

## Press Releases

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## Bangladesh's Darkest Chapter: The Yunus Regime vs. The Press

After the controversial ouster of the elected government in August 2024, an interim regime was installed in Bangladesh under the leadership of Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus. His rise to power, devoid of electoral legitimacy, has been viewed by many as unconstitutional and undemocratic. In this context, Yunus's increasingly authoritarian behavior toward the press was not unexpected. Rather than demonstrating respect for democratic values, his government has acted to suppress dissent and muzzle journalistic freedom. The Yunus-led administration has implemented new legal tools, enforced intimidation tactics, and created a climate of fear that is suffocating independent journalism. Rising Crackdown on Journalists



Soon after coming to power, the interim government introduced two controversial ordinances: the Cyber Security Ordinance 2025 and the Personal Data Protection Ordinance 2025. While these laws were presented as safeguards for digital rights, they have instead enabled greater control over journalists and media institutions. By January 2025, at least 21 journalists were arrested, and only three received bail. More than 100 journalists were injured, and nearly 900 were either fired or forced to resign.

### Wave of Lawsuits and Arbitrary Arrests

From August 2024 to April 2025, at least 296 journalists were accused in over 600 lawsuits, including many shocking murder charges. Senior journalists like Mozammel Babu and Shyamal Dutta were detained while trying to leave the country. Most of these cases appear politically motivated, aimed at silencing dissenting voices.

### Revocation of Accreditation Cards

In November 2024, the government's Press Information Department (PID) revoked press accreditation cards for 167 journalists. This move effectively barred them from entering government offices and attending official events, severely limiting their ability to work.

### Financial Harassment and Surveillance

The Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) froze the bank accounts of at least 18 journalists and demanded financial information from 96 others. Additionally, 83 journalists lost their National Press Club memberships, further isolating them professionally.

### Operation Devil Hunt

In February 2025, the government launched "Operation Devil Hunt," arresting more than 11,000 people, including several journalists. Critics say the operation was used as a tool to crack down on government critics rather than actual threats.

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## Mob Threats and Self-Censorship

Kamal Ahmed, head of the Media Reform Commission, admitted that although direct interference by intelligence agencies has lessened, the rise of "mob threats" has resulted in widespread self-censorship. Journalists now fear social media backlash, hateful campaigns, and professional consequences for simply reporting the truth.

## Political Bias in TV Talk Shows

One alarming trend is the overt politicization of TV talk shows. Guest selection is now heavily influenced by political loyalty. Journalists who were perceived as sympathetic to the previous Awami League government have been blacklisted from TV appearances. This exclusion has significantly curtailed space for diverse opinions. Journalists are also facing restrictions on social media platforms, where expressing a contrary opinion often leads to harassment or worse.

## Unprecedented Media Repression

In Bangladesh's history, such systematic exclusion of dissenting voices in mainstream media is unprecedented. Even during the rule of past military or autocratic regimes, such severe censorship was rarely witnessed. In April 2025, the so-called "Farooki Incident" led to the dismissal of three journalists and silencing of a major TV channel, simply because the government's cultural advisor was publicly criticized.

## Silencing the Press at the Highest Levels

The Prime Advisor's press wing and the advisors themselves are now holding press conferences where questions from journalists are often disallowed. Journalists who attempt to ask tough or critical questions have faced job termination, something not seen even under Bangladesh's harshest past regimes.

## Travel Restrictions and Mental Harassment

Several journalists have been arbitrarily banned from foreign travel without any legal justification. This, combined with job losses, lawsuits, and physical threats, has created an environment of deep psychological trauma and professional insecurity.

## Digital Censorship by BTRC

The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has reportedly taken down numerous news reports critical of the government. Such actions have reinforced the fear that freedom of expression no longer exists even in digital spaces.

## The Press in Peril

Human rights organizations have raised alarm. Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Article 19 have both called for immediate reforms. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) ranks Bangladesh 14th globally for journalist imprisonment, with four currently behind bars. According to Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), there were 102 reported attacks on journalists in the first quarter of 2025 alone.

The promise of press freedom under the Yunus interim government has proven to be hollow. With widespread censorship, politically motivated lawsuits, job terminations, and restrictions on speech, journalists in Bangladesh are working under one of the most repressive environments in the nation's history. Article 39 of Bangladesh's Constitution and Article 19 of the ICCPR affirm freedom of expression as a fundamental right. It is imperative that the interim government immediately halt its assault on media and uphold democratic values before it becomes too late. Otherwise, this period will be remembered as a dark chapter for press freedom and democracy in Bangladesh.

Journalists in Bangladesh have been accused of murder in a politically charged environment following the ousting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024.

## Political Retaliation:

The interim government has filed criminal cases against journalists, alleging their involvement in inciting violence during the protests that led to Hasina's resignation. For instance, journalists **Shakil Ahmed and Farzana Rupa** were arrested and charged in connection with the death of a garment worker during the demonstrations.

## Impact on Journalism:

The widespread legal actions have created a climate of fear among journalists in Bangladesh. Many media professionals are facing harassment, detention, and the threat of legal repercussions for their work. This environment undermines press freedom and hampers the ability of journalists to report freely and accurately.

-By Eng Shafiq Islam

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