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Rising Islamist and Anti-Hindu Sentiment in Bangladesh in Wake of Pahalgam Attack

Executive Summary:

- Following the ousting of longtime Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Islamist factions have filled the power vacuum in Bangladesh, leading to a surge in anti-Hindu violence. These groups have capitalized on growing anti-India sentiment—especially after the Pahalgam terror attack—to justify attacks against the Hindu minority and push a radical Islamic agenda.
 - Jihadist propaganda and pro-Pakistan Islamist movements have resurged, framing India as an existential threat to Islamic identity in Bangladesh. The interim government's inaction has emboldened extremists, deepening sectarian tensions and heightening the risk of regional destabilization.
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Bangladesh's political and religious landscape has witnessed a sharp sectarian turn since the ouster of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her flight to India in August 2024. What began as protests over job quota reforms soon escalated into a broader civil uprising. Exploiting the ensuing power vacuum, factions that include Islamist groups have expanded their influence, propagating anti-Hindu sentiment nationwide.

This situation has grown more pronounced following the April 22 terror attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir, where 26 Hindu tourists were killed by Islamist militants who reportedly targeted victims based on their religion ([OpIndia](#), April 22). Though the attackers were linked to Pakistan-based terror groups, the incident and India's retaliatory attacks against Pakistan reverberated in Bangladesh, and concerns over relations between the two states are at a new high.

The interim Bangladeshi government led by economist Muhammad Yunus now faces a confluence of crises ranging from Islamist extremism and sectarian violence to mounting geopolitical tensions. The growing vulnerability of religious minorities in Bangladesh, particularly Hindus, reflects both the resurgence of radical Islamist forces and escalating tensions with India.

Anti-Hindu Violence

The Bangladeshi Hindu community comprises about 8 percent of the country's population and has historically aligned with Sheikh Hasina's Awami League ([Minority Rights Group](#), accessed June 23). The group has suffered from the political and sectarian unrest that has gripped Bangladesh since the anti-government "Monsoon Revolution" in July 2024 ([Asian News International](#) [India], November 28, 2024; [United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), February 12). The turning point was on January 3, when a Hindu businessman was abducted and his shop looted in Patuakhali, followed by the robbery of another Hindu family's home in Jessore the next day by Islamists posing as police. Heightened security concerns were subsequently evident in the run-up to the April 2025 Hindu festivals, such as Maha Ashtami and Basanti Puja, when military forces were deployed to protect worshippers ([Press Trust of India](#), April 6). In spite of this, Hindu religious sites and symbols were desecrated with apparent impunity. On March 1, the idol of Goddess Saraswati was vandalized at a temple in Sirajganj, and a centuries-old sacred banyan tree housing a Shiva temple venerated by both Hindu and Buddhist communities was cut down in Madaripur on May 5 after being labelled "un-Islamic" ([TBS News](#), May 6). On May 27, the Hindu Goddess Kali temple was burned down in a pre-dawn arson attack in the Hindu-majority Ghuna-Sadarpara Area of Manikganj ([The BorderLens](#), May 28).

Between September and October 2024, several sectarian incidents presaged the surge in violence against Bangladesh's Hindu minority, particularly during their Ganesh Puja and Durga Puja Hindu festivities. The November 25 arrest of Chinmay Krishna Das, a Hindu spiritual leader and former member of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) underscored the precarious position of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh. Allegations against Chinmay Krishna Das

of desecrating the Bangladeshi national flag (by flying a saffron flag above the Bangladeshi national flag) aimed at suppressing growing demands from the Hindu community for protection and equal rights under the new Bangladeshi government. Chinmay Krishna Das remains in prison under other charges, including the murder of a lawyer, obstruction of police duties, and attacks on lawyers and litigants ([Dhaka Tribune](#), May 5). His detainment has drawn international attention ([Dhaka Tribune](#), November 25, 2024; [Indian Express](#), December 16, 2024).

Following the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack, anti-India sentiments further intensified in Bangladesh. On April 29, Major General (ret.) Fazlur Rahman, a close aide to interim leader Muhammad Yunus, sparked controversy by suggesting on Facebook that Bangladesh should align with Pakistan if India attacked and occupied the latter's northeastern states in the event of war ([NDTV](#), May 3). On April 18, Bangladesh and Pakistan held their first foreign secretary-level talks in nearly 15 years, indicating Dhaka's shifting foreign policy under the Yunus government toward Islamabad and away from New Delhi ([Times of India](#), April 17). Rahman's remarks and improving relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh could intensify Islamist sentiments framing Hindus as aligned with India's "Hindu nationalist" agenda.

During this same period, Hindus in Bangladesh came under threat for alleged blasphemy:

- On September 5, 2024, a man was assaulted in Khulna over a purported blasphemous online post, followed by a similar attack on a student at Jessore Science and Technology University on September 8 ([New Age](#), September 5; [BD24Live](#), September 7);
- Earlier, in December 2024, Muslim mobs attacked Hindu homes and temples following false blasphemy accusations against a boy, Akash Das ([Al Jazeera](#), December 12, 2024);
- In January, Pranta Talukder, another Hindu, was abducted and tortured in Chittagong for purported blasphemy ([Prathom Alo](#), January 2; [Dhakapost](#), March 5);
- In April, Hindu goldsmith Akhil Mondol was brutally assaulted in Tangail under similar pretexts ([Naya Diganta](#), April 6); and
- Lastly, on May 14, Bikash Dhar, a Hindu student at the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, was arrested on allegations of blasphemy in Moulvibazar ([Observer Bangla](#), May 16).

These incidents reflect a disturbing pattern of weaponized blasphemy claims used to persecute and intimidate Hindus in Bangladesh.

The Jihadist Propaganda Surge

The ongoing political vacuum in Bangladesh has created an opportunity for Islamist and jihadist groups, including al-Qaeda and Islamic State (IS)-linked factions, to resurface and expand their influence. This includes the Ansarullah Bangla Team, Neo-Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh and Hizbut Tahrir ([Firstpost](#), January 7). Meanwhile, the al-Qaeda-linked Ansarula Bangla Tigers, emboldened by the release of ideologue Jashimuddin Rahmani from prison in August 2024, has issued threats against India, incited violence against Bangladesh's Hindu minority, and called for an Islamist uprising ([Firstpost](#), September 14, 2024). Rahmani's rhetoric aligns with Usama Mahmood, leader of al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), who praised the ousting of Sheikh Hasina and advocated for a "pure" Islamic government ([Swarajya](#), August 11, 2024). Mahmood's narrative emphasizes resistance against secular influences, mainly from India, framing them as threats to Islamic identity and sovereignty. [1] [1] Ustadh Usama Mahmood, "Bangladesh: The Emerging Hope of Supporting Islam For the Muslim masses of Bangladesh on the occasion of the...

These developments underline the growing challenge posed by radical groups to regional stability and democratic governance in Bangladesh. Similarly, IS's regional branches have released posters and articles exhorting Bangladesh Muslims to exploit the opportunity to re-establish the caliphate, calling democracy the biggest curse upon Muslims of Bangladesh. [2] [2] "O Muslims of Bangladesh: Hah Way Done, Now Strive For The Rule Of Allah," Al Juhar Media, September 3, 2024.... Amid this challenging situation, the emergence of pro-IS *al-Bengal Media* in the last

several months suggests a renewed push to expand IS influence in Bangladesh ([X/@TRACTerrorism](#), January 23).

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) has pursued a vigorous anti-India strategy, leveraging the instability to forge alliances with other Islamist parties to consolidate power. JI had been banned by the Hasina government, though the ban has recently been overturned ([Al Jazeera](#), June 1). Prominent pro-Pakistan hardline Islamist groups like JI, Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh, and Islami Andolan Bangladesh have started denouncing some of the Yunus government's reforms as "anti-Islamic" ([Social News](#), April 25). Their opposition underscores the growing assertiveness of Islamist factions in shaping Bangladesh's socio-political discourse.

Conclusion

Bangladesh's increasingly volatile political and religious climate has strained its already fragile relationship with India. Anti-India and anti-Hindu rhetoric has surged, fueled by elements within the caretaker Yunus government and Islamist factions in the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) ([X/@Voice of Bangladesh Hindu](#), December 18, 2024; [Republic World](#) [India], March 31). Pro-Pakistan groups like Jamaat-e-Islami and Hefazat-e-Islam have capitalized on the political vacuum to push anti-India and anti-Hindu narratives. Amid this tense backdrop, the Yunus government has adopted a cautious approach toward protecting Hindu minorities and India. It remains to be seen, however, if the new government is able to properly rein in Islamist extremism and safeguard minority communities; the failure to do so only deepens regional instability.