

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	562
Land:	Bangladesh
Kilde:	The New Humanitarian (TNH)
Titel:	Democracy in darkness - Attacks on journalists silence pre-election Bangladesh
Udgivet:	11. februar 2026
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	16. juni 2026

Democracy in darkness: Attacks on journalists silence pre-election Bangladesh

"In the past, there was fear of the government, now it is fear from the streets, fear from the mob, and fear from the political parties."

On the evening of 18 December 2025, panic rippled through the newsrooms of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo, two of Bangladesh's most popular media outlets. Mobs armed with sticks and petrol torches forced their way past the gated buildings in Dhaka. They set fire to vehicles and pushed towards the main press buildings. Inside, journalists and support staff scrambled in the smoke and heat, trying to secure files and save equipment as the blaze grew.

For the first time in decades, the country's two largest newspapers were forced to stop printing. Outside, the crowd cheered. Inside, reporters huddled on the rooftop, fearing for their lives. This was not a random act of violence. It followed a week of riots, anti-India demonstrations (former prime minister Sheikh Hasina has been living in India since her [2024 ouster](#), after a violent protest crackdown led to an estimated 1,400 people being killed), and attacks on religious minorities.

Observers accused the interim government of allowing it all to happen: In comments to The New Humanitarian, New Age editor Nurul Kabir described the attacks as "persistent, collective acts of violence".

Abdul Goni, a photojournalist from The Daily Ittefaq, covered the December violence. For journalists, "the fear stems from mob justice", and that they can attack anyone at any time, he told The New Humanitarian. "A system has emerged, especially among younger groups, to incite mob violence. When they dislike something, they turn it into mob justice."

Under Hasina's 15 years of autocratic rule, media freedom was shrunk through strict laws, surveillance, and direct government control. Her government used the 2018 Digital Security Act to arrest journalists and censor critical outlets, while broadcast licenses were tightly controlled and intelligence agencies monitored dissent.

Now, under the interim government led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus, the threat is less about official censorship and more about mob intimidation.

Journalists report that if a newspaper publishes something unpopular, crowds quickly appear with sticks, fire, or threats. An August 2025 article in the Al Jazeera Journalism Review [noted](#) that reforms were introduced to undo Hasina's legacy of censorship, but the environment remains hostile, with intimidation replacing direct state bans. Rights watchdogs have also [confirmed](#) that harassment and mob violence have become the main tools to silence independent reporting since Hasina's fall.

This shift has created a mobocracy, where crowds act like police and decide what can be said. With elections slated for 12 February, many in Bangladesh are calling for zero-tolerance enforcement against mob violence and clear legal protections for journalists. Otherwise, they feel the revolution of the students will simply be remembered as the moment the state traded one kind of silence for another, and the truth will be the first casualty.

The parliamentary elections – with more than 127 million people registered to vote – will be [a major test of the country's democracy](#) after decades of Hasina and her family being accused of rigging polls in favour of the now exiled PM and her father before her.

Though there are several political parties in the country, parliamentary control will likely fall to one or two parties now that Hasina's Awami League party is barred from elections: the Bangladesh National Party or the Jamaat-e-Islami party.

Repression without watchdogs

Since the change of government in August 2024, the numbers tell a dark story. Local rights groups and press freedom monitors report a massive wave of attacks:

- **351** journalists were harassed in their offices or on the street.
- **109** journalists beaten while reporting.
- **167** journalists stripped of press cards.
- **More than 300** journalists have been banned from leaving the country.
- **140** journalists facing criminal cases, including murder charges.

While Hasina used laws to arrest people, the new interim government's rule has been marked by a massive jump in violent mob attacks and murder charges for journalists out reporting.

Criminal cases against journalists have shot up by 558% since the change in power. In 2023, there were roughly 300 reports of media harassment for the whole year, but we have already seen 351 cases and over 100 physical beatings in 2025. Under the previous government, journalists were often sued for "defamation", but now at least 140 journalists face murder charges related to the 2024 protests.

The interim government has also used a new tactic to silence critics: cancelling the press cards of 167 reporters, a move rarely seen before, while banning more than 300 journalists from travelling abroad, turning a once-selective punishment into a widespread crackdown.

The murder charges are particularly worrying.

Many reporters were simply covering the summer 2024 protests where people were killed, largely by Hasina's [security forces](#). Now, the reporters who happened to be on the scene are being blamed for those deaths – these charges are widely viewed as simply a way to keep the media from covering the upcoming election by keeping journalists in jail or

forcing them into hiding. The threat seems to have worked: A [recent survey](#) found that 89% of journalists fear they will be attacked if they cover election events. Half of female respondents fear sexual harassment.

During Sheikh Hasina's government, [surveys](#) and [reports](#) showed high levels of fear among journalists, but the numbers were lower, and the threats were different.

In 2023, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) noted that Bangladesh's press freedom was deteriorating under Hasina, with journalists facing arbitrary arrests and violence, but no survey showed figures as high as 89%. In 2022, Human Rights Watch [documented](#) that journalists were harassed, assaulted, and prosecuted under the Digital Security Act, creating a climate of fear.

The fear now for most journalists comes from the noted shift in silencing tactics, according to Shahidul Alam, a photographer, activist, and writer. "In the past, there was fear of the government, now it is fear from the streets, fear from the mob, and fear from the political parties," he told The New Humanitarian.

His words reflect the grim reality inside Bangladesh's newsrooms today.

The attacks on The Daily Star and Prothom Alo in December 2025 proved that mobs can silence the press as effectively as any law. Political parties now flood media outlets with their own photos and statements, while journalists hide their press cards to avoid harassment. This climate of intimidation has created a new culture of self-censorship.

"Journalists have become easy targets, which is why many of us feel it is unsafe to cover certain issues. We are even hesitant to identify ourselves as journalists."

According to journalist Promiti Prova Chowdhury, media freedom never truly existed in Bangladesh, but the situation has only gotten worse since the fall of Sheikh Hasina.

"Incidents keep happening: Cases are filed under the Cyber Security Act, and people lose jobs simply for speaking out, trying to act, or questioning an adviser," Chowdhury told The New Humanitarian.

Recent incidents show how dangerous this has become.

On 27 January 2026, at least 10 journalists were injured in the city of Narsingdi when members of the Crime Reporters Association of Bangladesh (CRAB) were attacked by local gangs demanding extortion money. Police later arrested three suspects, but journalists say such assaults are becoming routine.

Kazi Salahuddin Razu, a photojournalist, told The New Humanitarian, "Journalists have become easy targets, which is why many of us feel it is unsafe to cover certain issues. We are even hesitant to identify ourselves as journalists."

The result is clear: Reporters hide their press cards, avoid covering political rallies, and rely on party-supplied photos instead of independent reporting. Bangladesh's democracy risks being shaped not by free debate, but by whoever shouts the loudest, or burns the newsroom first.

Mobocracy rises and watchdogs go missing

The Rights & Risks Analysis Group (RRAG) [documented](#) at least 15 murders of Hindu minority members between 1 December 2025 and 15 January 2026, roughly one killing every three days. Victims included teachers, shopkeepers, and even a journalist Rana Pratap Bairagi, who was killed on 5 January. Yet Dhaka's major outlets barely covered these attacks. Reporters say covering minority violence risks being branded "anti-revolutionary". Yunus has at times [dismissed](#) such incidents as "political unrest" or "foreign disinformation".

In response, international bodies, such as the EU's election observation mission, have vowed to place an extra focus on minority issues, underscoring the pervasive concern that local reporting gaps could leave entire communities effectively invisible in official narratives.

Without coverage, victims remain invisible, aid groups cannot respond, and humanitarian crises vanish in the fog of mob violence. The double crisis is clear: Attacking journalists is a humanitarian abuse that blocks reporting on other abuses.

On the eve of the elections, Bangladesh's oversight institutions are strikingly absent. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) notes that both the Information Commission and the Human Rights Commission remain leaderless and inactive.

Speaking to the media, Iftekhar Zaman, TIB's executive director, called this a "bad example of ignoring state responsibility" and warned that promised reforms have stalled. Without functioning watchdogs, he said citizens have nowhere to turn when journalists are harassed or minorities attacked.

International groups are also sounding alarms: The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) [urged political parties](#) to commit to safeguarding press freedom during the polls. ARTICLE 19 submitted recommendations to the Election Commission, stressing that free reporting is essential for credible elections.

A revolution is supposed to make a country more open. But in Bangladesh, the door is closing. Burning a newsroom is burning the bridge between people and truth.

Edited by Ali M. Latifi.

