

# Preventing Atrocity Crimes in Bangladesh: Eight Strategic Priorities for a Fragile Democracy

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## Executive Summary

This is the companion report to *Bangladesh Atrocity Risk Assessment: The Challenges Ahead for the New Government* (May 2026), which found that Bangladesh remains at high risk of atrocity crimes despite its recent democratic opening and ongoing transition from years of increasingly authoritarian and repressive rule. Directly building on that report's analysis of atrocity risk factors in Bangladesh, this report outlines eight priority strategies to strengthen Bangladesh's atrocity prevention capacity and resilience, centred on: security sector accountability, youth- and gender-centred deradicalization initiatives, democratic and judicial reform, enhancing minority protections, media resilience, strengthening international cooperation to address humanitarian crises, and trauma-informed approaches to enhance social cohesion. It argues that effective prevention requires a broad, inclusive and gender-responsive approach to address the structural drivers of political violence, strengthen institutions capable of managing political competition peacefully, and protect vulnerable communities. The prevention strategies outlined in this report are not exhaustive, but they represent the most urgent structural interventions that could meaningfully reduce Bangladesh's risk trajectory. Sustained implementation requires political will, international support, and accountability mechanisms that are transparent, consistent, and immune to partisan manipulation.

## Introduction

The history of Bangladesh is marred by recurring cycles of mass violence, authoritarianism, political repression, and impunity of law enforcers since its independence in 1971. The country's political landscape was formerly dominated by two major parties—the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)—whose rivalry has produced winner-take-all political attitudes and the systematic use of state institutions and resources to entrench the power of political parties. Under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's authoritarian rule (2009–2024), this dynamic intensified: security forces committed widespread extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances; the military intelligence agency Director General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) ran illegal secret detention facilities; political opponents were imprisoned *en masse*; and a culture of impunity took hold in which perpetrators—many of whom were the military, intelligence, and police officials—were rewarded rather than prosecuted. A popular uprising in July–August 2024, driven largely by student-led protests against a discriminatory job quota system, was met with lethal force. A United Nations team found that the response of Sheikh Hasina's government, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of civilians, may constitute crimes against humanity. Hasina fled the country to India in August 2024.

The fall of the Hasina government opened a window for reform, but it has not resolved the structural conditions that create a permissible environment for atrocity crimes in Bangladesh. The interim government that took power in August 2024 and the elected government that was formed in February 2026 inherited unreformed security forces, a deeply polarised political environment, an overwhelmed judiciary, and a media ecosystem shaped by years of state and business interference. Radical Islamist networks, which expanded under the cover of political instability, continue to pose risks to secular social fabrics and religious minorities. Mob violence had surged: by 2025, mob attacks occurred in 45 of 64 districts, reflecting both a collapse of trust in formal justice mechanisms and the exploitation of instability by organised extremist groups.<sup>1</sup>

These political and institutional risks intersect with long-standing vulnerabilities rooted in geography, demography, and regional dynamics. Bangladesh is one of the world's most climate-exposed countries, and the combination of land loss, displacement, and resource pressure creates conditions that historically heighten the risk of exploitation, trafficking, and inter-group violence. The country also hosts over one million Rohingya refugees, a population rendered stateless by atrocity crimes in neighbouring Myanmar, whose prolonged displacement in under-resourced camps generates its own dynamics of radicalisation and criminal exploitation. Religious and ethnic minorities—including Hindus, Christians, and Indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts—have faced recurrent violence and structural marginalisation across successive governments.

A large portion of the Bangladeshi population has endured prolonged trauma under decades of authoritarian rule. Academics and human rights organisations have documented how a pervasive culture of fear took hold across the country,<sup>2</sup> particularly but not only related to state forces regularly

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<sup>1</sup>Mizanur Rahman,, "Death by Mob," *Netra News*, 11 February 2026, <https://interactive.netra.news/year-of-mob>.

<sup>2</sup> FIDH (International Federal for Human Rights), "Bangladesh: Enforced Disappearances Amount to Crimes Against Humanity," *International Federation for Human Rights*, 2019, <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/bangladesh/bangladesh-enforced-disappearances-amount-to-crimes-against-humanity>; Odhikar, "Civil Society Joint Alternative Report on

engaging in torture, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances — practices through which a psychological impact rippled far beyond the direct victims, leaving deep and lasting trauma across Bangladeshi society. A good number of studies have identified an intrinsic link between trauma, violence and extremism.<sup>3</sup>

In May 2026, the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect published the report *Bangladesh Atrocity Risk Assessment: The Challenges Ahead for the New Government*,<sup>4</sup> which distilled the above noted conditions into seven structural risk factors for atrocity crimes operating in Bangladesh today: militarized and unaccountable security and intelligence forces; the existence of radical Islamist networks; zero-sum politics and disputes among political actors; the persecution of religious and ethnic minorities; increased mob violence; hate speech and incitement to violence in media narratives; and pressures linked to climate change, migration and displacement, including the vulnerability of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. These risk factors variously exacerbate tensions, erode social cohesion, widen political disputes and economic disparities, and weaken restraints on violence. Together, these factors increase the likelihood that events—such as mass protests, terrorist incidents or non-state armed attacks, or election-related violence—will trigger atrocity crimes, as witnessed in the United Nations’ finding that crimes against humanity were likely committed in the response to the July–August 2024 protests under the Sheikh Hasina government. Based on this analysis, the report concluded that Bangladesh remains at high risk of atrocity crimes, despite recent signs of greater political openness and democratic reform.

The following report builds directly on the companion atrocity risk assessment by outlining targeted prevention strategies to strengthen the institutional, legal, and social safeguards that can mitigate identified risks and strengthen resilience to atrocity crimes in Bangladesh. It is intended as a practical tool for policymakers, civil society organisations, and international partners engaged in Bangladesh’s reform process. To this end, this report proposes eight prevention strategies:

1. Enhanced accountability and demilitarization of public security forces
2. Deradicalization promoting pluralism among youth, with an integrated gender approach
3. Reforming democratic institutions, including anti-corruption and peaceful transition mechanisms
4. Providing legal and political protection for minorities, including community led social cohesion initiatives
5. Reforming the judicial process

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Bangladesh Submitted to the Committee against Torture.” 30 July 2019, <https://forum-asia.org/from-our-member-odhikar-bangladesh-civil-society-joint-alternative-report-on-bangladesh-submitted-to-the-committee-against-torture/>.

<sup>3</sup> Alisa B Miller, David P Eisenman, Ryan A Brown and Steven Weine, “The roles of trauma and mental health in preventing domestic radicalization and violent extremism,” *NIJ Journal* 285 (2024), clo <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/roles-trauma-and-mental-health-preventing-domestic-radicalization-and-violent>; B Heidi Ellis, Stevan Weine, “The intersection of trauma and violent extremism: Future directions for research and policy,” *Boston, MA: Trauma and Community Resilience Center, Boston Children’s Hospital*. 2024, <https://www.childrenshospital.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/trauma-community-resilience-future-directions-guidance-research.pdf> and Martina Hinsberger, Jessica Sommer, Debra Kaminer, Leon Holtzhausen, Roland Weierstall, Soraya Seedat, Solomon Madikane, Thomas Elbert, “Perpetuating the cycle of violence in South African low-income communities: Attraction to violence in young men exposed to continuous threat,” *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 7, no.1 (2016): 1-9, <https://doi.org/10.3402/ejpt.v7.29099>.

<sup>4</sup> Mubashar Hasan, Sarah Teitt, & Aaqib Md. Shatil, “Bangladesh atrocity risk assessment: The challenges ahead for the new government,” Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, The University of Queensland, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.14264/8dcd8d8>.

6. Improving media and social media environment, including protection for journalists
7. Strengthening global cooperation to address natural and humanitarian crises, particularly for more durable and dignified solutions for displaced Rohingya
8. Introducing nation-wide psycho-social support to heal trauma and increase social cohesion

All eight strategies must be informed by a gender approach that recognizes atrocity risks may disproportionately affect people based on gender. A gender-responsive approach examines how gender norms and inequalities shape atrocity risks and emphasizes inclusive participation and the central role of women and marginalized groups in designing and implementing prevention efforts.<sup>5</sup>

Alongside desk research, this report draws on extensive consultations with an expert panel convened specifically for this project, whose members were drawn from Bangladeshi academia, investigative journalism, and policy research. The panel includes Kajalie Shehreen Islam, Associate Professor in the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at the University of Dhaka; Nazmul Ahasan, Executive Editor of Netra News; Professor Sk. Tawfique M. Haque, Director of the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance; and Mamun Abdullahi, Executive Director of the Dacca Institute of Research and Analytics. The authors gratefully acknowledge their contributions to the analysis and recommendations presented in this report.

A key message of this report is that effective prevention requires a broad, inclusive and gender-responsive approach to address the structural drivers of political violence, strengthen institutions capable of managing political competition peacefully, and protect vulnerable communities. Sustained implementation requires political will, international support, and accountability mechanisms that are transparent, consistent, and immune to partisan manipulation.

## Prevention Strategies

The following analysis translates the companion report's risk assessment findings into eight prevention strategies. The strategies that follow are not exhaustive, but represent the most urgent structural interventions—those that, if implemented, would most directly reduce the conditions enabling atrocity crimes and build longer-term resilience against political violence.

### 1. Enhanced Accountability and Demilitarization of Public Security Forces

In Bangladesh, public security forces, police, and the U.S. Treasury-sanctioned Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) have been implicated in serious human rights violations such as extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances.<sup>6</sup> Under the former Hasina government, the military intelligence agency, the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), was found to be running illegal secret prisons in the country, where the use of torture against detainees was prevalent among the security forces.<sup>7</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, "Gender-based atrocity crimes prevention: Linking the Responsibility to Protect; Women, Peace and Security; and women's rights agendas in the Asia Pacific," *Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect and Asia Pacific Partnership for Atrocity Prevention*, 2021, [https://appap.group.uq.edu.au/files/1998/2021\\_Gender-based\\_atrocity\\_crime\\_prevention.pdf](https://appap.group.uq.edu.au/files/1998/2021_Gender-based_atrocity_crime_prevention.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Sanctions Perpetrators of Serious Human Rights Abuse on International Human Rights Day," U.S. Department of the Treasury, 23 December 2025, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/iy0526>.

<sup>7</sup> Christian Caurla, Arafatul Islam, Birgitta Schulke and Naomi Conrad, "Death Squad": Inside Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion," *Dw.Com*, 3 April 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/death-squad-inside-bangladeshs-rapid-action-battalion/a-65209010>.

lead author of this report is a survivor of enforced disappearance who was held captive for 44 days in a DGFI run secret illegal prison in 2017. Hasina's government equipped these forces with military-grade weapons<sup>8</sup> and they gained notoriety for their brutality, killing over 2,500 people and forcibly disappearing hundreds of dissenters between 2009 and 2022.<sup>9</sup>

Even after the fall of Hasina, there is still a lack of public oversight and accountability over security forces and intelligence agencies. The RAB is yet to be disbanded and the DGFI still operates.<sup>10</sup> Successive Bangladeshi governments have not reversed the policies of militarising the public security forces; therefore, the structural risk for perpetrating atrocities still persists.

The recommendations below are ordered to prioritise foundational accountability mechanisms first, followed by operational reforms:

- The government must establish transparent reporting mechanisms for human rights violations and robust protections for whistleblowers, to break the cycle of rewarding perpetrators rather than punishing them.
- The National Human Rights Commission should be empowered to independently investigate cases of human rights violations by members of law enforcement. The process for nominating its members and chief should be transparent and immune to partisan influence.
- A national taskforce should be formed, with participation from civil society, politicians, and members of law enforcement, to identify credible allegations of atrocity crimes committed by officials and bring them to justice in accordance with due process and fair trial standards.
- The government should reform the police force by training officials in fundamental human rights principles. The use of military-grade rifles in routine policing should end: previously issued military-grade rifles should be withdrawn from regular police officers and restricted to special armed units that do not conduct routine policing. Standard service sidearms for officer self-defence should remain permissible under clear use-of-force rules that prohibit indiscriminate fire against civilians.
- Politicization of the security forces must end by introducing transparent policies governing the recruitment, promotion, and posting of police officials.
- The DGFI should be disbanded. It represents a key structural risk factor for atrocity crimes in Bangladesh, particularly due to the series of previous allegations against it, including interference in public life, attempts to shape and control media narratives, bank takeovers, the ousting of a former Chief Justice, and running an illegal secret prison. The agency's

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<sup>8</sup> Mohammad Suman and Zyma Islam, "Bangladesh Police: Equipped to Inflict Heavy Casualties," *The Daily Star*, 9 August 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/investigative-stories/news/bangladesh-police-equipped-inflict-heavy-casualties-3959046>.

<sup>9</sup> Nazmul Ahasan, "BODY COUNT: Extrajudicial Executions in Bangladesh," *Netra News Interactive*, 13 November 2023, <https://interactive.netra.news/extrajudicial-killings-bangladesh/>.

<sup>10</sup> Prothom Alo, "Abolition of RAB, Reform of Intelligence Agencies Recommended," *Prothom Alo*, 6 January 2026, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/mws96mb47a>.

accountability is limited to the Prime Minister's Office, with little independent oversight. This concentration of power significantly increases the risk of abuse and future atrocities.

- The domestic intelligence apparatus should be accountable to a joint parliamentary committee headed by an opposition leader to avoid conflict of interest. Classified sessions should follow appropriate security protocols; the committee should publish regular unclassified summary reports to ensure meaningful public oversight.
- The government should also heed calls from Human Rights Watch, RFK Human Rights, and the UN to disband the RAB, a force implicated in numerous extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances.
- The use of torture by security forces must be made illegal.

## 2. Promoting Pluralism Among Youths

The risk assessment report outlined how the network of radical and militant Islamists poses risks of atrocity crimes in Bangladesh. A long-term human rights-centred deradicalization strategy promoting pluralism is essential to reduce associated risk. Radicalization also poses particular gendered risks — militant and radical Islamist movements have historically imposed severe restrictions on women's freedoms and targeted women human rights defenders. All interventions must therefore be gender-sensitive at every stage of design and implementation.

This strategy should combine the following preventive and rehabilitative approaches:

- Bangladesh's curriculum — at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels — should be redesigned to promote pluralism, critical thinking, and constitutional values among students at all educational institutions. Teachers should also be sufficiently trained and, if needed, deradicalized through specially designed programmes to instil these values in their classrooms.
- The government-run Alia Madrasas and privately run Qawmi Madrasas, which follow the austere Deobandi school of Sunni Islam, should be incentivized and supported—through community engagement and provision of alternative curriculum resources—to align their programmes with values of pluralism and non-violence.<sup>11</sup>
- Since most radical Islamist preachers are linked to madrasas and mosques, these facilities should be monitored by engaging local communities to prevent the preaching of extremist ideas and recruitment into radical groups. The government should also consider building a parallel network of residential non-religious schools promoting religious pluralism in rural areas offering education, food, and accommodation free of cost to address the growth of Qawmi madrasas.

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<sup>11</sup>Abdullah Al Hussain, "State, Qawmi Madrasas and Children in Bangladesh: From a Social Protection Perspective," *Erasmus University Thesis Respository*, 17 December 2018, <https://thesis.eur.nl/pub/46690>.

- In consultation with P/CVE and gender experts, social media and online campaigns should be designed to counter radicalization efforts. Counterterrorism agencies and security forces should build collaborations with major social media companies to prevent social media-based radicalization at an early stage.
- Gender integration: All deradicalization and P/CVE programmes should expressly integrate gender analysis. Women—as potential victims, and agents of change—must be included in programme design and implementation. Particular attention should be given to the specific gendered risks posed by militant Islamist radicalization and to the role women can play as effective community voices against radicalization.
- A gender-informed ‘do no harm’ approach premised upon international human rights standards should guide all counter-terrorism policies.
- Rehabilitation programmes should target individuals who have been radicalized or are vulnerable to radicalization. The government, with the support of global partners, should initiate trauma-informed therapy sessions and engage local communities to support recovery.

### **3. Reforming democratic institutions, including anti-corruption and peaceful transition mechanisms**

The patron-client relationship is central to the functioning of Bangladesh’s political parties, leading to a winner-take-all system in which ruling parties use state resources to buy loyalties. This system has resulted in zero-sum politics, in which ruling parties, to retain power, often manipulate the rules to win elections and violently suppress their political opponents, provoking retaliatory violence from opposition parties.<sup>12</sup> Violence, perpetrated by both the ruling party and its opponents, has amounted to atrocity crimes in the past. This system also fuels deep-rooted corruption, as political actors leverage state institutions for personal or partisan gain—a dynamic that was central to sparking the 2024 protests.

Mitigating the risks requires reforming all democratic institutions and upholding democratic values and political pluralism, in line with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Bangladesh is a signatory.

- To ensure fair, credible, and genuine periodic elections, political parties in Bangladesh must reach a consensus on nominating credible and non-partisan individuals to lead future Caretaker or Interim Governments, through a transparent process that involves the opposition parties.
- Bangladesh must establish robust anti-corruption mechanisms, including a genuinely independent anti-corruption commission with full investigative and prosecutorial powers, transparent asset disclosure requirements for all public officials, and strong whistleblower

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<sup>12</sup> Sarah Tasnim Shehabuddin, “Bangladeshi Politics Since Independence,” In *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Bangladesh* (Routledge, 2016), 17–27, doi:10.4324/9781315651019-2.

protections. The patronage networks and corruption that fuelled the 2024 protests must be addressed structurally, not only through individual prosecutions.

- Bangladesh should adopt a formal framework for peaceful transitions of government. The winner-take-all mentality has produced violence at every change of administration except the recent election held in 2026. A transition framework should include empowerment of the election commission as a true independent institute capable of holding free and fair elections. The election commission in its current form cannot push back political influence from the ruling party. The selection process for election commissioners and members of Bangladesh's public service commission should be transparent and engage opposition parties.
- Parliamentary reforms are crucial to ensure that parliament does not act as a rubber stamp for the ruling party. An Upper House, in which members would be elected in proportion to parties' vote shares, can be formed and empowered to overturn constitutional amendments passed by the Lower House that undermine democratic values.
- Opposition party members should lead the parliamentary committees on Public Accounts, Home Affairs, and Public Undertakings, and should be able to hold ministers accountable. Article 70 of the Constitution, which prevents party-nominated MPs from opposing their party's position in parliament, should be revised to allow them to express dissent and vote against their party's stance.
- Bangladesh should establish a grievance redressal mechanism that involves all political parties represented in parliament, allowing citizens to address their grievances before resorting to street protests.
- Exclusion of significant political actors risks deepening grievances and incentivizing violence. Bangladesh should revisit the decision to ban the Awami League and devise strategies to reconcile with party activists who were not complicit in criminal violence, while holding those who committed crimes accountable through a fair judicial process.

#### **4. Providing Legal, Social and Political Protection for Minorities**

In Bangladesh, religious minorities, including the Ahmadiyya sect of Muslims, face persecution, resulting in significant displacement during periods of political instability.<sup>13</sup> The Pew Research Centre reports that about 1.6 million Hindus born in Bangladesh now live abroad, constituting 12% of all Hindu migrants.<sup>14</sup> Ethnic minority communities, particularly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, face the impact of past and ongoing insurgencies, living in militarised zones with constant fear of extrajudicial deaths, ethnic conflicts, and mass arrests.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Angie Zheng, "Risk of Mass Atrocities: What to Watch in Bangladesh," *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, 29 May 2025, <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/blog/risk-of-mass-atrocities-what-to-watch-in-bangladesh>.

<sup>14</sup> Pew Research Center, "Hindu Migrants around the World," *Pew Research Center*, 19 August 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2024/08/19/hindu-migrants-around-the-world>.

<sup>15</sup> Marzla Hashmi Momo and Denim Chakma, "In Bangladesh's Hills, Army's Quiet War on Bawm Nation," *Netra News*, 31 August 2025, <https://netra.news/2025/bangladesh-army-indigenous-bawm>.

To counter the persistent targeting of religious and ethnic minorities, Bangladesh must strengthen both legal protections and enforcement mechanisms, and must actively address the deep societal divisions and “othering” of minority communities.

- Bangladesh should establish fast-track special tribunals specifically designated to handle cases of communal violence and try the perpetrators of past attacks on minority communities, to build confidence among those communities.
- Hate crime legislation should be introduced to prevent future attacks, covering the incitement of hate crimes through social media to prevent coordinated attacks on minority communities, and complying with international human rights law on freedom of opinion and expression.<sup>16</sup>
- A comprehensive restitution mechanism should be established to assist victims from minority communities whose properties have been destroyed and those who have experienced displacement. Financial compensation, legal assistance, and access to counselling and community resources should all be made available.
- For ethnic minorities, especially for Indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the government should implement the 1997 Peace Accord, and a gradual demilitarization of the region should be planned in consultation with local indigenous community leaders.
- All major political parties should create adequate opportunities within their organizations to support and promote leaders from minority groups, including women leaders. The government should consider enacting a law requiring political parties to nominate at least 10% of their candidates for Member of Parliament positions from minority communities.
- Bangladesh should invest in sustained community-led measures to build social cohesion and address the “us vs. them” mentality between dominant groups and minorities. This includes: supporting inter-faith dialogue between religious leaders across communities; cross-cultural youth programs that create structured interaction and shared civic identity; women’s engagement activities that build inter-community networks and amplify minority women’s voices; and public messaging campaigns focused on unity, shared values, and the common interest in a successful and thriving Bangladesh.

## 5. Reforming the Judicial Process

After the 2024 uprising in Bangladesh, many security leaders supporting Sheikh Hasina fled, resulting in increased lawlessness and mob violence. By 2025, mob attacks occurred in 45 out of 64 districts, leading to at least 138 confirmed deaths — up from under 40 in 2023, according to Ain O Salish Kendra.<sup>17</sup> Most deaths were related to theft, with only one incident tied to religious motives, reflecting a growing distrust in the judicial process. Additionally, radical Islamist groups disguised as mobs

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<sup>16</sup> Article 19, “Hate Speech’ Explained — A Toolkit,” *Article 19*, 2015, <https://www.article19.org/data/files/medialibrary/38231/'Hate-Speech'-Explained---A-Toolkit-%282015-Edition%29.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Mizanur Rahman, “Death by Mob,” *Netra News*, 11 February 2026, <https://interactive.netra.news/year-of-mob>.

attacked around a hundred properties belonging to religious minorities, with few perpetrators facing justice, likewise causing victims to lose confidence in the judicial process.<sup>18</sup>

The structural risks posed by the increase in mob violence have two aspects: first, due to the lack of trust in the judicial process, people engage in mob violence to achieve justice on their own terms; and second, due to the inefficiency of the judiciary, mob violence cases rarely face trials, encouraging many to resort to mob action. Judicial reform must address both.

- Enhancing local access to justice through Village Courts may curb mob violence by alleviating case backlogs and making justice more accessible. Expanding legal aid services, particularly in rural or marginalised areas, would enable individuals to seek legal remedies rather than resorting to mob action.
- Expanding alternative dispute resolution mechanisms can help prevent minor conflicts from escalating into mob violence. Mediation and arbitration platforms, especially at the community level, offer faster and less confrontational ways to resolve disputes such as allegations of theft or local grievances.
- Reforms should ensure that collective liability is clearly defined, enabling courts to hold not only direct perpetrators but also instigators, organizers, and those inciting violence on digital platforms accountable. Additionally, criminalizing misinformation that leads to mob violence can help prevent these situations from arising.
- Improving the quality of investigations and prosecutions is crucial. Specialized prosecution units should be established and trained to handle group violence, digital evidence, and complex liability structures.
- Decentralizing high court benches to each district, appointing qualified judges, and regularly publishing data on case progress, conviction rates, and trial timelines would improve the system's accountability and foster public trust in the legal system.

## 6. Improving Media Literacy and Collaborative Action

In Bangladesh, during the 2007–08 military-backed regime and under Sheikh Hasina's government from 2009 to 2024, media narratives justified brutal repression of opposition groups and politicians<sup>19</sup> that claimed hundreds of lives. Moreover, social media has been frequently used to incite violence against minorities and secular institutions, such as the attacks on Buddhist monasteries in Ramu in 2012, anti-Hindu violence in 2021, and the attacks on two newspapers and two cultural organizations in 2025.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The Business Standard, "Unmasking the 'Tawhidi Janata': Faces behind It," *The Business Standard*, 9 March 2025, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/unmasking-tawhidi-janata-faces-behind-it-1088051>.

<sup>19</sup> Faisal Mahmud, "'Sheikh Hasina: A Critical Misstep and the End of 15 Years Ruling Bangladesh,'" *Al Jazeera*, 5 August 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/5/sheikh-hasina-a-critical-misstep-and-the-end-of-15-years-of-rule>.

<sup>20</sup> The Daily Star, "Mob Attacks on Star, Prothom Alo Scripted: Star-Dismislab Analysis," *The Daily Star*, 24 February 2026, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/investigative-stories/news/mob-attacks-star-prothom-alo-scripted-4113416>.

Given the documented misuse of media to justify violence and incite mobs, Bangladesh must invest in nationwide media literacy initiatives.

- Protecting journalists and enabling reporting without fear of reprisal is foundational to a healthy information environment. Bangladesh must establish strong legal protections for journalists, including criminalising threats, intimidation, and violence against media workers. A transparent mechanism for investigating and prosecuting attacks on journalists should be established, and impunity for such attacks must end.
- Bangladesh may consider collaborating with global partners and non-governmental organizations to redesign educational curricula and launch public awareness campaigns. These efforts should focus on equipping citizens with the skills needed to critically evaluate information and misinformation, as well as to resist inflammatory narratives.
- Regulatory frameworks can be revised to establish transparency in media ownership and mitigate the influence of political or extremist actors, while also protecting press freedom.
- Bangladesh should pursue collaboration with social media platforms and engage credible independent third-party organizations to monitor and limit the spread of hate speech and incitement, especially during crises.
- Improving information integrity and enabling journalists to perform their roles without self-censorship may contribute to a reduction in the risk of mob violence and coordinated attacks influenced by misinformation.
- A British-style independent media regulatory authority like Ofcom should be established. An independent regulator can reduce the risk of violence by ensuring that media outlets do not spread hate speech, incitement, or disinformation that can fuel mass violence.

## 7. Strengthening Global Cooperation to Address Natural and Humanitarian Crises

Experts predict that by 2050, Bangladesh could lose 17% of its land and 30% of its food production due to climate change,<sup>21</sup> displacing over 100,000 people annually and increasing pressure on cities.<sup>22</sup> Climate migrants are at high risk of modern slavery in Bangladesh due to resource constraints.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, over a million Rohingya refugees in resource-limited camps face growing vulnerability as aid decreases, raising concerns about potential exploitation and law and order issues, given the history of security forces committing atrocities against them.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> International Monetary Fund Asia and Pacific Dept, "Bangladesh: Selected Issues." *IMF Staff Country Reports* 15, no304 (2019), doi:10.5089/9781513514314.002.

<sup>22</sup> Mohammad Tarikul Islam, "Disaster and Climate-Induced Migration in Bangladesh: A Potential Threat to Human Security," *Harvard Humanitarian Initiative*, 22 September 2025, <https://hhi.harvard.edu/news/2025/09/disaster-and-climate-induced-migration-bangladesh-potential-threat-human-security>.

<sup>23</sup> Ritu Bharadwaj, Devanshu Chakravarti, N Karthikeyan, Shakirul Islam, and Urmi Jahan Tanni, "Exposed and Exploited: Climate Change, Migration and Modern Slavery in Bangladesh," *International Institute for Environment and Development*, February 2025, <https://www.iied.org/22604iied>.

<sup>24</sup> Anbarasan Ethirajan, "Rohingya: Gang Violence Stalks World's Largest Refugee Camp," *BBC News*, 24 August 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-66569013>.

Climate change-induced displacement and the Rohingya refugee crisis could exacerbate instability and vulnerability to exploitation and facilitate atrocity crimes. Bangladesh should deepen cooperation with international partners to secure climate adaptation funding, disaster risk reduction support, and sustainable urban planning assistance for rapidly growing cities.

- To support climate migrants, Bangladesh should collaborate with global partners to access the Loss and Damage Fund. This collaboration should involve implementing coordinated policies that ensure migrants have access to housing, employment, and social services, reducing their vulnerability to trafficking and modern slavery.
- The Rohingya crisis requires renewed diplomatic efforts involving both regional and global actors. These efforts should prioritise sustained humanitarian aid, the prevention of radicalization in refugee camps, and the facilitation of safe, dignified, and voluntary repatriation. International monitoring mechanisms can help prevent abuses by security forces.
- Rohingya refugees should be provided with access to quality education and employment opportunities beyond the confines of camps, empowering them to make meaningful contributions to Bangladesh's economic development.

## 8. Nationwide Psycho-social support

Trauma is an unspoken yet widespread social phenomenon in Bangladesh. During Sheikh Hasina's rule, a culture of fear was prevalent across the society due to state violence.<sup>25</sup> Many families have endured trauma due to mass imprisonment, extrajudicial killing and enforced disappearances. Political violence, violence by militant Islamists, violence against minorities and violence against women, and lack of justice have further compounded this complex scenario. There are a number of studies which find an intrinsic nexus between trauma, violence and extremism. For example, a study on 269 Rwandan prisoners accused or convicted of crimes related to the 1994 genocide found violence functioned as an antidote to trauma symptoms for some perpetrators.<sup>26</sup> In addition, a study of 98 female former child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo found a correlation between high levels of trauma exposure and perpetration of violence.<sup>27</sup> Bangladesh needs to prioritise establishing

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<sup>25</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Where No Sun Can Enter," *Human Rights Watch*, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/08/16/where-no-sun-can-enter/decade-enforced-disappearances-bangladesh>; Nasif Sadik, "Political Repression Unveiled: Criminological Overview on Enforced Disappearance in Bangladesh," *International Criminology* (2026), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43576-026-00233-4>; FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights), "Mid-term assessment of the status of implementation of UPR recommendations in Bangladesh," *International Federation for Human Rights*, 2 December 2020, <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/bangladesh/mid-term-assessment-of-the-status-of-implementation-of-upr>.

<sup>26</sup> Roland Weierstall, Suzanne Schaal, Inga Schalinski, Jean-Pierre Dusingizemungu & Thomas Elbert, "The thrill of being violent as an antidote to posttraumatic stress disorder in Rwandese genocide perpetrators," *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 2:1 (2011). <https://doi.org/10.3402/ejpt.v2i0.6345>.

<sup>27</sup> Katy Robjant, Sabine Schmitt, Amani Chibashimba, Samuel Carleial, Thomas Elbert and Anke Koebach, "Trauma, aggression, and post conflict perpetration of community violence in female former child soldiers — A study in Eastern DR Congo," *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 11 (2020), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7574907/>.

a comprehensive state-supported and community-led psycho-social support system towards healing and breaking cycles of violence.

- Build a Community-Rooted, Layered Support Network: Bangladesh should establish a nationally coordinated but locally delivered network of trained community development specialists and counsellors. Rooted in survivor communities and culturally familiar, this layered system ensures that psychosocial support reaches the majority who cannot access centralised services, while maintaining clear referral pathways to specialist care for those with complex trauma needs.
- Deliver Holistic, survivor-centred care and replicate lessons from the FASSTT Network, Australia: The Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT) demonstrates that effective trauma recovery must go beyond clinical treatment, operating as a collective of expertise that simultaneously addresses individual healing, community resilience, and systemic advocacy. Bangladesh should draw directly from this model. The framework must be embedded in the national health budget and protected by legislation, ending dependency on short-term international donor cycles that leave survivors without support when funding ends. A national coordinating body should oversee quality standards and resource distribution, while preserving the local autonomy and community trust that makes grassroots psychosocial work effective in the first place.

## Conclusion

Bangladesh has made notable progress in addressing the legacy of past abuses and seeking accountability for offenders. Recent initiatives aimed at investigating and prosecuting those involved in human rights violations, such as extrajudicial killings and political violence, indicate a growing recognition of the necessity to move away from a culture of impunity that has historically influenced governance. Although these processes remain unfinished and at times contentious, they signify a meaningful shift toward justice and institutional accountability. Such efforts provide some redress for victims and serve as a deterrent, conveying a clear message that abuses of power will not go unpunished.

These positive advancements should be both strengthened and broadened. Accountability must be applied consistently and impartially, regardless of political ties, to ensure that justice is not perceived as selective. By doing this, Bangladesh can begin rebuilding trust between its citizens and state institutions, which is vital for preventing mob violence, reducing political polarization, and promoting social unity.

Preventing atrocity crimes in Bangladesh necessitates more than mere policy reforms; it requires a sustained commitment to democratic principles, inclusivity, and human dignity. The country's history, marked by atrocity crimes as well as remarkable resilience, underscores the significance of the situation. By addressing structural risks while capitalising on recent progress in accountability, Bangladesh has the potential to forge a more stable and equitable future.