amendments quietly weakened the very tools meant to protect women and girls. In a country where violence against women is a daily reality, symbolic gestures are not enough.

This isn't just a legal issue; it's a societal crisis rooted in patriarchy, impunity, and a dangerous willingness to prioritise appearances over action. We must demand more than performative amendments. We need:

- Laws that deliver real justice, not loopholes.
- Courts that act with urgency, not delay.
- Leaders who listen to survivors, not silence them.

Until we treat violence against women and girls as the national emergency it is, more daughters will be buried, more families shattered, and more perpetrators emboldened. The question now is not whether we know what's happening. The question is: What will we do about it?

Reference:

- **“Child rape victim dies in Bangladesh; police bans protests”** *The Tribune* – March 13, 2025.
- **“Sister’s father-in-law raped the child: Case statement”** *Prothom Alo* – March 8, 2025.
- **“Rape of minority community woman sparks outrage in Bangladesh”** *The Hindu* – June 30, 2025.
- **“NGOs demand justice over incidents of child rape, abuse, and murder”** *Save the Children* – March 16, 2025.
- **“Bangladesh passes new women, child protection law after rape and murder”** *Arab News* – March 20, 2025.

# **From Protest to Looting: Economic Slowdown and Collapse Under Interim Government**

## **Introduction**

The transition in Bangladesh after 5 August 2024, provides a stark illustration of how political upheaval can evolve from mass protests to widespread disorder, revealing the deep-seated stresses within the country and the true nature of its new interim government. Widespread protests initially emerged from student movements targeting government job quotas, but quickly snowballed into a broader national outcry against inequality, corruption, and demands for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s resignation. The unrest reflected a profound dissatisfaction with the ruling party’s economic and social policies, as well as the perceived exclusion of broad segments of Bangladeshi society from meaningful power and opportunity. On 5 August 2024, the situation escalated as protesters stormed the prime minister’s official residence, prompting Sheikh Hasina to escape and resign. This sudden power vacuum laid bare the fragility of state structures, with the military stepping

into facilitates the formation of an interim government. Led by Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus, the new administration was formally installed on 8 August 2024.

## **Protest, Looting, and Costs**

In the power vacuum post-5 August, Bangladesh was gripped by chaos demonstrators and opportunists alike engaged in looting, arson, and attacks on symbols of the previous regime. Police stations, political offices, government buildings, and private homes especially those belonging to minority communities were ransacked in districts across the country. Perhaps the most high-profile incident was the looting and ransacking of Sheikh Hasina's official residence. Protesters made off with everything from furniture and electronics to livestock. In the days that followed, public pressure and campaigns by protest leaders led to a remarkable return of many stolen items, including valuable possessions and even pets and secret government files. A notable number of attacks targeted Hindu-owned homes and businesses, particularly in Khulna and Mymensingh divisions. Looting, arson, and deadly violence accompanied the broader unrest, with security forces often unable or unwilling to intervene.

Following the political unrest and protests in Bangladesh after 5 August 2024, various sectors experienced significant damage and disruptions. The [textile and garment industry](#) faced setbacks due to political instability, floods, and a shortage of [LNG](#). Additionally, the protests led to disruptions in exports, increased costs, and factory closures. The agricultural sector,

particularly in flood-prone areas, suffered damage to crops, fishponds, and infrastructure. Furthermore, the political turmoil impacted the economy, with the [Asian Development Bank](#) downgrading growth forecasts.

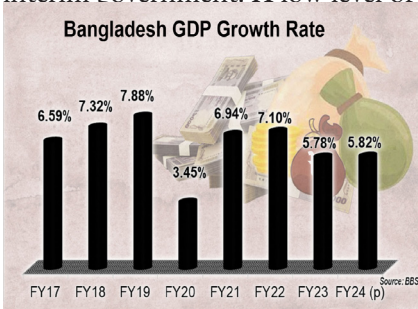
While there was a 2.9 percent increase in net FDI during FY2024 compared to FY2023, the most recent months of FY2025 show a significant decline in net FDI compared to FY2024. Furthermore, if only net inflows are considered, FDI actually declined in FY2024 as well. According to Bangladesh Bank data, net FDI inflow decreased by 8.8 percent in FY2024 compared that in FY2023. According to the ICT and telecommunications ministry, the sector faced financial losses of Tk 18,000 crore.

During Yunus-led administration, a deep structural challenges persist including high youth unemployment, corruption, and [sluggish industrial growth](#) while ongoing political

uncertainty continues to [discourage](#) investment. According to World Bank estimates, an additional [three million](#) people in Bangladesh could be pushed into poverty in 2025 alone. The outlook is equally sobering on GDP growth, which is expected to slow to [3.3 percent](#) in fiscal year 2024-25. Compounding these challenges is the looming threat of higher U.S. tariffs, which risk further pressuring Bangladesh's export-dependent economy.



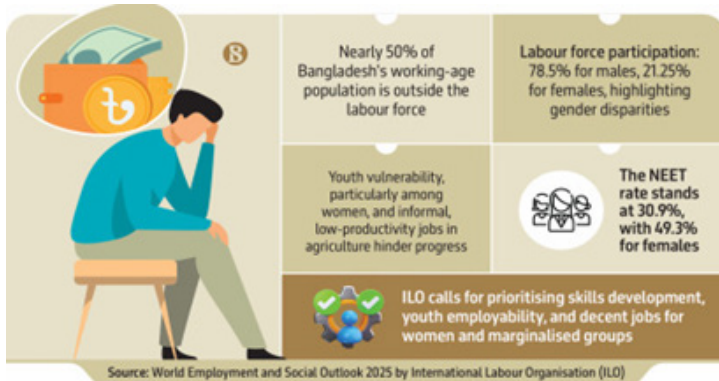
The law and order situation remained fragile, and instances of mob culture had lowered the business confidence in the country. Due to repeated labor unrests, many factories closed in the past year, which led to an increase in unemployment. According to Industrial Police data, more than 100 units closed between August 2024 and May 2025, resulting in about 60,000 workers becoming unemployed. Between July and December 2024, Bangladesh lost an estimated 2.1 million jobs, with women disproportionately affected. The apparel sector, a major export earner, faced disruptions due to factory shutdowns, internet outages, and violence, leading to negative signals for international buyers and increased costs for exporters. Moreover, various protests in the government and private sectors have undermined the investment climate and threatened operational continuity in many sectors during the interim government. A low level of foreign direct investment,



a contractionary monetary policy and an uncertainty over the state's democratic transition also impacted the businesses throughout the year.

## Real Character of the Post-5 August Government

The interim government, inaugurated on 8 August 2024, faces the herculean task of restoring law and order. Its initial actions included granting immunity for actions taken



during the protests (through 8 August), promising thorough investigations into human rights violations, and initiating operations to curb ongoing violence. The core ambitions of the interim leaders and activists are the reform of state institutions, the establishment of a truly inclusive society, and delivering justice for the atrocities committed during the protests and crackdown. The interim government's legitimacy is constantly tested by unrest, factionalism, and communal violence, and its authority is challenged both by remnants of the old guard and opportunistic rioters. There are concerns that, despite promises of reform and dialogue, deep-rooted corruption, impunity, and violence may persist if meaningful institutional changes do not happen. Calls for radical reforms include changes to the constitution, policing, electoral system, economic policy, and minority protections.

The transition from protest to looting and governmental instability reveals a Bangladesh both desperate for systemic reform and vulnerable to lawlessness in periods of political uncertainty. The real character of the post-5 August government is one of struggle: striving to fulfill the lofty goals of protesters, control chaos, mediate between warring factions,

and deliver justice and accountability while under the constant threat that the very violence and lawlessness the protest opposed, could engulf its future if reforms falter.

## **Real Picture of Economic collapse and slowdown of Bangladesh**

Here's a comprehensive overview of the economic and industrial disruptions linked to the Muhammad Yunus interim government in Bangladesh over the past year (since its formation on 8 August 2024\*\*)

- World Bank cut its forecast from 5.7% (April 2024) to 4.0% (October 2024) for FY2024-25.
- For July–September 2024 quarter, growth slowed sharply, with large-scale industrial production contracting by 0.71% YoY (it had previously been +11.87% a year earlier).
- Later, growth projections dropped to 3.8% and even 3.3%, the lowest in decades.
- According to industry insiders, over 60% of factories were non-operational by May 2025 due to: High production costs, Gas shortages and energy instability, Rising bank loan interest rates above 16%; and Law-and-order disruptions.
- Nearly 100 garment and related factories permanently shut in industrial zones such as Gazipur, Narayanganj-Narsingdi, Savar—and others, impacting 60,000+ workers.

- A Reddit estimate noted 140 garment factories closed in seven months, leaving over 100,000 unemployed, with 20% of export orders shifted to competing countries.
- BTMA data shows 330,000 job losses in the industrial sector over the past year—an unprecedented high.
- NBR revenue grew only 3.24% year-on-year (July-April), the slowest pace in five years.
- A major NBR strike in May–June 2025 halted customs/tax services entirely, affecting international trade worth roughly Tk 2,500 crore daily.
- Government borrowing from banks surged to Tk 985.79 billion, up 60% year-over-year by April 2025, crowding out private credit.
- Non-performing loans rose to 17% of total loans (~Tk 16.82 lakh crore) by late 2024, adding to financial strain.
- Factory shutdowns during student protests shut down garment operations.
- Estimated losses: ~\$150 million daily during curfews and communication blackouts.
- Export delays, disrupted supply chains, and inflation rounded out the impact.
- Outages lasted a week, hitting freelancers, e-commerce, ride-hailing, and small businesses hard, cutting communication and trade capacity.

## **Concern of Economists regarding the slowing down of economy of Bangladesh**

Observing the economic condition, miss-management, plundering and looting of public money, some economists of Bangladesh have raised their genuine concern. Such as:

- Zahid Hussain (Former Chief Economist, World Bank Dhaka Office) warns that political uncertainty—especially street protests—is severely undermining investor confidence and disrupting daily business activity: “Standing in traffic for three to four hours a day ... it breaks the economy’s knees.” Also criticizes the FY2025–26 budget as lacking structural reforms, questioning whether revenue targets (e.g., Tk 5.64 lakh crore) are achievable. He cautions that missing targets could force spending cuts or increased borrowing.
- Mustafizur Rahman (Distinguished Fellow, CPD) describes the current slowdown as “the lowest GDP growth in 36 years,” but argues it could reflect needed correction rather than structural collapse. He also highlights weak investment (capital spending contracting  $\sim 2.4\%$ ), soaring inflation ( $\sim 9.3\%$ ), rising poverty (extreme poverty up to  $\sim 9.3\%$ ), and low FDI ( $\sim 0.2\%$  of GDP).
- Selim Raihan (DU Economics Professor & SANEM Executive Director) warns that macroeconomic slowdown stems from both domestic mismanagement and global headwinds, including investor wariness, policy inconsistency, and political instability.

- Ahsan H. Mansur (Executive Director, Policy Research Institute) forecasts default loans could surge to 25–30% of total loans and warns that implementing IMF-driven loan policies could push defaults into the equivalent of >₹5 lakh crore taka.
- AB Mirza Azizul Islam (Economist) stresses that without political stability, exports, growth, and business confidence will continue to deteriorate.
- Dr. Anu Muhammad\*\* (Former Economics Professor, JU) claims that the interim government missed key opportunities to restructure the economy post-Hasina. Continues the pattern of vested-interest control, producing no meaningful results. Factory closures and unemployment are the outcome.
- Khondaker Golam Moazzem and CPD Survey (Nov 2024) CPD identified inflation, economic downturn, climate risk, and policy instability as top threats in the 2-year horizon (2025–26), with corruption and foreign exchange volatility among major obstacles.

## **Conclusion:**

Bangladesh's economy stands on the brink of a severe crisis. Production and investment have stagnated amid prolonged political uncertainty, rampant corruption, and a deteriorating business climate. Both local and foreign investors are increasingly hesitant to commit capital due to unpredictable policies, bureaucratic inefficiency, and weak rule of law. The resulting slowdown threatens to undo years of economic

progress, with key sectors—from garments to agriculture—facing stagnation or decline. Renowned economists have issued urgent warnings, highlighting multiple interconnected risks: political instability, which discourages long-term planning; rampant inflation, eroding purchasing power; plummeting investment, both domestic and foreign; chronic financial-sector vulnerabilities, including banking scandals and liquidity shortages; and structural policy failures, such as an unsustainable tax system and inadequate infrastructure. The consensus is unequivocal: Without immediate and decisive reforms, Bangladesh risks sliding from a temporary economic slowdown into a prolonged recession. Key measures must include restoring investor confidence through transparent governance, stabilizing the banking sector by addressing bad loans and mismanagement, and expanding the tax net to reduce reliance on regressive indirect taxes. Failure to act could deepen poverty, exacerbate unemployment, and trigger broader social unrest—jeopardizing not just the economy, but the nation’s stability as a whole.

### **Reference:**

- **“World Bank cut GDP growth forecast from 5.7% to 4.0% for FY2024–25”** *World Bank Report – October 2024.*
- **“Additional three million people in Bangladesh could be pushed into poverty in 2025”** *World Bank Estimates – 2025.*
- **“Industrial sector faces 330,000 job losses over the past year”** *BTMA Data – 2024–2025.*
- **“Major NBR strike halts international trade worth Tk**

- 2,500 crore daily” *National News Records – May–June 2025.***
- **“140 garment factories closed in seven months, leaving over 100,000 unemployed” *Reddit/Industry Estimate – 2025.***
  - **“Non-performing loans rise to 17% of total loans (~Tk 16.82 lakh crore)” *Financial Sector Audit – Late 2024.***
  - **“Estimated losses of \$150 million daily during curfews and communication blackouts” *Economic Impact Assessment – August 2024.***
  - **“CPD identifies inflation and economic downturn as top threats for 2025–26” *CPD Survey – November 2024.***

# How Plunder is Becoming a National Character

## *The First Wave of Terror*

In the afternoon of 5 August, upon news of Sheikh Hasina's departure from the country, in celebration the demonstrators marched towards the Prime Minister's Office, the Ganabhaban (Prime Minister's official residence), and the Parliament complex. During this time, large number of people entered these buildings and carried out widespread vandalism and looting. They took away whatever they could lay their hands on—furniture, televisions, refrigerators, clothes, frozen fish, ducks, chickens, goats—and emerged rejoicing. Many were even seen uprooting trees and shrubs from the gardens. Some brandished saris and undergarments in triumph. It was a vivid display of mass looting.

Circulated Videos on social media revealed that many of the looters belonged to the educated sections of society. Among them was former footballer Kaiser Hamid, who was seen carrying away items along with his wife and daughter. One army personnel was spotted leaving with a laptop. The army members deployed for the security of the Ganabhaban did not

attempt to stop the pillage. After the looting, the Ganabhaban was set on fire.

This incident set in motion an unchecked wave of looting that spread from the capital to the remotest corners of the country.

Around 4 p.m., an attack was launched on the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum housed in the three-storied residence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Dhanmondi 32. Every floor—laden with the memories of Bangladesh’s struggle and Liberation War—was ransacked and then set ablaze, destroying priceless historical relics. Simultaneously, looting occurred.

That same day, Sheikh Hasina’s late husband Wazed Miah’s residence Sudhasadan in Dhanmondi, several official residences of ministers and state ministers in Minto Road (known as the “Ministers’ Colony”), as well as the residences of the Attorney General and several judges were vandalized and plundered.

On 5 August, homes of various ministers, MPs, and political leaders across the country were attacked, vandalized, looted, and set on fire. Among the most notable targets were the residences of former President Md. Abdul Hamid, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, Local Government Minister Tajul Islam, Public Administration Minister Farhad Hossain, Land Minister Narayon Chandra Chanda, and Social Welfare Minister Dr. Dipu Moni.

In Bajitpur of Kishoreganj, MP Afzal Hossain’s “MP Market” and the market owned by his nephew, Gazirchar

Union Parishad Chairman Jewel Miah, were attacked and looted. The duplex residence of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, MP for Narail-2, and the two-storied house of Subash Chandra Bose, President of Narail District Awami League, along with properties of many local leaders were vandalized and robbed.

In Sherpur District, the Sadar Police Station, the magistrates' dormitory of the district administration, the Shreebordi Upazila Council office, various Union Parishad buildings, Awami League offices, and the residence of Sanuar Hossain Sanu, MP and General Secretary of Sherpur District Awami League, were all subjected to vandalism, looting, and arson.

In Arai hazar of Narayanganj, the residence of former Whip of the Parliament Nazrul Islam Babu in Krishnapura, the textile mill and home of municipal councillor Jahangir Hossain, and the houses of three MPs in Lalmonirhat were attacked and looted. Similar destruction and arson occurred at the residences of Munshiganj-3 MP Mohammad Faisal Biplob, State Minister Shafiqul Rahman Chowdhury, and MP Ranjit Sarkar in Sylhet, where two pharmacies were burned and a fashion house looted.

In Rajshahi's Ranibazar, the political office and residence of City Mayor and Awami League leader AHM Khairuzzaman Liton were attacked. In Dinajpur, the home of District Awami League President and MP Bir Muktijoddha Mostafizur Rahman Fizar met the same fate.

In Mymensingh's Trishal, homes and offices of the MP and several Awami League leaders were vandalized and plundered. In Taraganj, Rangpur, attackers stormed the

fertilizer warehouse of Awami League President Atiar Rahman and looted 460 sacks of fertilizer.

On 6 August, homes of at least 20 MPs, including recently ousted Religious Affairs Minister Faridul Haque Khan, Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder, and State Minister Zunaid Ahmed Palak, were vandalized, looted, and set ablaze.

In Bagerhat District, at least 100 Awami League and affiliated offices, residences, and businesses were attacked in the same manner. In Barguna, the scale of violence against Awami League offices, homes, and businesses was immense, along with the looting of over a hundred ordinary traders' establishments.

At a press conference on 11 August in Barguna Press Club, businessmen alleged that after the fall of the government, they were extorted for huge sums of money. Upon refusal to pay, their shops were attacked and looted of millions of takas in merchandise.

In Khoromopotti of Kishoreganj town, the offices and community center operated by the Freedom Fighters were heavily vandalized, set on fire, and looted, causing losses of nearly 100 million takas. On 5 August, every floor of the three-storeied building was ravaged. The Sadar Upazila Freedom Fighters' tin-shed office was looted as well. Seven air-conditioners, forty ceiling fans, a computer, a laptop, a laser machine, a camera, a photocopier, a generator, furniture, kitchenware, doors, chairs, carpets, basins, and stair railings were all stolen.

At noon on 5 August, the Army Chief assured the nation in a speech that the military was assuming responsibility for

citizens' safety. Three days later, an interim government was formed under Chief Adviser Dr. Muhammad Yunus.

While many blamed the immediate anarchy and the fragile state of the police for the looting, vandalism, and arson during the transfer of power, the second wave of destruction six months later disproved this notion. Some had warned from the outset that this was organized, structural terror, and subsequent events validated their claims.

## **The Second Wave: Bulldozer Terror**

On 4 February 2025, the verified Facebook page of Bangladesh Chhatra League announced that Sheikh Hasina, residing in India, would address the students via an online speech.

On 5 August, at noon, the verified Facebook page of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement—which had led the anti-Hasina protests and was known as the interim government's “powerhouse”—posted:

“If any media broadcasts the speech of this killer, genocidal, fascist Hasina, it must be ready to face the consequences.”

Later, at a press conference, the group's convener Hasnat Abdullah stated that any media airing Hasina's address would be deemed her accomplice. That evening, at 6:25 pm, he posted from his verified Facebook account:

“Tonight, the sacred land of Bangladeshi fascism will be liberated.”

Throughout the day, numerous activists had declared on social media that a “bulldozer march” towards Dhanmondi

32 would be organized. Around 9 pm, the July Revolutionary Alliance also announced a program heading for Dhanmondi.

On the afternoon of 5 August 2024, this historic residence and memorial museum had already been vandalized, looted, and set on fire. Again, on 5 February 2025, at around 8 pm, a group of violent individuals stormed the premises shouting slogans. They began vandalizing the property. Around 8:45 pm, they set the house ablaze.

Meanwhile, another group set fire to Sudha Sadan, the Dhanmondi residence of Awami League President Sheikh Hasina. Police were seen stationed on Mirpur Road near the entrance to House No. 32, while later, around 9 pm, army personnel arrived on the street. Neither the police nor the army intervened.

At approximately 10:45 pm, a bulldozer (excavator) was brought to demolish the house. Throughout the night, it was used to tear down the structure. By morning, a large portion of the front three stories had been demolished. Journalists present were informed that work would continue until the remaining structure was flattened.

That same night, in Khulna, the three-storied home of Sheikh Hasina's paternal cousins—known locally as Sheikh Bari—was razed by bulldozer. In Kushtia, the house of Mahbubul Alam Hanif, Awami League's Joint General Secretary and former MP, was bulldozed. In Cumilla, the house of former MP A.K.M. Bahauddin Bahar and the Awami League's metropolitan office were vandalized and set on fire—properties that had already been looted on 5 August.

The residence of Advisory Council Member and former Minister Tofail Ahmed, the former MP of Bhola-1 (Sadar), was attacked and torched. In Pirojpur, the house on Parerhat Road belonging to District Awami League President A.K.M.A Awal and his brother, former municipal mayor and district Vice President Habibur Rahman Malek, was vandalized and set alight. Later, Malek's filling station in the city's New Bus Stand area was ransacked. The residence of Akhtaruzzaman Fulu, Joint General Secretary of District Awami League, in Khamkata village of Sadar Upazila was also set ablaze.

In the morning of 6 February the Noakhali District Facebook page of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement posted:

“Revolutionaries of Noakhali, be ready with bulldozers. March to Kauwa Quader's house! Today at 11 am.”

Subsequently, the ancestral home of Obaidul Quader, Awami League General Secretary and former Minister, located in Mia Bari, Bororajapur village of Basurhat Municipality, Companiganj Upazila, was attacked, vandalized, and set on fire.

That same day, in Bagha's Arani Municipality of Rajshahi, the residence of former State Minister for Foreign Affairs and MP Shahriar Alam was set ablaze. In Narundi, the ancestral home of Awami League leader Mohammad Ali, father of actress and filmmaker Meher Afroz Shaon, was set on fire.

In Khoromopotti of Kishoreganj town, the house of former President Abdul Hamid was also attacked and set ablaze. In Bogura, the offices of District Awami League and District JASAD (Inu) were demolished. Later, the Awami

League office was mockingly declared the “Awami Abu Jahl Toilet” and the JASAD office was labeled the “Abu Sayeed Grand Mosque.”

In Savar, a “March to Manjuri” was proclaimed. Attackers stormed “Raj Manjuri,” the ancestral residence of Manjurul Alam Rajib, General Secretary of Upazila Awami League, and his brother Fakhru Alam Samar, Joint Secretary. Local resistance prevented them from setting it on fire.

On 7 February at 10 pm, a group calling themselves “Student Public” attacked and began looting the home of former Liberation War Affairs Minister and Gazipur District Awami League President A.K.M. Mozammel Haque in Ward 31 of Dhirashram, Dakshinkhan, Gazipur. Announcements were made via mosque loudspeakers calling on people to intervene, claiming a robbery was in progress. Locals surrounded the property. As the attackers fled, fifteen were caught, beaten, and injured. Army personnel later rescued them and transported them urgently to Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Medical College Hospital.

The Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, supporting the interim government, claimed the attackers as their own members and announced a nationwide protest against the injuries inflicted on what they called “innocent students,” alleging they were assaulted by Awami League “terrorists.” Subsequently, cases were filed against 239 Awami League members, and large-scale arrests ensued.

That night, the ancestral house of former Army Chief Moeen U Ahmed in Begumganj Upazila of Noakhali was attacked, vandalized, and burned.

## **The Third Wave of Terror: The Gaza Pretext**

Another wave of vandalism and looting unfolded in the first week of April. Under the banner of *Tawhidi Janata*, protests were announced nationwide on 7 April to condemn Israeli genocide in Gaza.

From one such demonstration in Sylhet city's Mirboxtula area, a mob attacked and ransacked a KFC restaurant and a newly opened hotel. One after another, outlets of Bata, Unimart, and several other prominent brands were looted and smashed.

At around 12:30 p.m., in Cox's Bazar's Sugandha area, a group of young men vandalized KFC, Pizza Hut, and Pansi. Between 12:30 and 1 p.m., in Bogura's Satmatha area, the Bata shoe store was attacked by the *Tawhidi Janata*. In Gazipur's Boardbazar, the Bata showroom met the same fate.

Around 4:15 p.m., in Chattogram's GEC intersection, KFC and Pizza Hut were vandalized.

For many years, Bangladeshis have demonstrated in solidarity with oppressed Palestinians, but never before had such protests turned into systematic looting and destruction.

## **More Than Political Revenge: A Social Affliction**

Immediately after the change of power on 5 August, looting reached even the remote river islands (chars) of Mehendiganj and Hizla upazilas in Barishal, which are cut off from the mainland. Criminal gangs arrived in trawlers to steal hundreds

of cattle and buffaloes grazing openly on hundreds of acres. They also seized the farmers' harvests.

In Kainagar of Chandpai Union, Mongla upazila of Bagerhat, the home and shrimp enclosure (gher) of Hashem Fakir were attacked and looted. The attackers occupied his 156-decimal shrimp farm.

In Charghat upazila of Rajshahi, government water bodies were indiscriminately seized, and their fish stolen. Continuing this spree, in the first week of March 2025, at least 10 fisheries in Sunamganj's Shalla, Derai, and Jamalganj upazilas were looted. The legal leaseholders, who paid the government enormous revenue, were left penniless as millions of takas worth of fish disappeared.

In Rupdia Madhyapara of Jessore Sadar, 14 homeless families had been sheltered for over 50 years by landowner Sayeed Box. After his death, Jamaat leader Khabir Khan and his followers began claiming ownership. Though they failed in court, after 5 August, they renewed threats to seize the land. On the morning of 13 April 2025, 60–70 armed Jamaat activists attacked, demolished all 14 homes, and beat men and women. Victims alleged that the attackers looted everything before leaving. Although police arrived, they did nothing, and the residents reported receiving new threats of another attack.

Seizing the opportunity created by the power vacuum, within hours in Sylhet's Gowainghat and Companiganj upazilas, enormous quantities of stones—worth hundreds of crores of takas—were looted from the famous “white stone” areas of Jaflong and Bholaganj. From the evening of 5 August

through the afternoon of 6 August, hundreds of small boats carried away stone without obstruction.

In Jaflong, Awami League activists' homes and businesses were also looted and torched. From Jaflong, Bholaganj, and Lovachhara—and all Sylhet's quarries—the mass plunder continued unabated.

According to a report in daily *Prothom Alo* on June 10, 2025, in the 10 months following 5 August, nearly 20 billion takas worth of stone had been looted—more than the total amount stolen over the prior 15 years combined.

Looting, vandalism, arson, and land-grabbing have grown into a form of nationwide anarchy—not merely act of political revenge. Nor have only Awami League leaders, workers, and supporters been the victims. Rather, through the government's inaction and tacit approval, this disorder has spread across society, harming countless apolitical citizens.

In the 54 years since the Liberation War of 1971, Bangladesh had not witnessed such mass lawlessness.

As part of their effort to unseat the uncompromisingly nationalist Awami League government, the US- and Euro-centric powers engineered a “Color Revolution.” One of its key tactics was to destabilize society and perpetuate that instability.

Marie Masdupuy, the French ambassador to Bangladesh and a prominent figure behind this Color Revolution conspiracy, compared the occupation of the Ganabhaban to the storming of the Bastille fortress. On 12 July, while speaking

at France’s National Day reception in Dhaka, she remarked:

“You have occupied the Ganabhaban as the symbol of a hated regime. Nearly a year has passed, and you will soon commemorate 5 August. The values you are fighting for are very familiar to us.”

One day, I hope to be able to tell the French ambassador: those values may be familiar to you—but they are not ours. Unlike the French, we did not colonize nations around the world, nor did we enrich ourselves by plundering others’ resources. That is why we do not glorify looting.

The epidemic of looting that began on 5 August with the Ganabhaban was not spontaneous; it was planned. One day, we will surely defeat these international looters and their local collaborators.

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# Developmental Statism vs. Transitional Uncertainty

## *An Analysis of Business Environment in Bangladesh*

For more than a decade, the Awami League government functioned as the architect of Bangladesh’s investment-friendly and globally connected economic order. Between 2009 and 2024, its policies reflected a developmental state model—where the state itself acted as a key driver of growth while ensuring a stable environment for both domestic and foreign investors. Under this framework, the Awami League government maintained a three-tiered approach:

**Policy Security:** The implementation of legal instruments such as the Foreign Private Investment (Promotion and Protection) Act 1980 and the Bangladesh Economic Zones Act 2010 provided clear legal safeguards for investors. Foreign companies were granted 100% ownership rights, along with full profit and capital repatriation guarantees—rare in developing economies.

**Institutional Stability:** Institutions like the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA), Export Processing Zones (EPZs), and Special Economic Zones (SEZs) were designed to reduce bureaucratic delays and encourage

ease of doing business. These mechanisms created a perception among investors that Bangladesh was a reliable and predictable partner for long-term ventures.

**Economic Diplomacy:** The Awami League government practiced a balanced foreign policy rooted in economic pragmatism, maintaining partnerships with India, China, Japan, South Korea, the EU, and the United States. Notable initiatives such as Japan's Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG-B), China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects, and U.S.-linked trade dialogues reflected this commitment to global integration.

### **Achievement Achieved:**

When Sheikh Hasina took office in 2009, Bangladesh's annual FDI inflows hovered below \$1 billion. With a declining GDP, the Premier was determined to transform the nation's economic wheel. Her government launched an ambitious, state-driven development agenda of which the one which lauds admiration are the Padma Bridge, Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, and Matarbari Deep Sea Port. Besides the infrastructures, she thought of focusing on economic zones with an ambition to create 100 specialized zones by 2030. Associated with her reforms plans were the streamline of business process removing the bureaucratic hurdles and the formation of the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA). In order to create new markets for Bangladesh business, she deepened ties with India, Japan, and China, securing major investments and diversifying sources of capital.

Hence, her efforts paid off. These efforts paid off. FDI soared to over \$4 billion by 2023, with energy, telecommunications, manufacturing, and infrastructure sectors leading the charge. Yet, beneath the surface, persistent geo-political challenges erupted which were often surfaced bringing in allegations of corruption, bureaucratic inertia, fragile banking sector, and legal inefficiencies. Sheikh Hasina is hailed as the rising star in South Asia, attracting billions in foreign direct investment (FDI) under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina. But the dramatic fall of her government in August 2024 sent shockwaves through the economy, triggering a collapse in investor confidence and exposing deep-rooted vulnerabilities. Now, as the country navigates a tentative recovery, questions loom over the sustainability of its FDI-driven growth model.

Under the following ground the business and commerce can be visualized:

## **1. Philosophy of Governance and Economic Rationality**

At its core, the Awami League’s approach to the business environment was anchored in a developmental-state philosophy, where economic growth was treated as a political project and foreign investment as a strategic instrument of national transformation. The state did not retreat from the economy; instead, it positioned itself as the central coordinator of capital, infrastructure, and global integration. This model rested on the belief that stability—even if politically centralized—was a prerequisite for long-term investment confidence. In this sense, economic governance under the

Awami League was teleological: growth, industrialization, and global competitiveness were seen as cumulative processes that required continuity of leadership and policy.

By contrast, the interim government under Muhammad Yunus operates within a transitional and procedural logic, rather than a developmental one. Its governing philosophy is not oriented toward long-term economic orchestration but toward temporary stewardship, crisis management, and political normalization. As a result, the business environment lacks a unifying economic narrative. The interim regime's legitimacy derives from moral authority and reformist intent rather than electoral mandate or developmental performance. Consequently, economic governance becomes reactive rather than strategic—focused on short-term stabilization rather than structural direction. From a philosophical standpoint, this reflects a shift from state-led developmental certainty to transitional managerial ambiguity.

## **2. Institutional Trust vs. Institutional Fragility**

Under the Awami League, institutions such as BIDA, EPZs, SEZs, and sectoral regulatory bodies functioned not merely as bureaucratic mechanisms but as symbols of institutional promise. Even where inefficiencies and corruption existed, foreign investors perceived a predictable “rules of the game.” This predictability created what Douglass North terms institutional credibility, where actors trust not the moral purity of institutions but their consistency. The Awami League's long tenure allowed institutions to sediment routines, informal

norms, and enforcement expectations that reduced uncertainty for foreign capital.

The interim government, however, governs in a context where institutional authority is contested, fragmented, and provisional. Bureaucracy lacks political backing, law enforcement is inconsistent, and regulatory decisions are often delayed or reversed. This produces what political economists describe as institutional thinness—institutions exist formally but lack effective authority or coordination. Investors are less concerned with the ethical intent of the interim government than with the erosion of enforcement capacity. In this sense, the interim regime presides over a system where institutions no longer function as anchors of trust but as sites of uncertainty.

### **3. Continuity of Policy vs. Volatility of Transition**

The Awami League's business environment was characterized by policy continuity across electoral cycles, which is exceptionally rare in developing economies. Laws protecting foreign investment, guarantees of repatriation, and long-term infrastructure projects signaled a commitment to intergenerational economic planning. Even geopolitical balancing—between India, China, Japan, the EU, and the U.S.—was executed with pragmatic consistency, reinforcing Bangladesh's image as a reliable node in global supply chains.

In contrast, the interim government embodies policy temporariness. Without a clear electoral horizon or consolidated

political authority, economic decisions are often cautious, reversible, or externally driven. The sharp pivot toward China reflects not strategic diversification but dependency-driven realignment, shaped by immediate liquidity needs rather than long-term national interest. This volatility undermines what investors value most: assurance that contracts, incentives, and regulatory frameworks will survive political change.

#### **4. Law as Instrument vs. Law as Uncertain Terrain**

Under the Awami League, law functioned instrumentally in support of economic objectives. While critics rightly note selective enforcement and political bias, from an investor's perspective the legal environment offered functional protection. Law enforcement agencies, courts, and administrative bodies were broadly aligned with the developmental agenda, creating a climate where disputes—though imperfectly resolved—rarely threatened systemic collapse.

The interim period, however, reflects a crisis of legal authority. Deteriorating law and order, administrative confusion, and weakened enforcement mechanisms have transformed law from an instrument of predictability into a terrain of risk. Legal uncertainty raises transaction costs, delays project implementation, and deters capital-intensive investments. Philosophically, this marks a transition from “rule-bound governance to contingency-driven administration”, where legality exists but lacks coercive certainty.

## **5. Investor Confidence as Political Capital vs. Investor Confidence as Casualty**

For the Awami League, foreign investor confidence was a form of political capital—evidence of international legitimacy and domestic success. FDI growth was not merely an economic metric but a validation of governance. Mega-projects symbolized sovereignty, capability, and national ambition. However, this confidence was also politically personalized, heavily tied to Sheikh Hasina’s leadership rather than deeply embedded institutional resilience. The collapse of her government revealed the fragility of this arrangement. Under the interim government, investor confidence has become a ‘casualty of political rupture’. The dramatic FDI decline, project cancellations, and capital flight reflect not just economic mismanagement but the absence of a coherent political center capable of reassuring markets. The modest rebound in early 2025—driven largely by China-backed projects and forced reinvestment—illustrates a hollow recovery, lacking the broad-based confidence necessary for sustainable growth.

## **6. Developmental Authoritarianism vs. Reformist Uncertainty**

Philosophically, the Awami League exemplified what might be termed developmental authoritarianism—a model that prioritizes growth and stability over pluralism and institutional autonomy. This model delivered tangible economic outcomes but at the cost of democratic depth and institutional independence. The interim government, by contrast, aspires

to reform and moral renewal but operates within a vacuum of authority, where good intentions lack structural power. This contrast reveals a deeper paradox:

- The Awami League provided certainty without inclusivity.
- The interim government offers inclusivity in principle but uncertainty in practice.

## **Conclusion: Two Visions, Two Risks**

The business environment under the Awami League was defined by predictability, continuity, and state-driven confidence, albeit under a centralized and politically restrictive order. The current interim government presides over a “liminal phase”, marked by moral legitimacy but economic fragility, institutional erosion, and investor anxiety. From a political economy perspective, the transition has exposed the dangers of over-personalized governance and the absence of resilient institutions capable of surviving regime change.

Ultimately, the contrast is not merely between two governments, but between two philosophies of economic governance: one rooted in controlled stability, the other suspended in transitional uncertainty. Bangladesh’s challenge moving forward is to synthesize the strengths of both—combining institutional predictability with democratic legitimacy—without reproducing the failures that led to the present crisis.

Indeed, the Hasina era proved that strong, centralized leadership can drive rapid growth—but also that such

gains are fragile if not underpinned by robust institutions. The post-Hasina crisis exposed the risks of overreliance on political continuity and a narrow set of partners. The future of Bangladesh requires an iron fist in its governance with structural reforms in the government and the financial sector. From a macroeconomic perspective, there needs alteration in the political climate, build on high reserves and attract investments in sectors which would bring in high yield. Associated with such initiative, the new government of Sheikh Hasina looked into reformation and upliftment of the higher education sector; however, the fall of Hasina accrues mostly on the students, for whom she built several universities in different regions of the country. In terms of international outlook, diversification of markets would lead to investor-friendly economy and thereby contributing to resilient in the wealth maximization of the country

# **The ill Fate of University Teachers after 5 August 2024: A scenario**

## **Introduction**

In Bangladesh, the teacher-student relationship holds deep cultural and emotional significance, rooted in respect, discipline, and moral guidance. Traditionally, teachers are revered almost like guardians, and their words carry considerable weight in shaping students' values and aspirations. While modern education has introduced more formal and institutional settings, the bond of mutual respect largely endures, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. However, growing commercialization of education, political influence in academic spaces, and rising generational gaps have somewhat strained this traditional connection. The quota movement and its aftermath of one point movement of outing the Sheikh Hasina government has created a complex scenario in Bangladesh where teacher student relationship is in peril and very bad in shape.

## **The background: Student movement and teacher role**

The student movements of 2024 in Bangladesh, particularly the quota reform protests, have significantly reshaped the teacher-student relationship, moving it from a traditionally hierarchical model to one based more on solidarity, empathy, and shared values.\*\* During the height of the protests, especially in July, many university teachers stood beside students—not just symbolically, but through active participation in rallies, public statements, and legal support. Many other teachers also supported mentally when their movement was in the line of quota reform. Teachers from institutions like Dhaka University and Jahangirnagar University condemned the repression of students and formed advocacy groups, such as the University Teachers’ Network against Repression, demanding justice and accountability. This visible support deepened students’ trust and emotional connection with their teachers, fostering a bond rooted in shared struggle for justice. However, the political tension, arrests, and disruption of academic activities also strained the teaching environment. Delays in classes and exams created anxiety, and in some cases, confusion and mistrust. Yet, out of this turbulence emerged a new form of dialogue—one where teachers were not just educators but allies in the democratic and civic awakening of students.

## **Misperception about faculties of Pro-Awami League**

The post-5 August 2024 scenario in Bangladesh brought a visible shift in the teacher-student relationship, marked by

tension, mistrust, and emotional distance, especially in public universities. After the crackdown on student protestors, mass arrests, and reported custodial torture following the anti-quota movement's climax, many students felt abandoned or betrayed by those faculty members who remained silent or distanced themselves from the unfolding crisis. This led to a rupture in the trust that had been building between progressive teachers and their students during the peak of the protests.

While some teachers had stood in solidarity earlier, the perceived silence or caution from broader academic leadership post-5 August was seen by students as complicity or cowardice. In campuses like Dhaka University, Rajshahi University, and Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, students began expressing frustration that their struggles for justice, representation, and fairness were not fully backed when it mattered most. Simultaneously, teachers also felt increasingly constrained, with surveillance, administrative pressure, and fear of reprisal impacting their freedom to speak out or support students openly. This was happened when the student's movement was backed by political parties such as BNP and Jamat-e-Islami, and their student wings. Then, the pro-liberation teacher forces doubt that their intention is to oust the government, not only the reform of the quota. Thus, many of the university teachers kept them silent when the government took initiative to suppress the movement.

This created a polarized environment where the earlier alliance of trust began to fracture. Many students now question whether the teacher-student relationship is one of genuine care or merely professional duty. However, the moment has also

sparked a broader conversation in academic spaces about the role of educators—not just as transmitters of knowledge but as moral agents with a responsibility to speak against injustice.

## **Post 5 August steps by some quarter of students**

The post 5 August scenario in the university was horrible which was never seen earlier in the history of Bangladesh. The pro-Islamic wings and pro-BNP student wings categorially targeted the teachers of all universities who were appointed by the previous government. These students created mob and forced all vice-chancellor, deans, and senate and syndicate members to resign from their posts. They even created panic situations and blockade the office and assaulted them to resign from their position. This was done systematically so that their like-minded teachers can hold the positions. According to *The Daily Star* reporting, students identified around 100 professors across multiple departments who were declared “unwanted” due to alleged support for the previous regime and suppression of the student protest. These teachers were temporarily barred from leading classes or participating in exams for several months.<sup>1</sup> *The Daily Star* reports that across the country, at least 150 teachers were forced to resign in the aftermath of Sheikh Hasina’s removal on 5 August, often through public pressure and humiliation. Many belonged to educational institutions nationwide universities.

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1 [https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/education/376673/backing-awami-league-during-uprising-over-50-du?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/education/376673/backing-awami-league-during-uprising-over-50-du?utm_source=chatgpt.com) “Backing Awami League during uprising: Over 50 DU teachers still barred from classes”

## Table: List of Teachers affected

### Dhaka University

Action	Individual affected
Boycotted by the students of Shibir and Chatrodol	103 faculties in different departments
Issued letter for permanent termination	02 faculties in Institute of Education and Research
Called by anti-corruption	30 faculties who were in different position during the previous government
Case filed	20 Faculty members
Case on attempt to murder	25 Faculty members
Arrested and in jail	04 faculty members
Total case filed	104 University teachers
Illegally removed from Dean offices	10 elected Deans
Illegally removed from the post of Syndicate	06 elected syndicate members
Illegally removed chairman either by mob or by executive order	10 chairman of different Departments

### Chittagong University

Action	Individuals Affected
Promotion Suspended	Assistant Professor Kushal Chakraborty
Forced Resignation	Assistant Professor Rontu Dash

### Jahangirnagar University, Savar

Category Affected	Number of Individuals
Teachers suspended	9
Additional teachers investigated	10
Students expelled/suspended	289
Officials with revoked pensions	Former VC & Registrar

## Rajshahi University

Institution	Affected Personnel	Nature of Disciplinary Action
Rajshahi University	2 associate professors	Suspended; possible termination
RUET (Rajshahi)	4 staff/faculty	Dismissed for alleged suppression roles

## Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur

Category Affected	Number
Suspended and case file	07 faculty members
Suspended and case file	09 administrative officers

## Jagannath University, Dhaka

Category Affected	Number
Suspended and case file	13 faculty members
Suspended and case file	10 administrative officers
Salary suspended	06 Faculty members

## Psychological Trauma of Affected Teachers

The psychological trauma and family destabilization faced by teachers who have been suspended, harassed, sacked, or publicly humiliated after the events of 5 August 2024—are serious and far-reaching. Based on human rights reports, media coverage, and precedent cases in Bangladesh and beyond, the consequences have manifested in several overlapping areas:

### Anxiety and Depression

Teachers subjected to suspension, show-cause notices, and expulsion without due process reported extreme emotional

distress. Many faced clinical depression, panic attacks, and sleeplessness, fearing surveillance, arrest, or job loss. Some were forced into isolation, fearing backlash even from colleagues or students.

## **Public Humiliation and Shame**

When university administrations publicly condemned or suspended teachers, often without proven misconduct, the stigma caused deep humiliation. Social media campaigns labeling them as “anti-state” or “anti-national” worsened the impact.

## **Loss of Professional Identity**

Academics build their self-worth around intellectual freedom and their status in the university. Being removed from that environment triggers a profound identity crisis, causing long-term psychological harm. Many senior faculty, especially women and those from minority groups, were devastated by what they saw as betrayal of institutional ethics. Some of the faculty members mentioned that they are in house arrest because they can't come outside due to fear of mob and arrest.

## **Family Destabilization**

### **Economic Hardship**

Sudden loss of salary, housing (in public universities), and job security left families in financial distress, especially for those supporting children's education or elderly parents. Teachers

blacklisted from other institutions struggled to find alternative employment. One female teacher of Jagannath University mentions that she has three daughters of age group of 5 to 10. Her salary is suspended by the university authority. Thus, she cannot buy milk and food for her children.

### **Social Stigma and Isolation**

In many communities, especially rural or conservative ones, losing a respected university post is considered dishonor. Spouses and children have faced social exclusion. In extreme cases, children were bullied at school, and spouses had to quit their jobs due to reputational fallout. A faculty of Dhaka University has resigned from his job because his daughter has been insulted in her school. The family has left the country and now settled in Australia. The son of the Ex-vice chancellor has also left the studentship and got admission in Australian university. There are numbers of examples of these kind of family embarrassing, insulting and harassment occurred after 5 August 2025.

### **Forced Migration or Exile**

Some affected teachers reportedly left Bangladesh to seek temporary academic refuge abroad. Others moved to remote areas or changed professions, leading to family separation and alienation.

### **Gendered Dimensions**

Female teachers faced additional trauma—such as online

abuse, sexualized rumors, and disproportionate targeting. In some cases, working mothers were accused of neglecting family duties due to their involvement in protests or solidarity actions.

### **Case Examples (Reported or Alleged)**

At Dhaka University, several prominent professors were mobbed by student wings, had their offices vandalized, and received anonymous death threats. One senior academic reportedly developed severe hypertension and PTSD symptoms.

At Rajshahi University, a teacher suspended for “disciplinary violations” was evicted from university housing within 48 hours, forcing his family into temporary shelter.

One Jahangirnagar University faculty member resigned after months of pressure, reporting that her teenage son had been targeted with hate speech on social media.

*Quotes from Testimonies (Media Reports & Anonymous Accounts)*

*“They took my job, but more than that, they stole my dignity in front of my students.”* — A senior professor, University of Dhaka

*“I have no strength left to fight. My children ask me why the neighbors call me a traitor.”*

— A suspended lecturer, Rajshahi University

*“We had to move out at midnight. No severance pay. My wife is clinically depressed now.”*

— A faculty member removed from Chittagong University

## Conclusion

The trauma faced by these educators goes far beyond professional punishment—it reflects a broader collapse of institutional protections, academic freedom, and democratic norms. Without restorative justice, counseling, and institutional acknowledgment, these wounds risk lasting for generations—not just among faculty, but across their families and communities.

## **The Domestic Conspiracies in July Movement**

After a year of fall of Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government, now, it is completely evident that a several vested quarters of Bangladeshi society were involved in different level of conspiracies after the general election held on January 2024 along with US-deep state involvement.

It is known that all aggrieved group came under a single covered issue which is ‘Quota Reform’ in July 2024 Movement. Be it political parties like BNP-Jamaat with their old adversaries, be it a section of civil society who are employed in different NGO’s or be it Dr. Yunus, the Chief Advisor of Current Interim Government with his legal cases or personal graze with Sheikh Hasina.

However, few organizational drawbacks of Awami League government also led the people of Bangladesh to participate in the July-August 2024. One of the major components was Awami League was unsuccessful in establishing an effective link with the Dhaka based urban middle-class and upper middle class.

Though these sections are not directly involved in politics, they have the power to influence others. It is an educated

section, who are employed in different NGO's, UN based organizations, English Medium Schools, Private Universities etc.

Another failure is lack of effort in monitoring international media and their activities. Many media persons received foreign funds to run blatant lies against Sheikh Hasina relentlessly for the last 2-3 years.

As an organization the Awami League did not try to develop young and dynamic leaders who can connect with the new generation. This major failure along with the conspiracies of vested quarters led to instigate people against the elected Al-government.

Now, in this write up, we would like to focus on some key issues that were capitalized by all groups to dethrone the Awami League from power.

## **A “meticulously designed” plan indeed.**

### **1. Reinstallation of Quota System and the Role of Attorney General Office of GoB**

The spark ignited as a verdict came on June 2024 from the High Court of Bangladesh about the reinstallation of Quota System. This quota was abandoned by the government in 2018. But mysteriously the attorney general office of the Government of Bangladesh did not respond at the very beginning of the hearing appropriately.

Notably, Supreme Court Lawyers of Bangladesh had its representative election only few months back before the

quota-related judgment came in June 2024. Definitely, it raises lot of questions about the implications of such a directive given by the court. The merit of the judgment creates a lot of confusion among the government job seekers as it contradicts the government's previous position.

High Court comprises Justice K. M. Kamrul Kader and Justice Khizir Hayat gave the verdict to reinstate the previous quota system, which sparked ill motivated conspirators to mobilizes students and bring the students for street agitation.

Later the Supreme Court scraped the previous verdict given by the High Court but it was too late. Students already took the street with the aim to prolong the movement in demand of government fall.

## **2. Legal Cases of Dr. Yunus and Deep State Involvement**

Now it is clear from different sources and news that Dr. Muhammad Yunus continuously tried to dethrone Sheikh Hasina led-Awami League government to fulfill his own political ambition. As he had to leave his Managing Director (MD) post in Grameen Bank when he lost the legal battle, his own personal revenge came into being in great manner that led to July-August 2024 movement under cover of the Quota Reform Movement. He was charged with several tax fudging cases previously too.

The first verdict of his conviction for tax evasion came in January 2024. At that moment several other court cases against him related to tax evasion were underway. As a Nobel Laureate

and because of his global image as the pioneer of micro-credit he exploited his reputation and connection to manipulate the local politics of Bangladesh. He attempted the same in 2007-08 during Fakhruddin Ahmed and Moeen U Ahmed-led government too. But failed due to mass protest.

But in 2024 he along with other vested quarter, he grabbed the power of Bangladesh and became Chief Advisor of the country with aid from USAID-funded NGO's

### **3. Hill tract and Quota System Grievances**

Interestingly, not much clarification is given in the verdict about the reinstatement of 1% quota for tribal, small race and ethnic minority groups in government jobs. The honorable court only mentioned that small ethnic groups are still economically backward class, so reservation is required for them.

But in the petition, no representatives from tribal group or small ethnic minor group appeared to court, demanding such quota reinstallation. So, the question arises when such reinstallation of quota for ethnic minorities came as a verdict.

Few days later it became more ambiguous when another verdict came from the Appellate Division of Bangladesh Supreme Court. In the latter one, directive for all sort of reservations was given including to the small ethnic group quota while no one from the small ethnic minority appeared before court.

Here, we should highlight the fact that unrest erupted in the Chattogram Hill Tract (CHT) area for the last couple of years. Few militant camps were also found in different part of Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban with arms and ammunitions.

News of deadly clashes between different ethnic groups also appeared in the media regularly but it remained unnoticed among the urban elites. Discussions regarding it in public sphere were also absent.

Remarkably, in 2024 national assembly election, voter turnout remains absolutely zero in many polling centers located in the hilly areas.

Many link these clashes and grievances of ethnic minorities to the sudden abundance of their quota from government jobs in 2018.

#### **4. Tax on Private Universities**

Private Universities in Bangladesh were established under Private University Act 1992. The act was amended in 2010. From its inception, several BNP-JAMAAT affiliated businessmen were pioneer in establishing private universities. Currently Bangladesh has around 108 private universities. Many Board of Trustee (BoT) members of these universities have direct eighter link with BNP-Jamat.

After Holey Artisan Café attack in 2016, many private universities came under scrutiny. Some measures in terms of monitoring were taken to curb eruption of Islamic Militancy in these universities. However, after Covid-19 and economic turmoil due to Russia-Ukraine war relaxation came in this monitoring process.

On the other hand, private universities especially their BoT became direct adversaries when an order came from the Appellate Division of High Court regarding imposing VAT

on these private universities. A long legal battle which started more than decade, came to a finishing end through such order.

But the way NBR has frozen the bank accounts of different reputed private universities such as North South University (NSU), Independent University of Bangladesh (IUB) etc., particularly before Eid-ul-Fitr of last year created huge grievances among the BoT members and private university authorities.

Detail scuffle between NBR and private universities can be found in this link.

The involvement of BoT members in July-August 2024 movement is exposed when all the authorities organized programme to mark one year of so called ‘July Revolution’ in this year.

## **5. Curbing Militancy and Trial of War Criminals**

There is no doubt that Sheikh Hasina led- Awami League government earned huge success in terms of curbing Islamic Militancy in the country. Neighboring country India hailed her several times for uprooting the insurgency in its eastern border. Seven state of India (known as Seven Sisters of India) were relatively stable. Separatist Group like Ulfa’s activity was very limited during her regime.

Trial of War criminals of 1971 was also another success of her regime. Government executed 11 convicted war criminals to death. Several were given life imprisonment along with other punishments. As the auxiliary forces of Pakistani Armi, most

of the convicted war criminals were connected politically with Jamaat-e-Islami. So the political rivalry against Awami League played the key role in last year's July-August Movement.

## **6. No Monitoring in Madrassas and Religious Schools**

For the last couple of years, several thousands of Madrassas were established in different parts of the country, specifically in the entry points of Capitals like Jatrabari, Gabtoli, Uttara etc. Several Madrassa's were also established in Chattogram Hill Tracts too. Most of the Madrassas provide food and provide daycare facilities if the parents sent their children to it.

This facility is considered a blessing as a huge number of female workers are employed in Ready Made Garments Sector of Bangladesh. These female workers sent their child to the madrassas in order to avail day care facility as well as religious education. But in the name of religious education, tender kids were given the lesson of radical Islam and commando training to establish it in the society.

Unfortunately, effective monitoring was completely absent in Madrassas. Reports also came regarding recovering arms and ammunition from Madrassas located at different parts of the country as well as Madrassas. [5][6]. These students and weapons were used during July-August movement of last year.

## **7. False Image of AL Regarding Media**

Though Sheikh Hasina led-government passed the bill of Right to Information Act in 2011, has given license to

several private television channels and newspaper in both her 1996-2001 and 2009-2024 regime, but an image was created intentionally by several agencies that she wanted to control the media, her government does not permit to investigative reports, news etc.

Digital Security Act was introduced in her regime but it was portrayed in negative manner. A perception was developed among the commoners that AL government has its own media people, other than that it does not allow any other media person or news men.

## **8. No Monitoring in Judiciary System**

The judicial system is one of the important pillar of Democracy. Lawyers play the vital role to uphold rule of law.

Unfortunately, lawyers with background of BNP-Jamat affiliation are in leading position in the judiciary. Party affiliation of lawyers actually played a very crucial role in July-August conspiracy. Regionalism also prevailed in the legal system, which ultimately demean the spirit of the constitution of the country.

## **9. Lack of Monitoring in NGO Fund**

Now it is revealed that several development agencies such as USAID, UKAID, DFID, CIDA etc along with World Bank, ADB gave direct fund to several NGO's (Brac, Grameen, CPD, Democracy Watch etc) of Bangladesh to conduct research on social issues. Through such funding a network has been developed among local Bangladeshi people.

Several Academicians of public and private universities were involved in those NGO's and development agencies as consultants and advisors. These academicians play a crucial role in last year's July-August movement specially in making public opinion.

As the President of the United States of America shuts down the activities of USAID worldwide, many vocal academicians are now completely silent on current economic and deteriorated situation of law and order of Bangladesh.

## **10. Anti-India Propaganda**

A vested quarter in Bangladesh ran a smear campaign against India for the last 3-4 years. According to them, current Modi government of India is looting and colonizing Bangladesh at its maximum extent, which Sheikh Hasina led-Awami League government completely failed to counter confidently with facts and true information.

Sheikh Hasina led Awami League government created a friendly environment for both the countries where both the neighboring countries were enjoying a peaceful environment ensuring regional security. In her regime she signed Land Boundary Act (BLA) with India, sorting out a long-withheld problem of enclaves of two countries. She signed helpful trading deal like "Transshipment" and imported electricity from Adani Group's power station, located in Jharkhand.

## **11. Without Realizing Global Crisis, False Allegation of Price hike**

Since 2020, the world has gone through Pandemic of Covid-19. Economy of the entire world was in peril due to successive lock-down, purchase of vaccine etc. The scenario turned into worst followed by Russia-Ukraine war. Several economic sanctions and counter sanctions were imposed on Russia by USA and several NATO countries and vice versa.

Without understanding the global crisis, a vested quarter in the country tried to portray this as the fault of the ruling party Awami League.

Apart from the given reasons, several reports related to corruption published in the media went unchecked and without any rebuttal.

Therefore, public perception among the core-supporters of Awami League also got confused and diverted.

# Long Shadow of the Big Game

## Introduction

The July–August Movement of 2024 in Bangladesh marked one of the most turbulent and violent political episodes in the country’s recent history. Initiated by a coalition of opposition parties and student organizations, the movement quickly escalated into a nation-wide confrontation that brought cities to a standstill, paralyzed state institutions, and left over 850 people dead. While the declared intent of the movement was to push for democratic reforms and the resignation of the government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the violent nature of the protests—including arson, armed assaults, attacks on law enforcement, and calls for foreign intervention—suggests a more complex and potentially orchestrated agenda. The scale, coordination, and international echoes of the unrest have led to widespread speculation about external involvement and covert geopolitical maneuvers. In this regard, the statement of the head of the interim government is highly significant. In a commentary published by BD Digest in April 2025, the author cites Yunus speaking at the Clinton Global Initiative meeting in the U.S.: *“It (the protest) was a meticulously designed*

*thing. It just didn't happen suddenly. Very well-designed. Even the leadership didn't know (him), so they could not catch him."* His confession signals the conspiracy behind the July-August movement in Bangladesh.

## **Violence and Mobilization Tactics**

What made the July-August movement extraordinary was the extent and intensity of the violence. Protesters often appeared highly organized, deploying locally manufactured weapons and engaging in direct confrontations with law enforcement personnel. Government buildings were attacked, roads blockaded, and arson became rampant. While opposition leaders and some international voices framed the response of the security forces as repression, many observers noted that the protests often crossed the threshold from civil disobedience to organized insurgency. The nature of the movement raised pressing questions: Was this a domestic cry for democracy, or was it being used as a proxy battlefield for larger geopolitical stakes?

## **The Role of International Media**

The response of international media during the crisis was deeply polarizing. Prominent Western outlets such as BBC, DW, CNN, and VOA were heavily criticized for disproportionately broadcasting the narratives of the protesters while neglecting ground realities and government perspectives. Newspapers like The Washington Post and The New York Times were accused of presenting unverified claims from opposition sources as fact, while Al Jazeera's coverage continued its long-standing critical

tone towards the ruling Awami League, reviving themes from its earlier report “All the Prime Minister’s Men.” Analysts argued that such coverage shaped an international perception of a brutal, authoritarian regime silencing democratic voices, ignoring the organized nature and provocations of the protestors.

Rights organizations were also accused of selective outrage—highlighting state excesses while remaining silent on the opposition’s role in stoking violence. This one-sided narrative, critics argue, skewed global perceptions and added fuel to the movement. At the same time, the unrest unfolded against a backdrop of heightened geopolitical interest in the Bay of Bengal and Indo-Pacific region, where global powers such as China, India, and the United States vie for strategic influence. Some commentators suggest that the July-August uprising became a convenient lever in these larger power struggles.

## **The Biden Administration’s Strategic Pressure**

The United States, under the Biden administration, played a controversial and possibly pivotal role in shaping the events that unfolded. While Washington never officially endorsed regime change, a series of policy moves appeared to embolden opposition groups and undermine the Hasina government. On 24 May 2023, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced a visa restriction policy targeting Bangladeshi individuals believed to be involved in undermining electoral processes—including vote-rigging, suppression of assembly, and press intimidation. Although framed as a democratic

safeguard, the policy was seen in Dhaka as direct interference in domestic politics.

Moreover, the U.S. had already sanctioned Bangladesh's elite paramilitary force, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), in December 2021 under the Global Magnitsky Act, citing human rights abuses. These moves collectively built a narrative of Bangladesh as a rights-abusing state, which opposition parties readily leveraged to gain international sympathy.

Sheikh Hasina's growing alignment with China, Russia, and India, and her refusal to join U.S.-led Indo-Pacific alliances like the Quad, were seen by some as catalysts for this diplomatic cold front. Observers argue that the U.S. pressure was driven more by strategic calculations than human rights concerns. The convergence of these geopolitical tensions with internal unrest suggested to some that the protests may have received tacit encouragement from Washington.

## **United Nations and Diplomatic Maneuvering**

During the height of the protests, the United Nations took a highly visible stance. UN Secretary-General António Guterres called for restraint and accountability, urging Bangladesh to investigate violence and protect civil liberties. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk issued multiple statements condemning government crackdowns, internet shutdowns, and arbitrary arrests—particularly those involving minors and journalists. While framed in the language of human rights, these statements were seen by pro-government voices as encouraging the protesters and delegitimizing state authority.

UNICEF joined in, stressing the toll on children and advocating for judicial reform and accountability. The cumulative effect was a narrative that painted the government as oppressive, creating a diplomatic environment that weakened morale within Bangladesh's security establishment. Law enforcement agencies like the RAB and even segments of the military reportedly became hesitant, fearing international backlash and sanctions.

## **Influencing the Armed Forces**

Perhaps most significantly, the UN is said to have applied subtle but effective pressure on the Bangladesh Army. In a BBC HARDtalk interview in March 2025, High Commissioner Volker Türk warned that any military involvement in suppressing protests could jeopardize the country's prized UN peacekeeping status. This cautionary message reportedly resonated deeply with senior military leadership, which values its reputation and international deployment opportunities. Though no official sanctions were declared, the reputational threats acted as a strategic deterrent. Public statements by Guterres and other UN officials further reinforced the notion that any military alignment with the government would be internationally condemned.

## **USAID, Democracy Promotion, and Controversies**

Amid the unrest, USAID's role in Bangladesh came under intense scrutiny. The agency's democracy support programs,

especially the \$21 million “*Nagorik*” or “*Amar Vote Amar*” project, were perceived by critics as tools for political engineering. Run under the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) through the International Republican Institute (IRI), National Democratic Institute (NDI), and IFES, the initiative funded civic engagement workshops, youth leadership seminars, and voter education programs that reached over 10,000 participants.

Although officially intended to support democratic participation, these programs were interpreted by pro-government commentators as fomenting dissent among the youth and opposition-aligned civil society. Former State Department official Mike Benz added fuel to the fire, claiming that USAID-backed programs had even sponsored rap music groups and social media campaigns aimed at undermining Hasina’s government. Benz further alleged that U.S. plans for a military base in Bangladesh were thwarted by Hasina’s administration, leading to retaliatory destabilization efforts.

Yet Bangladeshi government sources found no formal records of the much-discussed \$29 million allegedly routed to obscure entities, casting doubt on the transparency and accountability of these projects. Nonetheless, the perception of covert influence lingered, especially after former President Donald Trump publicly echoed these suspicions.

## **Trump’s Provocative Allegations**

In February 2025, Donald Trump’s remarks at CPAC and the White House Governors Working Session reignited

controversy. He accused USAID of channeling \$29 million to an unknown firm in Bangladesh, sarcastically claiming it helped fund “a radical left communist” opposition. He mentioned:

“Two people ... I think they’re very happy, very rich ... they’ll be on the cover ... for being great scammers.” “That \$29 million... help them vote for a radical left communist in Bangladesh.”

Though lacking concrete evidence, Trump’s comments resonated with those already critical of U.S. democracy-promotion strategies. Conservative media outlets and opposition voices to the Biden administration amplified these claims, suggesting a broader covert agenda to topple governments unwilling to toe the Western line.

## **Conclusion**

The July–August 2024 movement in Bangladesh cannot be understood solely as a domestic protest against governance. Its scope, timing, and international reverberations point to a confluence of internal grievances and external interests. From strategic U.S. visa policies to UN diplomatic pressure and the controversial role of USAID, the crisis offers a case study in 21st-century geopolitical contestation. Whether one sees it as a popular movement hijacked by foreign interests or a legitimate uprising against authoritarianism manipulated by power politics, the episode underscores the fragile interplay between national sovereignty and international influence in an increasingly interconnected world. It was a broader, meticulously orchestrated campaign involving both domestic

opposition and external actors. Several key indicators point toward this. *Firstly*, the sudden coordination of protests across multiple cities, using synchronized slogans and messaging amplified globally by diaspora-led digital campaigns, suggested centralized planning. Social media activity, particularly anonymous accounts boosting anti-government hashtags like *#HasinaOut*, trended internationally within hours of the protests beginning. *Secondly*, foreign media outlets such as *BBC*, *Al Jazeera*, *DW*, and *The New York Times* disproportionately amplified protestor narratives while downplaying or omitting reports of violence against law enforcement and public property—raising concerns of selective reporting and potential bias. This media imbalance coincided with earlier U.S. actions such as visa sanctions on Bangladeshi officials in 2023, interpreted by some as attempts to pressure the Hasina government and influence electoral outcomes. *Thirdly*, exiled opposition leaders were also active during this period, issuing calls for international intervention through U.S. and UK-based panels and interviews. Several of these exile groups were connected to organizations that had lobbied for foreign pressure on Bangladesh’s internal affairs. *Fourthly*, at the same time, foreign-funded NGOs reportedly received an increase in democracy and governance grants, which critics argue helped lay a soft infrastructure for unrest. The silence of the United Nations and key Western embassies on the deaths and injuries of law enforcement officers during the protests further added to suspicions of partiality. Meanwhile, some multilateral donors delayed financial assistance under the pretext of governance concerns, adding economic pressure on the state. Comments made by former U.S. President Donald

Trump in early 2025, where he remarked that “*we should’ve pushed harder in Bangladesh,*” were seen by government allies as informal validation of Western interference. Additionally, some analysts believe that both China and India had strategic interests in the unrest, aiming to reposition Bangladesh’s foreign policy orientation. Taken together, these developments suggest that the 2024 movement was not merely a reflection of domestic discontent but the result of complex geopolitical entanglements, informational warfare, and externally facilitated dissent.

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## The Election Conundrum

After the toppling of the Sheikh Hasina government through mob violence against public officials and public property in August 2024 and Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus's appointment as interim chief adviser, Bangladesh's major political parties have expressed deep mistrust in both the caretaker government and the current Election Commission.

While grassroots BNP (the only other major political party besides Bangladesh Awami League) leaders spent the past ten months comfortably entrenching themselves through informal control of tampoo stands and local marketplaces, granting Muhammad Yunus's interim government a temporary honeymoon. BNP, eyeing a return to state power, has called into question the neutrality of a number of Advisers in the Cabinet. Yunus's own National Citizens Party (NCP), still awaiting formal registration, is already marred by corruption allegations against its leadership. Ironically, BNP's confidence lies not in the government but in the Election Commission, whose current leadership is widely viewed as composed of party sympathizers making the Commission BNP's stronghold and the Yunus cabinet NCP's Achilles' heel.

None of the three key parties—Sheikh Hasina's Awami League (AL), the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP),

and the National Citizens Party (NCP) – treat the Yunus administration as a neutral arbiter. Each has publicly called into question the legitimacy of the interim regime and the ability of the EC to deliver a credible vote. Below, we summarize each party’s stance with representative quotes and statements:

## **Awami League: Regime Illegitimate, EC Complicit**

Awami League leaders have denounced the Yunus government as unconstitutional and coercive. They consider the toppling of the Sheikh Hasina government as undemocratic and a result of deep state conspiracy by Muhammad Yunus. Sheikh Hasina has repeatedly accused Yunus of illegally usurping power.

In a public audio message, Sheikh Hasina branded Dr. Yunus a “militant leader” who “illegally seized power” without any popular mandate. She lambasted the interim administration’s actions as “illegal” and “unconstitutional,” especially its ban on the Awami League itself: “Who gave this militant leader, who has illegally seized power, the right to touch the constitution?... This is illegal.” Hasina declared.

Such rhetoric makes clear the AL’s position that the caretaker government lacks any legitimacy or neutrality in its view. By extension, AL officials see the Election Commission as tainted by this process.

Indeed, on 10 May 2025 the Yunus government cited “national security” to suspend the activities of Bangladesh Awami League under the Anti- Terrorism Act, and days later the EC formally suspended the party’s registration. While

this formal suspension came on May 2025, the operation of Bangladesh Awami League was de facto criminalized by the government from much earlier. The interim government led by Muhammad Yunus empowered a religious extremist and militant mob to dismantle all the offices of Bangladesh Awami League. All processions faced illegal mob violence by government sponsored extremist mobs. Regardless Sheikh Hasina has denounced such banning of her party as unconstitutional (calling it “illegal”), implying that under these conditions neither the interim administration nor the EC can be trusted to run a fair vote.

In sum, the AL leadership flatly rejects the Yunus government’s neutrality and views the EC as a partisan enforcer rather than an impartial umpire.

## **BNP: Questioning the Neutrality of Yunus Government**

The BNP, whose leaders largely boycotted the January 2024 elections, has insisted that neutrality is indispensable for any credible election. While BNP officials say they have cooperated with the interim government, they stress that key figures must be removed and institutions overhauled to achieve neutrality.

BNP standing committee member Khandaker Mosharrak Hossain told journalists that, to “ensure free, fair, and neutral elections” and uphold government “impartiality,” the interim advisory council must be reconstituted and its controversial advisers removed. In its formal written submission to Muhammad Yunus, the BNP likewise urged that “some

controversial advisers whose statements and actions have tarnished the government’s image should be removed” to “maintain the neutrality of the interim government”.

BNP standing committee member Salahuddin Ahmed said that they demanded the removal of the national security adviser and two student advisers, citing their roles as detrimental to the neutrality of the interim government.

These statements show the BNP’s conviction that at present the caretaker administration is not neutral, and that credible elections cannot proceed unless its partisan elements are purged. Such demands imply they do not yet regard the EC as fully capable of overseeing a free election. In summary, the BNP’s official line is that under Yunus the interim setup is not neutral and must be reformed (even “recast” to some degree) before elections can be trusted.

## **NCP: Calls for EC Reforms**

The National Citizens Party has likewise voiced serious reservations about the fairness of the electoral framework. NCP leaders have called for concrete institutional changes. Notably, NCP convener Nahid Islam publicly demanded the “reconstitution of the Election Commission” as part of a package of reforms. After meetings with Chief Adviser Yunus, NCP spokesmen declared that creating a “level playing field” will require recasting the EC. In fact, an NCP adviser told journalists, “we do not believe that a level playing field exists under the present structure”, plainly signaling lack of confidence in the existing election commission. These calls

mirror other parties' insistence that the EC, like the caretaker government, needs overhaul.

Unlike the Awami League's outright antagonism or BNP's firm demands, NCP leaders have maintained support for Muhamamd Yunus. For example, joint convenor Sarwar Tushar told AlJazeera that "we believe Dr. Muhammad Yunus is committed to his historic responsibility" and urged unity among parties.

In short, the NCP strongly endorses Muhammad Yunus's interim administration but demands new appointments and institutional guarantees to the Election Commission.

## **All Parties Question Neutrality and Credibility**

Taken together, all three parties reject the notion that Bangladesh's interim administration or its Election Commission are above politics. The Awami League deems the Yunus regime illegitimate and views the EC's banning of AL as proof of bias. The BNP insists on scrubbing the partisan advisers and explicitly rallies the public to "demand a neutral government". Even the National Citizens Party, while more conciliatory, openly calls for recasting the Election Commission to establish a level playing field. Thus, none of the major stakeholders has expressed confidence that as currently constituted the Yunus government or the Election Commission could preside over a truly free and fair election.

These official positions are backed by widespread public statements. Sheikh Hasina's audio message (circulated widely

online) described the caretaker setup as an “illegal” power grab carried out with “terrorists”, and party spokesmen have echoed that “Yunus does not have the mandate of the people”. BNP press conferences and written letters to Yunus similarly note that without the removal of certain advisers and the “recasting” of institutions, the government cannot be considered impartial. The NCP has raised parallel concerns, urging a joint dialogue to ensure reforms and fearful that without them the election would fall short of public expectations.

Credible reports from Bangladeshi and international media uniformly show that Bangladesh’s political spectrum is deeply skeptical. No major party has labeled the interim government or EC as neutral; on the contrary, they demand significant changes before pledging confidence. This pervasive lack of trust is itself a serious red flag. Given that free and fair elections require both a genuinely impartial caretaker administration and a credible commission, the unanimous doubts suggest the need for fresh appointments and removal of certain advisers to the interim government and commissioners to the election commission. To restore public trust, stakeholders (and observers) are calling for a reconstituted caretaker team and a revamped Election Commission composed by mutual consent. Only such new, broadly accepted appointments can overcome the current “crisis of confidence” and lay the groundwork for a truly legitimate electoral process.

# **Unmasking the Interim Government: The Slide Into Fascism in Bangladesh**

Since the inception of the interim government, most are aware of the events that have unfolded over the past nine months in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, a summary is warranted. During this period, widespread protests and violent clashes became a regular occurrence. Individuals associated with the current government were involved in acts of violence, including the killings of ruling Awami League activists, yet were granted impunity, shielded from legal accountability. We have witnessed the eruption of state-backed violent mob actions aimed at pressuring the President to resign, an effort believed to be orchestrated by the interim government. Reports have emerged of coercion, threats, and even physical assaults against several Supreme Court Justices, including the Chief Justice, as well as public and private sector officials, forcing many to resign. Attacks have also been carried out against religious minorities and followers of Sufi and Baul traditions. Additionally, morality policing has reportedly led to violence against women. There have been incidents of violence within court premises and attacks on political figures following their

release on bail. Several journalists have also been forced to resign under threat. These actions are attributed to the interim government.

The most pervasive issue over the past nine months, however, has been the widespread filing of fabricated or politically motivated cases. Leaders and activists of the Awami League have not only been killed, but their homes and businesses have also been destroyed.

Many have fled the country or are attempting to do so. Individuals with no formal ties to the Awami League, those who may have held positions or received benefits during its tenure, have likewise been targeted. Surprisingly, even those who actively participated in anti-government protests and advocated for the fall of the Awami League have not been spared. Among those affected are journalists, lawyers, and notable cultural figures. Security forces, including the Army (which has attained magistracy powers), have remained largely inactive in addressing or preventing these excesses.

When a government targets journalists, cultural figures, civil society members, and legal professionals through fabricated criminal charges, including false murder accusations, it is widely seen as an attempt to silence dissent. Such behavior is emblematic of fascist or authoritarian regimes.

From the outset, Bangladesh's unelected interim government has pursued a politics of revenge rather than reconciliation. Although assigned limited responsibilities for a short duration, it has egregiously overstepped its mandate, contributing to a marked decline in civil life across the country.

A culture of impunity and lawlessness has taken root, enabling certain individuals to amass significant power and wealth through corruption. These actors, among them government advisors and student leaders, akin to those in the Awami League, appear to believe they will remain in power indefinitely and are actively working to reshape the political landscape in their favor.

## **Weaponizing Justice: Fabricated Cases to Silence Opposition**

As previously mentioned, the filing of false and politically motivated cases against journalists, cultural figures, and lawyers is well-documented. Numerous arrests have taken place, particularly targeting individuals who have spoken out against the government or taken part in protests. Approximately 15,000 Awami League members and supporters have been arrested without warrants under the banner of “Operation Devil Hunt,” many charged with inciting violence or arson based on dubious legal grounds.

Some have been detained under the draconian Special Powers Act, which makes them ineligible for bail or legal redress. Eighty-four pro-Awami League lawyers have been denied bail and jailed. In Chattogram, over 100 Hindu lawyers were charged in connection with the murder of a lawyer named Alif, raising serious concerns about selective and communal targeting. This trend continues. Just two days ago, a new murder case was filed naming Sheikh Hasina and 406 other individuals as accused. Among them are political leaders, journalists, lawyers, entrepreneurs, and professionals from various fields. Notably, cultural advisor Mostofa Sarwar

Farooki questioned the inclusion of actor Iresh Zaker, arguing that since Zaker supported the anti-government movement, he should not have been implicated. This raises troubling questions: Does political alignment determine guilt? Are those who oppose the movement automatically considered culpable?

Another case filed in March 2025 charged 286 individuals, including prominent actors such as Suborna Mustafa, Azizul Hakim, Nusrat Faria, Meher Afroz Shawon, Apu Biswas, Nipun Akhter, and Zayed Khan, with attempted murder. There is speculation that the case was backdated and filed retroactively. Previously, writer and Liberation War researcher Shahriar Kabir and actor and MP Asaduzzaman Noor were reportedly detained and held under harsh conditions. Actor Chanchal Chowdhury, who had performed in front of Sheikh Hasina, is allegedly in hiding. Nusrat Faria and others were reportedly charged solely for participating in a biopic on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, though cultural advisor Farooki spared his wife, Nusrat Imroze Tisha, and a few others from similar accusations.

It is widely believed that these cases lack any legal merit and are solely intended to suppress dissent. It seems implausible that a single plaintiff, such as a BNP leader filing on behalf of his murdered brother, could compile such exhaustive lists including artists, journalists, and intellectuals. This bears a disturbing resemblance to the notorious “lists” compiled by Al-Badr militia forces during the 1971 Liberation War.

There is a strong reason to suspect that these case lists were generated by actors within the government to silence the voices of the opposition.

## **Behind the Mask of Reform: Fascism and the Yunus Interim Regime**

When a government resorts to fabricated charges, arrests, and torture to silence opposition, it may be exhibiting fascist tendencies. Let us evaluate the current situation in Bangladesh through this lens:

### **Attempts to Silence Journalists, Writers, and Artists:**

There have been deliberate efforts to silence journalists, writers, and artists. For instance, the cultural advisor reportedly forced three journalists to resign for failing to ask questions in alignment with his preferences. Deepto TV's broadcast was allegedly suspended under pressure. Sustained pressure has been applied to media outlets, compelling editors and owners to practice self-censorship. Meher Afroz Shaon and Sohana Saba were reportedly detained and threatened to such an extent that, upon release, they chose to remain silent. While similar incidents occurred under the Awami League government, colleagues in the media assert that such occurrences are now happening with far greater frequency and severity.

### **Abuse of the Legal System**

The judiciary is increasingly being used as a political weapon to suppress dissent. The systematic filing of fabricated cases appears intended solely to neutralize opposition. Although the penal code provides penalties for filing false claims, such actions continue unchecked, allegedly due to the complicity

of legal advisor Asif Nazrul. He has publicly stated that if the authorities are determined to proceed with such cases, there is no mechanism to prevent them.

## **Labeling Government Critics as ‘Enemies’**

A systematic effort is underway to discredit critics of the government. Prominent voices such as Nabonita Chowdhury and Masuda Bhatti have used platforms like YouTube and Facebook to express dissent. In response, the government has reportedly filed murder charges against them to suppress their voices. Even individuals with past associations to the previous government have been labeled as “enemies”, a label now seemingly synonymous with being named in a fabricated case.

## **Spreading Misinformation through Propaganda Mechanisms**

Misinformation, rumors, and distorted narratives are being used to manipulate public opinion. The Chief Advisor’s press wing, allegedly supported by the political group Kings Party (NCP), is said to have disseminated false or exaggerated claims to bolster the image of the Chief Advisor and the government. Campaigns such as “We want Dr. Yunus in power for five more years” are reportedly being run using state resources across newly created political and social media platforms.

Recently, the Home Affairs Advisor expressed a desire for the interim government to remain in power long-term. Just days later, Chief Advisor Dr. Yunus stated on Al Jazeera that the people wanted them to continue. By offering vague

promises of future elections, the government appears to be attempting to co-opt political parties and maintain an extended grip on power. Many have long argued that the current regime is evolving into a fascist system, mirroring the aspirations of certain Islamic fundamentalist groups. By eroding the founding principles of the state, the administration seems to be steering the country toward the final stages of authoritarian rule.

## **Final Remarks**

The current government of Bangladesh is an unelected interim administration. It was entrusted with a limited mandate: to implement reforms, ensure justice for the July–August killings, and organize prompt elections. Instead, it has embraced authoritarianism and political vengeance. Despite its lack of democratic legitimacy, the interim government is entering into international agreements and interfering in foreign policy, particularly in the Rohingya crisis, beyond its mandate. Under the guise of humanitarian concern, it is facilitating technologies such as Elon Musk’s Starlink, which could allow unregulated foreign military access. Furthermore, the government is involving itself in matters concerning the Arakan Army and India’s northeastern states, both beyond its jurisdiction. Any initiative to create a “humanitarian corridor” for the Arakan Army could potentially serve as a channel for arms trafficking and militant activity, risking military intervention in Bangladesh. The interim government is acutely aware that it lacks popular legitimacy and thus operates under the assumption that it will not be held accountable, even if

national sovereignty is compromised. Its decisions are likely to create significant challenges for any future elected government or the military. Dr. Muhammad Yunus, who in his 85 years has contributed little of substantive value to the nation, is now touring Asia and Europe with unclear intentions.

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