

## **When Elections End, Fear Begins Bangladesh's Minorities and the Silence of the World**

PK Pal\*

### ***Abstract***

*The essay sheds light on the structural violence being perpetrated against the religious and indigenous minority populations in Bangladesh, particularly during political change and elections. According to the article, the violence being committed against these populations is more than mere occurrences. They have been occurring consistently for years due to the historical nature of discriminatory acts like the Vested Property Act coupled with political manipulation, extremism, and the failure of institutions. The article relies on recent findings and events that occurred between 2023 and 2026, and in these periods, there were numerous acts of terrorism against members of minority communities in Bangladesh, which included Hindus among others. The violence escalated after the fall of the government in 2024 when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned. These findings reveal how the post-election instability contributed to the insecurity felt throughout several Bangladeshi cities. The essay also touches on the issues of revisionist ideology, mob culture, and the failure of state mechanisms to maintain order.*

**Keywords:** Communal violence, Bangladesh minorities, electoral violence, Hindu persecution.

### **Will they come tonight?**

The question was whispered, not shouted. An elderly Hindu man stood by the door of his home, clutching his bag, which held only clothes and documents. His village had already been attacked once. The temple nearby was vandalized.

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\* Political Analyst

His neighbor's home was burned. He was not asking if democracy had failed him. He was asking if he was going to survive the night.

This is not an isolated incident. This is the reality for religious minorities, Indigenous minorities in Bangladesh, especially after elections and the transfer of power.

Bangladesh is seen by the world as a moderate Muslim majority democracy, born out of the liberation movement based on secular principles. But what is the history for minorities? A history based on fear, dispossession, and election violence.

Since the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, minorities in this subcontinent have never enjoyed true citizenship. Their security has always been conditional. Their citizenship rights have always been tenuous. And their justice has always been lacking. Violence against minorities has never been random. It has always been systematic. It has always been cyclical, often after national elections.

“I lost my father's land without selling it,” the young man told me. He pointed to the land, which was no longer in his family's possession. Through the implementation of the Enemy Property Act, which was later renamed the Vested Property Act, minorities were legalized into dispossession. This was initially bureaucratic; later, it became social engineering. Trying to retrieve their lands was met with arson, assault, sexual assault, or forced migration. Exile was the only way for them to survive.

This was not state failure. This was state-enabled injustice.

Elections, in theory, are moments of hope. For minorities in Bangladesh, they have been moments of terror.

Time and again, electoral transitions have made minorities the easy scapegoats, labeled as supporters of the ‘wrong’ party, collectively victimized for assumed loyalties. Alterations in the constitution undermining secularism, readmission of extremist parties into mainstream politics, and the declaration of Islam as state religion have made minorities feel like they live in a state of permanent fear.

The message has been loud and clear: you are allowed to live here, but you don’t feel like you are allowed to live here. The darkest period began after the 2001 general election.

There was no chaotic outbreak of violence in this situation. Rather, there was organized violence being carried out against minority groups. In at least 20 of the districts of Bangladesh, attacks were being made upon minority groups. Thousands of women and children became victims of rape and other forms of sexual assault. Communities were being destroyed and even burned out of existence by those attacking them.

From 2001 to 2006, between 1.8 and 2 million Hindus became victims of what was referred to as "ethnic cleansing" from Bangladesh.

“Things were calm afterwards,” said one survivor. “But fear has always been there.” Even in the calm, extremist networks have grown in the shadows. Land grabbing, intimidation, and violence have persisted. The machinery of violence has always been there. It has merely been in hiding.

Communal violence in Bangladesh basically means the acts of violence, persecution, and discrimination carried out against various communities on the basis of religious and cultural identity (Ajkaler Khobor, 2023; Prothom Alo, 2023). Communal violence in the country may be carried out in an individual capacity or in an organized manner. The communal violence in the country has been carried out against religious minorities and the indigenous communities. According to the statistics provided by Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), which were

obtained from newspapers in Bangladesh, in total, 1,580 incidents were recorded from 2013 to 2020 in the country in relation to the hurting of the religious sentiments of the minorities. On an average, 197 incidents were recorded in a year. This shows that the communal violence in the country has been a structural issue.

Between July 2023 and June 2024, in the country, a total of 1,045 incidents of communal violence, persecution, and repression were recorded. The incidents of communal violence were recorded in the form of 45 killings, 7 body recoveries, 10 attempts to kill, 36 death threats, physical assaults and torture against 479 individuals, 102 attacks and vandalism, and 47 incidents of land grabbing. Additionally, 14 attacks on temples, 40 incidents of vandalism of idols, 25 incidents of rape or attempted rape, and 12 incidents of abduction and religious conversion were recorded in the country. The incidents of communal violence were also recorded in the country in the context of the national and local government elections.

### ***Political Instability in 2024 and Communal Violence***

In 2024, following the anti-discrimination student movement, the quota reform movement, and the subsequent noncooperation movement, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned on 5 August, leading to the dissolution of the cabinet (Naya Diganta, 2024). Immediately after news of the government's resignation spread, the intensity of communal violence increased sharply in various parts of the country. According to *The Daily Star*, within the first hour of the government's ouster, attacks on Hindu homes, temples, and businesses were reported in at least 27 districts (The Daily Star, 2024a). In the following days, the violence spread to a total of 52 districts, where thousands of minority households, business establishments, and places of worship were subjected to vandalism, looting, and arson (The Daily Star, 2024b; *Times of India*, 2024).

According to the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, at least 205 incidents of persecution against members of minority communities

occurred in 52 districts within just four days after 5 August (Star Digital, 2024). During the same period, Indigenous communities in various regions of the country were also subjected to attacks, vandalism, and arson, creating widespread fear and a sense of insecurity among them (bdnews24.com, 2024). In response, the National Indigenous Council demanded the protection of all citizens and the restoration of peace and public order.

### ***Displacement and Border Situation***

Such incidents have raised a lot of concerns regarding communal harmony, the safety of the minorities, and the general state of human rights in Bangladesh. The scenario on the ground is that the machine is getting back into action. With elections coming up soon, and political coalitions changing hands, once again, the minorities are caught in the crosshairs. In any place where the minority vote becomes a decisive factor, the minority becomes the target. In any place where the legitimacy of politics comes under question, the minority becomes the scapegoat.

However, there is one more alarming development – the growth of extremist ideologies in the country. This ideology can be found both within the system and outside of it. The emergence of mob violence is a new trend in the country. The revision of history is nothing other than an effort to remove from memory the struggle for the liberation of the country in 1971. The concept of 'new independence' is an attempt to remove from memory the ideological foundations of the independence of Bangladesh. In such a situation, minorities are no longer citizens but are only used as instruments in negotiations. This is a concrete question that must be posed to the international community. How is it possible to define democracy if the elections result in terrorizing minorities? How can sovereignty be defined in this case, if human rights are systematically violated?

Bangladesh's minority problem is not a domestic problem but an international one. This is a test for the international community regarding its determination towards human rights, pluralism, and the making of history.

There is nothing abstract about the question posed. And neither is there anything abstract about the answer. The answer lies in the city that comes next, where another minority stands before the door, asking the same question:

Will they come tonight?

### ***Communal Violence Against Hindu Minorities in Bangladesh (December 2025–January 2026)***

On 18th December 2025, a Hindu male named Dipu Chandra Das was brutally murdered by a mob in Bhaluka, Mymensingh district in Bangladesh. According to media sources, the victim was beaten severely by the attackers, hanged on a tree, and eventually burned alive. The attackers accused the victim of making derogatory remarks against the Islamic faith during a factory-related event (The Hindu, 2025; Mangalorean, 2025). This murder took place in the backdrop of the widespread unrest and violence in the country, especially after the attack on a student leader named Sharif Osman Hadi (Sunday Guardian Live, 2025).

With the end of the Sheikh Hasina regime in Bangladesh, there has been a marked increase in violent attacks against the Hindu minority population in the country (Mangalorean, 2025). Currently, the population of Bangladesh consists of 13.1 million Hindu citizens, which makes up 7.95 percent of the total population in the country (Hindustan Times, 2025). The recent spate of violent attacks against the Hindu population has raised a lot of concern over the safety and security of the Hindu population in the country.

The Islamist group accused the victim, Dipu Chandra Das, of making offensive remarks against the Prophet Muhammad. Such accusations are common in

Bangladesh and are used to incite violence against minorities in the country. However, prior to the murder, there was no independent judicial inquiry or concrete evidence to support such accusations against the victim (The Hindu, 2025; Mangalorean, 2025).

The murder of Dipu Chandra Das was not an isolated incident. Within a span of 18 days, i.e., from December 2025 to January 2026, international media sources reported the murder of at least six Hindu citizens in Bangladesh (The Hindu, 2025; Hindustan Times, 2025). These murders took place in the following circumstances:

- **Amrit Mondal alias Samrat (29):** Beaten to death on 24 December 2025 in Pangsha, Rajbari, only days after the killing of Dipu Das. Although authorities described the incident as related to extortion, it sparked widespread alarm.
- **Khokon Chandra Das (50):** A pharmacy owner and mobile financial service agent, hacked to death and set on fire on 31 December 2025 in Damudya, Shariatpur.
- **Bajendra Biswas:** A Hindu factory worker shot dead while on duty on 29 December 2025 in Mymensingh.
- **Rana Pratap Bairagi (37):** An ice factory owner and journalist, shot in the head and had his throat slit publicly on 5 January 2026 in Manirampur, Jashore.
- **Sharat Chakraborty Moni (40):** Killed with sharp weapons inside his own shop on the same day in Palash, Narsingdi.

It is noted that the organizations for human rights, like Ain O Salish Kendra and the Bangladesh Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Unity Council, found that there were more assaults against minorities than what was reported by international media. While there was always an official explanation about the reasons behind these deaths, the overall feeling of being insecure and fearful was created in the minds of minorities all over Bangladesh because of the accumulation of these violent events (ASK & BHBCUC reports).

Such incidents highlight the alarming trend where people belonging to religious minority groups are subjected to lethal attacks at times when there is political unrest in the country, especially in Bangladesh.

### ***Mob Culture as a Tool of Political Terror***

A very frightening feature of the current crisis is the growing trend of mob culture, which is being employed as a tool to intimidate. This is not an organic growth but is being employed as a tool to intimidate and instill fear. Extremist organizations, especially those belonging to Jamaat-e-Islami, have promoted this culture of mob violence to intimidate and instill fear. This is done by means of public lynching and other forms of chaos to instill fear. This is a very low-cost form of political terrorism, where maximum psychological impact is achieved while the perpetrators can easily deny their involvement.

### ***Erasing 1971: Ideological Warfare and Historical Revisionism***

In addition to physical violence, an ideological campaign is also being waged. This is evident from the fact that political players and political alliances including Yunus and his groups, NCP, Jamaat, and civil society organizations have continuously propagated an ideology against India and Awami League, to an extent that these have been portrayed as existential threats. This is not an ordinary political statement; this is an indication that an attempt is being made to delegitimize the very foundation and history of Bangladesh. At the heart of this campaign is an attempt to erase the memory of 1971. Evidence suggests that this is a very meticulously designed attempt to rewrite history by replacing the memory of the Liberation War with an alternative history of a 'Independence of '24.' In this quest to achieve this objective, nothing is too low to be attempted. Not even the death of an individual like Hadi is left unused to create a narrative that undermines the very basis of the history of 1971. In this context, Jamaat e Islami emerges as the central player in this ideological campaign, working behind the scenes and keeping all players engaged while pursuing their own long-term objectives.

## **Power Struggles, Institutional Paralysis, and a Generation at Risk**

This crisis is further complicated by a convergence of opportunism between all actors within these institutions. Yunus aligned networks, leaders within NCP, Jamaat, various political alliances, stakeholders, and civil society appear to be more focused on positional advantage than on providing for the welfare of the people. Every actor in this situation believes that they are strategically “using” all the other actors to their own advantage. However, in all this, there is institutional decay. The role of state institutions has not provided much reassurance either. The military leadership has shown indecisiveness in their actions and sudden outbursts in attempts to achieve geopolitical balance as opposed to internal accountability. This has resulted in confusion and mistrust in their ability to protect the people.

This is not just a struggle for power between elites. This is a struggle that is actually destroying political ethics, cultural values, and historical memory on a scale that will affect an entire generation. Unless there is some form of accountability for these actions, violence, cynicism, and historical amnesia will become permanent features on our political landscape.

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