



From Ballot to Governance: Protecting People and Strengthening Democracy in Bangladesh

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The general elections held in Bangladesh on 12 February 2026 followed the fall of the 16-year long, autocratic regime of the Awami League led by Sheikh Hasina. This was the result of a mass uprising of the people in July 2024 and a clear and positive step in the democratic process of the country.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-led coalition won with a two-thirds majority, while the coalition led by the Jamat-e-Islami party became a strong opposition. The Awami League was banned from contesting.¹

¹ Daily Star, 10 May 2025. Govt decides to ban AL activities, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/politics/news/govt-decides-ban-al-activities-3891566>; Al Jazeera, 13 February 2026. Bangladesh Election Results 2026: Who won? Who lost? What's next? <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/2/13/bangladesh-election-results-2026-who-won-who-lost-whats-next>

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An Interim Government was formed after the July 2024 uprising, with Mohammad Yunus appointed as Chief Advisor. The Interim Government is to be commended for successfully holding these elections amidst numerous challenges, thus fulfilling the manifold aspirations of the people of Bangladesh.

Bangladeshis also voted at the Referendum on the July Charter 2025 on 12 February, which was equally significant for the country's transition to a democratic process.²

As the newly elected government assumed office, it faced both renewed expectations and persistent challenges in advancing human rights. Over the past decades, Bangladesh has made notable progress in economic growth, poverty reduction and social development. However, concerns remain regarding civil and political freedoms, the rule of law, accountability and the protection of vulnerable communities. Strengthening human rights protections is essential not only for democratic consolidation but also for sustainable and inclusive development. In particular, ensuring judicial independence, safeguarding civic space and reinforcing institutional accountability mechanisms will be critical priorities for the new administration.

During its mission to Bangladesh from 28 August to 3 September 2025, a regional delegation of South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR) met

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with journalists, academics, legal professionals, student leaders who led the July uprising, civil society representatives, several advisers and the chief advisor of the Interim Government, as well as the victims of enforced disappearances. These meetings were important for SAHR to learn about the people's aspirations with regard to the economy, the security status, reforms to legislation and the development of the public institutions of the country to strengthen democratic values and promote and protect the rights and entitlements of the people.³

As Bangladesh moves forward, embedding human rights at the center of governance will require political will, legal reform, institutional strengthening and meaningful engagement with civil society. The newly elected government has a significant opportunity to reaffirm its constitutional commitments, enhance transparency and accountability and build a more just and inclusive society for all citizens. Therefore, SAHR calls on the new government to urgently address the public concerns listed below, in consultation with the relevant stakeholders.

² Al Jazeera, 19 February 2026. Bangladesh referendum: The big post-election flash point? <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/2/19/bangladesh-referendum-the-big-post-election-flashpoint>

³ SAHR conducted a mission from 28 August to 3 September 2025 to understand the progress made by the Interim Government of Bangladesh in the aspects of promotion and protection of human rights and democratic values in their first year in office. The South Asian delegation included Dr. Roshmi Goswami, SAHR Co-Chairperson; Saroop Ijaz, lawyer and SAHR member; and Deekshya Illangasinghe, SAHR Executive Director.

1. Weakened Levels of Law and Order

The rule of law in Bangladesh was severely weakened in the aftermath of the July uprising. Violent crimes such as robbery, political violence, murders, mob attacks, vigilante and reprisal attacks, and extortion saw an alarming surge.

There was a deep sense of insecurity among the masses for a number of reasons. These included murder charges being brought against persons who were arrested; that many of the accused were denied bail and those who became ill while in detention were not given medical treatment; that there were many loopholes and delays of due process; that prisoners in detention suffered violence in prison and in the courthouse, and that acts of vengeance were treated with leniency.

In the meantime, law enforcement agencies were struggling to regain full functionality and faced accusations of ignoring the victims of crime and displaying a disturbing indifference to the escalating violence. Some of the provincial Bar Associations were struggling with the lack of lawyers while newly appointed judges took time to familiarise themselves with their caseloads.

According to Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), (a legal aid and human rights organisation in Bangladesh), at least 401 incidents of political violence occurred in 2025, leaving around 4,844 people injured and 102 killed.⁴ As per the survey by the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) published in August 2025,

overall concern about mob violence stood at 80%, concern for women's safety at 56%, nighttime safety at 61% and street harassment related to women's attire at 67%.⁵

The Bangladeshi security forces appeared hesitant or unable to impose law and order across the nation, to prevent the violence. As a result, widespread demonstrations, mob assaults, vigilante and retaliatory attacks—especially on the media—and other instances of instability in public life indicated that the Interim Government did not have the ability to impose and maintain law and order within the country.

This trend of failures in the rule of law across the country made ordinary citizens extremely alarmed and anxious. There was an increase in acts of violence, religious extremism, politically driven attacks, harassment of women in public and the oppression of religious and ethnic minorities. These abuses raised serious concerns about a worsening situation in the future. The extremely high level of insecurity amongst the people—especially among members of civil society—was very obvious, for even the slightest, most unsubstantiated allegations of being associated with the Awami League became sufficient reason for people to be targeted.

1.1 Mob Violence and the Escalation of Vigilante Action

The vigilante activities of the mobs escalated during the post-July uprising, reflecting the rapid deterioration of the public security apparatus.

⁴ The Business Standard, 31 December 2025. 197 killed in Mob Violence in 2025: ASK, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/197-killed-mob-violence-2025-ask-1323301>

⁵ The survey, titled "BIGD Pulse Survey 3: Public Opinion, Experiences and Expectations, July 2025," gathered opinions on the activities of the Interim Government, people's expectations for reforms and political parties' public support ahead of the upcoming elections.

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A report by ASK noted that mob violence and other serious human rights violations caused at least 197 deaths in Bangladesh in 2025.⁶

The gradual increase in mob violence resulted in an average of 18 deaths per month, with at least 179 fatalities recorded between August 2024 and June 2025 - marking the highest annual death toll in a decade.⁷ The most common targets were persons accused of theft, blasphemy or political dissent. In many instances the police only investigated these crimes after public outcry on social media.

In one particularly tragic instance, a mob in Rajshahi beat to death Abdullah Al Masud, a former student leader who had a prosthetic leg, as he attempted to purchase medication for his newborn infant. Police allegedly did nothing to intervene while this incident took place, despite his cries for help and obvious injuries.⁸

The surge in vigilante violence revealed the more serious problem of a breach in the social contract, leading to the culture of impunity that saw people losing trust in the nation's legal system.

It was evident that the state itself transgressing the rules and standards of human rights gave citizens encouragement to enforce their own forms of justice, by subtly legitimising illegal behavior.

Besides committing individual acts of violence, the mobs disrupted cultural events and women's football matches and attacked residences, media offices, heritage sites and shrines. These actions appeared to have been orchestrated by powerful groups including religious extremists, ultranationalists and online influencers, who sought to control public morals, drive dissent and manufacture post-uprising narratives. These were not mere spontaneous outbreaks of public rage.⁹

ASK in its 2024 Annual Assessment stated that *"during the Interim Government, lynching people to death in the name of mob justice has been worrying,"* as there were 128 cases of deaths by lynching recorded during 2024. In 2023, about 51 persons were lynched to death, compared to which there was a 131% increase in deaths by lynching, in 2024.¹⁰

For the most part, political parties did not explicitly denounce these acts. Others defended mob violence as a historical norm or renamed the mobs as 'pressure groups', while still others distanced themselves from such actions, citing them as an outpouring of public outrage following years of persecution.¹¹ The state itself legitimised illegal activity when it participated in or tolerated the abuse of human rights. The outcome was a perilous change in the way justice was viewed, with people using violence as

⁶ The Business Standard, 31 December 2025. 197 killed in Mob Violence in 2025: ASK, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/197-killed-mob-violence-2025-ask-1323301>

⁷ Daily Star, 26 June 2025. Mob violence now alarming routine in Bangladesh, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/mob-violence-now-alarming-routine-3924961>

⁸ Prothom alo (English). 8 September 2024. Ex- BCL leader Masud beaten to death in Rajshai. He lost a leg earlier, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/b9qo0rfh30>

⁹ The Diplomat 26 June 2025. Why is mob violence so common in Bangladesh? <https://thediplomat.com/2025/06/why-is-mob-violence-so-common-in-bangladesh/>

¹⁰ The Business Standard, 31 December 2024. Death from mob lynching more than doubled to 128 in 2024: ASK, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/deaths-mob-lynching-more-doubled-128-2024-ask-1031696>

¹¹ Just News, 26 June 2025. Not a mob, but a pressure group has emerged: Shafiqul Alam, <https://www.justnewsbd.com/en/bangladesh/news/25809#>:

a form of control and retaliation after becoming disillusioned with institutional remedies.

Despite the elected government announcing that mob violence would not be tolerated,¹² it has been seen to continue in the post-election period. The Human Rights Support Society (HRSS) stated that there were 49 deaths due to mob violence in 88 incidents, during the first three months of 2026.¹³

2. Mass Arrests, including ‘Operation Devil Hunt’

Of severe and particular concern were the mass arrests that also took place, mostly targeting members and supporters of the Awami League, with little or no due process being observed.

The most notorious feature of this crackdown was ‘Operation Devil Hunt’, initially launched on 8 February 2025.¹⁴ This exercise was promoted as a national effort to restore public safety, but instead it functioned as a tool for political cleansing. Within a week of the launch of phase 2 on 13 December 2025—to ensure public safety ahead of national elections—over 12,500 persons had been detained.¹⁵ The Home Affairs Adviser Lt Gen (Retd) Md. Jahangir told reporters that the operation would go on until *“All the devils are finished”*.¹⁶

“Reports suggested that many elderly people and even those uninvolved in politics had been arrested without warrants, often in pre-dawn raids. In some cases, detainees were held without being formally charged, were denied legal representation and were not produced before a magistrate within the constitutionally mandated 24 to 48 hours.”

Reports suggested that many elderly people and even those uninvolved in politics had been arrested without warrants, often in pre-dawn raids. In some cases, detainees were held without being formally charged, were denied legal representation and were not produced before a magistrate within the constitutionally mandated 24 to 48 hours. In response to criticism about the dehumanising name of the operation, the Interim Government later dropped the name ‘Operation Devil Hunt’, but the mass arrests continued. For example, a report suggested that in April-May 2025, over 48,000 persons had been arrested in one month, with an average of 1,500 daily.¹⁷

These arrests were conducted by the Joint Forces, while military personnel were also involved, since the military held the powers of executive magistracy during the period of the Interim

¹² Daily Star, 18 February 2026. Mob culture won’t be tolerated, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/mob-culture-wont-be-tolerated-salahuddin-4109276>; Daily Star, 17 April 2026.

¹³ Daily Star, 12 April 2026. 39 die in custody in first 3 months of 2026, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/crime-justice/news/39-die-custody-first-3-months-2026-hrss-report-4149566>

¹⁴ Prothom Alo English, 14 February 2025. Operation Devil Hunt: 3924 arrested in 7 days, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/xdqrsnfmmo>

¹⁵ The Business Standard, 1 January 2026. Operation Devil Hunt Phase 2: 12,607 arrested so far, 156 firearms recovered, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/crime/operation-devil-hunt-phase-2-12607-arrested-so-far-156-firearms-recovered-1324391>; BSS News, 27 January 2026. Over 2200 held, huge arms, drugs seized under operation Devil Hunt Stage 2 : Jahangir, <https://www.bssnews.net/news-flash/355289>

¹⁶ Diplomat, 6 March 2025. Breaking the Promise? State Violence and Dehumanization in Post Revolution Bangladesh, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/03/breaking-the-promise-state-violence-and-dehumanization-in-post-revolution-bangladesh/>

¹⁷ Daily Star, 19 May 2025. Over 48400 arrested in one month, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/over-48400-arrested-one-month-3898721>

Government. There were reports of ill treatment during arrests, torture, death in custody and even extrajudicial killings.

2.1 The Urgent Need to Strengthen the Police Force

The fact-finding report by the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR) estimated that around 1,400 people might have been killed during the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh.¹⁸

On 8 August 2024, the then Inspector General of Police stated that a total of 42 policemen died between 16 July and 6 August 2024.¹⁹ The PHQ released a list of names of 44 police officers who were killed during the student and public-led uprising in July.²⁰ The Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) reported on 4 August 2024, that 13 policemen were killed in the Enayetpur Police Station of the Sirajganj district and one at Eliotganj Highway Police Station in the Cumilla district. The PHQ confirmed the news of the deaths in a press release, which also said that more than 300 policemen were injured across the country.²¹

However, there were no condolences officially tendered by the Interim Government to the family members of the slain police officers, nor was there a process of inquiry or investigation

into these deaths that took place after August 2024. This demoralised the police as a force and as a result, police personnel were ineffective in ensuring civilian protections.

The police department meticulously maintains the list of officers or constables, who are injured or killed in any protests or any acts of violence. A list of total number of police officers killed in the uprising was released by the PHQ. Consequently, the PHQ requested anyone who claimed that there were more police who were killed whose names did not appear on the list, to provide the relevant evidence.²² Further, the pardoning of the persons who murdered these officers led to a deep sense of frustration within the police and it was reported that the Police as a force, was unhappy about being questioned by the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) about their functions and activities during the July protests.²³

There were demands for legislative changes that would make the police accountable for their actions, since most of the 1,400 fatalities were people who were shot dead by the police during the mass uprising.

The Police Reform Commission submitted its report to the Chief Adviser on 15 January 2025, outlining 15 key recommendations to promote transparency, accountability,

¹⁸ UNHR, 12 February 2025. Bangladesh: UN report finds brutal, systematic repression of protests, calls for justice for serious rights violations, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/02/bangladesh-un-report-finds-brutal-systematic-repression-protests-calls>

¹⁹ Prothomalo English, 12 August 2024, 326 killed in 4-6 August, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/uehg958yy8> (Accessed on 27 October 2025)

²⁰ Prothomalo, 18 August 2024. 44 policemen killed in student-mass uprsing, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/government/r5qrx04c5#>.

²¹ BSS News, 04 August 2024, 14 policemen killed in miscreant attacks in Sirajganj,Cumilla, <https://www.bssnews.net/news-flash/202673>

²² Prothomalo English, 25 Oct 2025. Some media, people spreading lies on number of cops killed in uprising: CA's press wing, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/fy1fy04mld>

²³ Dhaka Tribune, 16 October 2024, Police frustration grows over 'immunity' for officer killings, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/362065/police-frustration-grows-over-%E2%80%98immunity%E2%80%99-for>

human rights and citizen centered policing.²⁴ The Commission recommended a five-step use-of-force plan based on old and British colonial laws and modern international standards, which was intended to minimise harm and protect lives. The Commission also urged the quick implementation of Supreme Court directives on arrests, searches and interrogations. Further, the Commission suggested amending laws, installing glass-walled interrogation rooms, treating female detainees with respect, the banning of the filing of cases against unknown persons and showing suspects to the media before conviction.

Moreover, to build a transparent, people-friendly police system, the Reform Commission advised that the proposed Police Commission be an independent body.

The Commission further recommended ending the misuse of anonymous First Information Reports (FIRs) and the banning of the practice of presenting suspects as criminals in the media before a court verdict. It suggested empowering the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to directly investigate allegations of human rights violations by law enforcement personnel. The commission also recommended taking disciplinary action against officers involved in incidents concerning the casualties of July and August 2024, limiting police powers to control unlawful gatherings, and the revision of 22 laws, for police reform. It also called for an independent commission to oversee the police, with representation from both the ruling and opposition parties.

The Police Commission Ordinance–2025, promulgated by the interim government as part of the exercise of reforming the police force, is now being revised for presentation as a Bill in the National Parliament. The ordinance originally included a provision requiring the Police Commission to recommend the appointment of the Inspector General of Police (IGP).

However, this provision was later removed, which weakened the process of reform.²⁵

3. Rising Religious Extremism

Religiously motivated violence in Bangladesh increased dramatically between August 2024 and June 2025, and was disproportionately directed against non-conforming Muslim sects and minority communities. At least 241 violent occurrences were recorded during this time, including attacks on 20 Hindu temples, the murder of at least seven Hindu persons, and the destruction of more than 100 Sufi and Ahmadiyya shrines, according to the Manobadhikar Sangskriti Foundation (msf) 2025 report.²⁶

Further, the scope and severity of such persecution and violations were evidenced by the pillage of 137 minority-owned homes and businesses and arson attacks on 14 properties.

The inertia and inconsistency of the Interim Government and law enforcement forces drew heavy criticism. While the Chief Advisor publicly portrayed these violent episodes as political rather than religious in nature, officials often

²⁴ Dhaka Tribune, 05 August 2025. Police Reforms Commission: A framework for accountability, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/388118/police-reforms-commission-a-framework-for>

²⁵ Prothom Alo, 7 April 2026. Police Commission to be further weakened, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/aglqsksunp>

²⁶ Manobadhikar Sangskriti Foundation (MSF), 2025. Annual Human Rights Report 2025, <https://www.msf.org.bd/Annual%20Human%20Rights%20Report%202025.php>

referred to the violence as “*spontaneous public anger*.”²⁷ Despite the seriousness of the attacks, very few persons were taken into custody, and the majority were freed on bond in a few days.²⁸ At least 20 Hindus, on the other hand, were still behind bars for allegedly “*hurting religious sentiment*.” The state’s inability to defend minority rights was highlighted by the absence of accountability and the incarceration of victims rather than offenders, which worsened the human rights situation.²⁹

Far-right radical organisations like Hefazat-e-Islam and groups linked with Jamaat-e-Islami have made a comeback in the rural regions of Bangladesh, and they are taking advantage of the political unrest and religious extremism to increase their power. The intimidation of secular and minority communities, demands for Sharia law, and public demonstrations featuring ISIS-style emblems have all been part of their resurgence.³⁰

Extremist forces have begun trying to push their way onto the stage, after 16 years during which Sheikh Hasina both suppressed and appeased them, and the counter-terrorism

response of the Interim Government has been disjointed, imprecise and ineffective in tackling the organisational and intellectual base of radicalisation.

The proliferation of religious extremism is a sign of a grave deterioration in Bangladesh’s secular and multifaceted foundations and evidence of a seriously malfunctioning system of law enforcement. Minority rights have increasingly come under threat as a result of the tolerance of hate speech, selective law enforcement, and political backing for hardline organisations. Thus, in the absence of a robust and comprehensive action plan to counter extremism, Bangladesh might experience further instability and international contempt.

3.1 A Surge of Violence against Women and Children

There have been manifold episodes of discriminatory treatment of women and girl children in Bangladesh from the time of the post July uprising upto the elections.³¹ According to crime statistics from the PHQ released in July 2025, incidents of violence against women

²⁷ Daily Star, 18 March 2025. Minority attacks were political not religious, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/diplomacy/news/minority-attacks-were-political-not-religious-3851956>

²⁸ Connecting Nations, 30 January 2025. Bangladesh’s religious minorities under attack: 174 incidents, 23 dead in less than five months, <https://connectingnations.com/2025/01/bangladeshs-religious-minorities-under-attack-174-incidents-23-dead-in-less-than-five-months/>

²⁹ HRW, 2025. World Report 2025, Bangladesh, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/bangladesh#>:

³⁰ Dhaka Tribune, 3 May 2025. Influential Islamists promise sharia as they ready for polls, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/380276/influential-islamists-promise-sharia-as-they-ready>; RSIS, May 2025. Bangladesh’s evolving security crisis: The rise of religious extremism amidst political transition, <https://rsis.edu.sg/ctta-newsarticle/bangladeshs-evolving-security-crisis-the-rise-of-religious-extremism-amid-political-transition/>

³¹ UN women, July -December 2024. Gender Analysis – Bangladesh, Impact of the Civil Unrest on Women and Marginalised Groups, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/np-c1521-rapid-gender-analysis-juldec24.pdf>; Taylor & Francis Online, 03 August 2025, Women’s ongoing struggles for safety in ‘new’ Bangladesh: human rights under siege, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1323238X.2025.2533890#abstract>; Global Voices, 18 October 2025. A year after the uprising, women in Bangladesh face new challenges: Interview with Farzana Sithi, <https://globalvoices.org/2025/10/18/farzana-sithi-interview-on-the-struggles-of-post-uprising-bangladeshi-women/>

and children surged significantly.³² In the last four months of 2024, 5,795 such cases were reported, and during the first six months of 2025, the number of rape cases recorded was 2,744. Meanwhile, the reforms presented by the Commission on Women's Affairs came under severe attack by religious extremists while additionally, the government did not endorse the reforms at all.³³

Comparing the data of the first six months of 2025 to a different year might better illustrate the trend of criminality. There were 1,933 murders in the first six months of 2025; evidently nearly 11 (10.74) people were murdered on a single day, compared to 8.28 persons every day in 2023.³⁴ There were also 2,744 incidents of rape up until June 2025, meaning that over 15 women were being raped every day.

The most incriminating indictment of the period of the Interim Government was the failure to protect children. There were 2,159 instances of violence against children between January and June 2025 amounting to 12 children abused every day, as opposed to 2,713 such instances in 2023, which was about 7.43 per day.

The Bangladesh Mahila Parishad stated in early July 2025 that the number of rape cases between January and June 2025 was nearly as high as the total number of rape cases in 2024 in their

“A collective mindset, greater efforts and a restructuring of society itself are necessary if the country is to ensure genuine safety for its women and children.”

compilation of statistics (based on newspaper reports). The organisation also reported 481 rapes, of which 345 were of children. There was a total of 516 incidents of rape reported in the year of 2024.

The factors that have contributed to the surge of violence against women include the failure to deliver justice rapidly, the societal norms and views that treat women as subordinate, and ineffective protection systems for Bangladeshi women in general.

The absence of a system of effective legal implementation and victim support mechanisms—such as shelter, social security, and equal opportunity—as well as the lack of societal respect, all reflect a systemic failure in the country's responsibilities towards its women. A collective mindset, greater efforts and a restructuring of society itself are necessary if the country is to ensure genuine safety for its women and children.

³² The Business Standard, 17 July 2025. Violence against women in first half of 2025 shows sharp increase over previous 2 years, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/crime/violence-against-women-first-half-2025-shows-sharp-increase-over-previous-2-years>; Asia News Network, 25 August 2025. Bangladesh's child rape cases rise nearly 75% in 7 months, <https://asianews.network/bangladeshs-child-rape-cases-rise-nearly-75-in-7-months/>

³³ HRW, 5 May 2025, Bangladeshi Women's Rights opposed by hardline religious groups, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/05/05/bangladeshi-womens-rights-opposed-hardline-religious-groups>; also see The Daily Star, 4 May 2025. Disband Women's Reform Commission, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/disband-womens-reform-commission-3885741>

³⁴ The Daily Star, 15 July 2025. Crime 'stable' at 11 murders and 15 rapes a day, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news-0/news/crime-stable-11-murders-15-rapes-day-3940666>

3.2 Attacks on Religious Minorities

Religious minorities—especially the Hindus and Muslims of other sects such as the Ahmadiyya and Sufis—faced particular violence.³⁵ According to the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council (BHBCUC), commonly known as the Oikya Parishad, 2,010 incidents of communal violence occurred between 4 - 20 August 2024, resulting in the deaths of 9 individuals from minority groups, while the newspapers reported that 1,068 facilities were attacked.³⁶

Around 408 households were vandalised during these incidents, including 36 cases of arson. Besides this, there were also reports of 113 incidents of the vandalising of business establishments owned by the minority community, 32 incidents of attacks on temples and mosques of the Ahmadiyya sect and 92 incidents of vandalising idols in 92 temples.³⁷

An Ahmadiyya place of worship was attacked by a mob on the night that the Hasina government collapsed, part of a wave of anarchy that targeted minority religious sites, particularly those of Hindus. According to an official statement from the community, on 5 August, the Ahmadiyya Mosque in Taraganj, Rangpur district, was targeted; on 6 August, the Ahmadiyya Mosque in Bamnail village, Rajshahi district, and the

mosque in Choraikhola, Nilphamari district, were also attacked. That same day, the Ahmadiyya Mosque in Madartek, Dhaka City, faced two assaults by local religious extremists. Additionally, on 6 August a group of religious fanatics attacked and vandalised an Ahmadiyya mosque and homes in Rangtia, Sherpur district. On 9 August, another attack on the Ahmadiyya community was orchestrated by a group of religious extremists.³⁸

On 18 December 2025, when violence erupted after the death of Sharif Osman Hadi, leader of the Inqilab Moncho in Mymensingh's Bhaluka, a young Hindu man was beaten to death over allegations of religious defamation. After the murder, his body was set on fire in a barbaric manner, and a journalist, who served as the president of a press club in Khulna, was also shot dead on the same day.³⁹

However, the Durga Pooja was held peacefully during the period of the Interim Government, which was a guarantee given to the SAHR mission when they met the Law Advisor and the Advisor to the Ministry of Local Government.

3.3 Attacks on Cultural Events and Mazars

According to the Global Sufi Organization, during a six-month period in 2023 more than 80 mazars (shrines) and darbar sharifs (Sufi centers)

³⁵ Global Center for Democratic Governance (August 2024 – September 2025). The burning of shrines: Bangladesh's cultural and spiritual soul under attack, https://globalcdg.org/100shrines_destroyed/

³⁶ Daily Star, 19 September 2024. 2010 communal attacks in Bangladesh since August 4-20: Oikyo Parishad, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/news/2010-communal-attacks-bangladesh-august-4-20-oikyo-parishad-3706731>

³⁷ *Ibid*

³⁸ Dhaka Tribune, 01 September 2024. Ahmadiyya Muslims denounce attacks on community, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/356884/ahmadiyya-muslims-denounce-attacks-on-community>

³⁹ Scroll.in, 19 December 2025. Bangladesh: Hindu man killed after being accused of blasphemy amid widespread unrest, <https://scroll.in/latest/1089443/bangladesh-hindu-man-killed-after-being-accused-of-blasphemy-amid-widespread-unrest>; BDNews24.com, 18 December 2025. A journalist shot dead in Khulna, <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/cde86d2dabc1#>

were attacked by extremist groups across the country.⁴⁰ An annual Lalon Mela could not be held in Narayanganj because the district authorities denied the organisers permission to host the event, amidst *“threats from a religious group.”*⁴¹

In the face of objections from Islami Andolon leaders, the administration of the Kalkini Upazila district also blocked the Kundubarir Mela, an annual fair marking Diwali, and a Kali Puja traditionally held for almost two and a half centuries.⁴²

3.4 Attacks on Indigenous Communities

Incidents of violence also broke out in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) within just a month of the Interim Government taking control. In September 2024, more than 50 people were injured and homes were set ablaze, vandalised, and looted. Four people were killed and at least 72 others injured as violence flared up in Rangamati town and Khagrachhari’s Dighinala and Sadar Upazilas on 20 September 2024.

In Dighinala, Upazila Nirbahi Officer Mohammad Mamunur Rashid said that at least 102 shops were burnt down.⁴³ The deceased have been identified as Dhananjay Chakma (50),

Rubel Tripura (25) and Junan Chakma (20). In a more recent incident, 3 persons were killed by the Army in collusion with illegal settlers in a village in the CHT.⁴⁴

These events deepened the crisis of trust of the indigenous people towards the Interim Government. Although the youth across the country were expressing their emotions through graffiti, the students in the CHT were denied that right. Not only were they prevented from painting graffiti, they were also instructed what to paint and which slogans to write. These restrictions on the hill students made it clear that the spectre of the old fascist government still loomed over the hill areas. The students who had joined the July uprising with dreams of a non-discriminatory Bangladesh were instead confronted with disappointment yet again.

Since 5 August 2024, incidents of attacks, looting, vandalism and arson have been reported from at least 20 areas across the northern region. Nearly 70 indigenous families came under attack in several locations across the country, including Rajshahi, Naogaon, Chapainawabganj, Dinajpur and Thakurgaon.⁴⁵ Specifically, the indigenous communities in six Upazilas of Dinajpur were assaulted. The only Sidhu-Kanu sculpture in the country was also demolished.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Daily Star, 24 January 2025. 80 shrines, Sufi centres attacked in last 6 months, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/80-shrines-sufi-centres-attacked-last-6-months-3807006>

⁴¹ Daily Star, 24 November 2024. Lalon Mela cancelled over threats, Lalon Mela Cancelled In Narayanganj | Lalon Mela cancelled over threats, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/lalon-mela-cancelled-over-threats-3759631>

⁴² Prothomalo English, 26 October 2024. Local administration suspends Kundubari Mela due to objections, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/local-news/vw4a5j6zy0>

⁴³ The South Asian Times, 20 September 2024. 3 killed in Khagrachari clash: 72 hrs blockade in CTG from tomorrow, <https://www.thesouthasiatimesbd.com/crimes-law/news/23641>

⁴⁴ Daily Star, 20 September, 2024. Khagrachhari violence: 3 dead, 4 sent to CMCH ‘with bullet wounds’ <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/khagrachhari-violence-3-dead-4-sent-cmch-bullet-wounds-3707691>

⁴⁵ The Daily Star, 28 August 2024. 70 indigenous families attacked in the north, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/70-indigenous-families-attacked-the-north-3688151>

⁴⁶ Prothom Alo (English), 1 January 2025. Casualties from mob lynching more than doubled in 2024: ASK, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/yj5nd5a71p>

On 24 December 2024, the homes of 17 families from the Tripura community were burnt down in the dead of the night in the Sarai Tangojhiri area in Lama Upazila of Bandarban.⁴⁷ The locals claimed that some thugs had demanded tolls from them before the incident. The Dinajpur district administration acknowledged the vandalism and looting of indigenous homes. However, it remains unclear whether any action has been taken against those responsible.

Conforming to the demands of the student protesters, on 13 January 2025, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) removed graffiti featuring the word 'Adivasi' (indigenous) from the back cover of the Grade 9 and 10 Bengali Grammar and Composition textbook.⁴⁸ At least 20 Adivasi students were injured on 15 January 2025 in an attack on an indigenous group and its supporters who were protesting the removal of graffiti from textbooks, featuring the word 'Adivasi'.⁴⁹

The Adivasis once again demanded inclusion in the constitution. Ironically, many of those in power in the Interim Government had previously advocated for indigenous rights and freely used the term 'Adivasi'. However, even among the Adivasis, a growing hesitation to use the word had become evident.⁵⁰

The Interim Government's lack of transparency in dealing with minority groups was criticised. It had completely excluded indigenous peoples and religious minorities from the constitutional reforms process, by failing to include members of such groups in the Constitutional Reforms Commission. On 8 October 2024, the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) urged the Interim Government to reconstitute the commission and include representatives of indigenous peoples and minorities, who together constitute about 17.6 million people.⁵¹ However, the Interim Government took no action to rectify this issue.

4. Decline in Freedom of Expression and Press Freedom

The overall status of press freedoms and freedom of expression had significantly worsened. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) expressed concern over the safety of journalists in Bangladesh, particularly in the period leading up to the national elections on 12 February.⁵²

⁴⁷ BD News, 25 December 2024. 17 burnt in tribal Bangladesh village during Christmas festivities, 17 homes burnt in CHT village during Christmas homes festivities, <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/a7c6522ac19d>

⁴⁸ The Business Standard, 13 January 2025. Ethnic minority students protest 'Adivasi' graffiti removal from text book, Ethnic minority students protest 'Adivasi' graffiti removal from textbook | The Business Standard, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/nctb-removes-ativasi-graffiti-textbook-after-students-protest-1041691>

⁴⁹ Daily Star, 16 January 2025. Removal of word 'Adivasi': Indigenous group attacked at NCTB; 20 hurt, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/removal-word-ativasi-indigenous-group-attacked-nctb-20-hurt-3799851>

⁵⁰ The Daily Star 25 February 2025. How are Indigenous People are faring in the new Bangladesh? <https://www.thedailystar.net/supplements/anniversary-supplement-2025/towards-equality/news/how-are-indigenous-people-faring-the-new-bangladesh-3832191#>:

⁵¹ Written Statement of the International Working Group of Indigenous Affairs, 12 February 2025. IWGIA_Written Statement to UN Human Rights Council_Bangladesh_Feb 2025.pdf

⁵² Protham Alo, 24 January 2026. UNESCO voices concern over journalists' safety in Bangladesh ahead of elections, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/h3wmq1lugh>

On 18 December 2025, a series of violent incidents simultaneously occurred.⁵³ This violence was reportedly sparked by the death of Sharif Osman Hadi, a leader of the Inqilab Moncho, who died in a Singapore hospital from injuries sustained in a previous shooting.

Assailants vandalised and looted the media offices of both the Prothom Alo and Daily Star before the arson attack, and over 26 staff members including journalists of the Daily Star, were trapped inside as the building filled with smoke. Shortly after midnight, the historic cultural institution Chhayanaut in Dhanmondi was attacked and set on fire. On 19 December, a group of unidentified individuals also attacked and set fire to the central office of Bangladesh Udichi Shilpigoshthi. The attackers claimed that the media outlets had failed to adequately report Hadi's death and accused them of promoting *"Indian cultural hegemony"*.

The mob attacks on Prothom Alo, The Daily Star, Chhayanaut and Udichi were not ordinary incidents, and it seemed that these were coordinated assaults on progressive symbols, values and ideals; attempts to undermine the institutions that stand as symbols of secularism and pluralism and suppress their achievements.

There had been claims that the government had felt comfortable in aligning itself with pro-rightwing forces. Despite many limitations, the reporting of Prothom Alo and The Daily Star was, to a great extent, impartial and unbiased.

"There had been claims that the government had felt comfortable in aligning itself with pro-rightwing forces. Despite many limitations, the reporting of Prothom Alo and The Daily Star was, to a great extent, impartial and unbiased."

The claim that the media was promoting Indian hegemonic culture has not yet been fully substantiated.

In January 2026, Udichi (the Bangladesh Udichi Shilpigoshthi - the largest voluntary cultural organisation in Bangladesh), held an exhibition of the charred remains of their office displaying 57 years of cultural history, archival documents, musical instruments, theatrical costumes and props, as a symbolic protest against the attempts to silence cultural expression. Jamshed Anwar, the organisation's General Secretary, said that the Interim Government had deliberately excluded Udichi from the annual government grants allocated to cultural organisations for 2026. He further stated that a case had been filed on behalf of Udichi.⁵⁴

According to the annual report of ASK, 381 journalists were subjected to abuse and harassment across Bangladesh in 2025, while three journalists were killed and the bodies of four others were recovered under mysterious circumstances.⁵⁵ Journalists faced murder, death threats, arbitrary arrests, false charges, prolonged

⁵³ Prothom Alo, 20 December 2025. Attack on Prothom Alo, Daily Star and old politics in a new garb, <https://en.prothomalo.com/opinion/op-ed/8zucqecyq6>

⁵⁴ Prothom Alo (English), 14 January 2026. Fire at Udichi office: No govt representative enquired even after 24 days, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/r943kky7wi#:~:>

⁵⁵ Ain O' Salish Kendra, 31 December 2025. Journalist harassment Jan – December 2025 <https://www.askbd.org/ask/2025/12/31/journalist-harassment-jan-dec-2025/>

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detentions and other forms of intimidation. The media had been operating in a climate of fear, worsened by ongoing surveillance and harassment of both journalists and Human Rights Defenders (HRDs); media offices had been set on fire and raided, their accreditations revoked and travel bans imposed.

In politically motivated or unproven cases, 412 journalists were arrested, 39 were formally charged, and at least 10 journalists were killed.⁵⁶ Approximately 740 journalists were targeted in 178 attacks in 2024. Of those impacted, 448 journalists were attacked and injured while carrying out their job, and 5 journalists lost their lives. Of the 206 journalists who experienced court harassment, 147 were implicated in 21 cases, including murder cases, in the post-July 2024 insurrection.

In December 2025, the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement protestors trespassed into Somoy TV, forcing the owners to sack 5 journalists from their jobs.⁵⁷ Further, at least 167 journalists were denied accreditation for their alleged links with the Hasina government as of 13 November 2024, thereby seriously harming their professional life.

Following a fire accident at the Bangladesh Secretariat—the administrative headquarters of the Government—on 29 December 2024, the

Interim Government issued an order suspending journalists' access to the Secretariat, which added to the deterioration of the relationship between the government and the media fraternity.⁵⁸

5. Legal Reforms amidst the Continuation of Draconian Laws

During the period of the Interim Government, key laws that were drafted or revised included the Cyber Protection Ordinance (CPO), the Sexual Harassment Prevention and Protection Bill - a comprehensive draft on sexual harassment - and the Data Protection Ordinance (DPO), aimed at regulating personal data.

5.1 The Cyber Security Act Falls Short of International Standards

In light of the fact that virtual spaces are used to instigate mob violence, the vilification of persons and the fabrication of news, Bangladesh clearly requires strong legislation that safeguards the freedom of expression, the freedom of assembly and press freedom, in line with the constitution. At the same time, it is also important that this law be drafted in such manner that the government cannot misuse it to curtail political dissent and prevent the media from reporting on issues of public interest, including matters of government accountability and corruption.

⁵⁶ Rsf.org/Bangladesh, <https://rsf.org/en/world-press-freedom-index-2025-over-half-worlds-population-red-zones>; Rights & Risks Analysis Group, 7 February 2025, Bangladesh: The case for establishing OHCHR Field office, <https://www.rightsrisks.org/by-country/bangladesh/bangladesh-the-case-for-establishing-ohchr-field-office/>; The Hindu, 4 August 2025. Post – Hasina Bangladesh records 230% increase in attacks on journalists, says rights body, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/post-hasina-bangladesh-records-230-increase-in-attacks-on-journalists-says-rights-body/article69893178.ece>; The Humanitarian.Org. 11 February 2026. Democracy in darkness: Attacks on journalists silence pre-election Bangladesh, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2026/02/11/democracy-darkness-attacks-journalists-silence-pre-election-bangladesh>

⁵⁷ Daily Star, 24 December 2025. Student protesters entered Somoy TV owner's offices, journos sacked, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/student-protesters-entered-somoy-tv-owners-offices-journos-sacked-3783891>

⁵⁸ Prothom Alo, 28 December 2024, Security group restricts journalists' entry to secretariat: CA press wing <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/onq43d2bg>

The digital security law had often been used by the previous regime to target people from different sectors, including HRDs, activists and journalists. Prior to 2018, the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act 2006 amended in 2013 with vague definitions of crimes and harsher penalties, was used to restrict the freedom of expression, with section 57 of the law being the most frequently used.

In September 2018, the ICT Act was replaced by the Digital Security Act (DSA). The new law incorporated Section 57 of the ICT Act, and it contained other provisions that were overly broad and vague and imposed disproportionate sentences and lengthy prison terms on offenders.

During the time of the Interim Government, the Cyber Security Act (CSA) of 2023 (successor to the Digital Security Act 2018), was repealed, which was a welcome change. The CSA was used by the Hasina regime to curb press freedom and criminalise dissent, creating a chilling effect for freedom of expression in the country. The CPO was drafted to replace that Act, and removed some of the restrictive provisions of the CSA. After several selective consultations, the new Act was finally promulgated on 21 May 2025.

However, concerns have been raised by civil society groups, media professionals and HRDs with regard to some of the repressive provisions of the previous Act that have been retained and which are inconsistent with Bangladesh's international human rights obligations under

the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and could be used to stifle online expression.

Section 25 of the CPO entails provisions that make it an offence to *“transmit, publish, or disseminate any information with intent to insult, harass, or defame”* an individual. These are vague and overly broad terms that pose a threat to the freedom of expression and could discourage legitimate comments or criticism of individuals, especially those in power.⁵⁹

There are also concerns about Section 26 of the CPO that will allow the prosecution and jailing of citizens who *“hurt religious sentiments”*. This is an impermissible restriction, since under the relevant international standards, the right to religion or belief does not include the right to be free from criticism and ridicule. Section 8 of the CPO authorises the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) to remove or block content that may undermine ‘national unity,’ ‘economic activity,’ ‘security,’ ‘defence,’ ‘religious values,’ or ‘public order,’ at the request of law enforcement agencies and the Director-General of the National Cyber Security Agency (NCSA).⁶⁰ There are concerns regarding these vague and undefined reasons that could be used to remove or block content and about the excessive powers provided to the commission without any judicial oversight.

Section 35 of the CPO permits warrantless searches, seizures and arrests, requiring reports to

⁵⁹ CIVICUS, 12 February 2025. Bangladesh: UN report highlights repression by former Government as journalists targeted and draft cybersecurity ordinance raises concerns, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/bangladesh-un-report-highlights-repression-by-former-government-as-journalists-targeted-and-draft-cybersecurity-ordinance-raises-concerns/#>

⁶⁰ Front Line Defenders, 15 January 2025. Bangladesh: Concerns about the draft Cyber Protection Ordinance, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/statement-report/bangladesh-concerns-about-draft-cyber-protection-ordinance#:~>

be submitted to a tribunal, but without a defined timeline. This absence of a reporting deadline increases the risk of harassment and abuse by the authorities. Section 46 of the CPO refers to the offences classified as 'bailable' and 'non-bailable'. There is no recourse for defendants awaiting trial for 'non-bailable' offences.

5.2 The Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act No. 43 of 2016

The Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act (FDRA) was one of the tools used by the Hasina regime to control civic space. Section 3 of the Act requires individuals to obtain approval from the Non-governmental Organisation (NGO) Affairs Bureau to receive foreign funds to conduct voluntary activities, which in turn can adversely impact charitable activities and place a burden on the NGO Affairs Bureau. Section 4 states that the registration of an organisation will be issued only for a period of ten years and it is subject to renewal at the conclusion of this period. Section 6 (4) requires NGOs to obtain the approval of the Bureau to implement projects. The Bureau first sends the details of the project to the relevant ministry for comments, following which, if there is no objection, the Bureau approves the project.

The Act also interferes in the micro-management of NGOs. For example, Section 6 (5) stipulates that a registered NGO or person shall not spend more than 20% of the approved expenditure on its administrative functions. Section 8 (3) requires any person engaged in 'voluntary

activities' to inform the Bureau of travel abroad, which is intrusive and curtails the freedom of movement of the said individuals. Section 14 deems the violation of any provision of the Act an offence and also criminalises speech by making any "*malicious and indecent (derogatory and reproachful) comments regarding the constitution of Bangladesh or any constitutional institutions*" an offence.

The Interim Government brought an amendment to the Act through an Ordinance on 11 December, 2025, relaxing the burden of registration and securing approval for funding. However, as with several other ordinances, the new parliament has not endorsed this Ordinance. It is imperative that the new government takes immediate and proactive steps to address this issue.

5.3 Abolition of the Death Penalty

Odhikar (a leading human rights organisation in Bangladesh) reported that "*the death penalty in Bangladesh has been criticised for being used disproportionately against vulnerable and marginalised populations along the lines of economic status, social identity and levels of educational attainment.*"⁶¹

Also, since the weakness of the judicial system increases the possibility of errors, the imposition of capital punishment does not align well with the fundamental right to life enshrined in the constitution.

⁶¹ Odhikar, 2022. Imposition of death penalty and its impact, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/odhikar_replies-dp.pdf; UN News, 17 November 2025. UN opposes death penalty but pushes for justice in Bangladesh, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/11/1166384>; Amnesty International, 17 November 2025. Bangladesh: Justice for victims of 2024 massacre not served by death sentence against Sheikh Hasina, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/11/bangladesh-justice-for-victims-of-2024-massacre-not-served-by-death-sentence-against-sheikh-hasina/>

Similarly, the statute around which the International Crimes (Tribunals) (ICT-BD) is framed needs to be amended, based on Bangladesh's international obligations to human rights mechanisms, international criminal law and the Constitution of Bangladesh. This particular Tribunal which was specifically constituted to bring to account those responsible for grave violations of international law during the 1971 war of independence, includes rules of procedure and practices that have undermined international human rights standards and thus has the potential to be misused in the future.⁶²

6. Urgent revival of Independent Public Institutions - the National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh and the Information Commission

The National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh (NHRCBD) was established in 2009 but for all these years it has failed to address the numerous human rights violations in the country. Although legally defined as an independent body, the NHRCBD has suffered from serious institutional limitations.

Notably, the Interim Government brought amendments in to the NHRC Act in November and December 2025, aiming to strengthen the commission's independence and align it with international standards.⁶³

The NHRC 2025 Ordinance empowers the NHRCBD to act as a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) to prevent torture and allow the independent inspection of detention centers.⁶⁴ The new structure aims to include more diverse representation, including ethnic minorities and women. The new ordinance also allows the commission to directly investigate human rights violations by law enforcement and mandates compliance with its orders. The definition of human rights in this law has been broadened by the inclusion of human rights guaranteed under the constitution and laws of Bangladesh, international human rights instruments ratified by Bangladesh, and those recognised by customary international human rights law, consistent with the laws of Bangladesh.

Under a new Ordinance, a chairperson and four members of the NHRC were appointed on 5 February 2026.⁶⁵

While the steps taken by the Interim Government were commendable, critics raised concerns regarding the involvement of the Cabinet Secretary in the selection process, arguing that this could undermine the independence and credibility of the commission. It is disappointing to note that within a month of passing the new law, the government amended the ordinance to reinstate bureaucratic control of the selection

⁶² HRW, 22 October 2024. Letter to the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Regarding Reforming the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/10/22/letter-ministry-law-justice-and-parliamentary-affairs-regarding-reforming>; Global Human Rights Defence Organisation, 22 June 2025. Beyond 1971: The Transformation of Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal, <https://www.ghrd.org/beyond-1971-the-transformation-of-bangladeshs-international-crimes-tribunal/>

⁶³ BDNews 24, 30 October 2025. Govt. approves new human rights commission ordinance, expands jurisdiction and powers, <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/8cd106ab9699>

⁶⁴ BSS News, 27 November 2025. Government Okays new ordinance empowering NHRC as National Preventive Mechanisms, <https://www.bssnews.net/news/336395>

⁶⁵ BSS News, 06 February 2026, Justice Moynul Islam Chowdhury appointed new NHRC Chairman, <https://www.bssnews.net/others/358186>

committee. The presence of a top-tier bureaucrat will in turn allow the government to exert unwarranted influence over the formation of the commission, which is precisely the reason why the commission has remained ineffective over the years.

The Information Commission was essentially inactive, and all three commissioners resigned in the aftermath of the 2024 July uprising and the assumption of power by the interim government. Since then, despite petitions, protests and even a recent High Court ruling, the vacuum has persisted.

When the Right to Information (RTI) Act was adopted 16 years ago, it was hailed as a landmark in Bangladesh's democratic journey. Rooted in the principle that power belongs to the people, it granted citizens the right to know how they are governed and to demand answers from those in office. With the Information Commission dismantled, the requests for information go unanswered, appeals vanish into a void and the costs of such neglect are borne by ordinary people.

7. The Urgent Implementation of Extensive Reforms to Strengthen Public Institutions

To reset the nation's constitution, electoral system, and institutions, the Interim Government created eleven reform commissions for the following sectors: Public Administration, the

Judiciary, the Electoral System, the Constitution, the Police, Anti-Corruption, Health, Mass Media, Labour Rights, Local Government and Women's Affairs. Given that proactive reforms are the backbone of a democratic process, the newly elected government is obligated to quickly and consistently continue with the reform process, in consultation with the relevant stakeholders.

8. Redress for the Victims and the Families of the Disappeared

Following the accession of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances in December 2025, the Interim Government passed the 'Enforced Disappearance Prevention and Redress (Amendment) Ordinance 2025'. This introduced a key provision that allows a tribunal to officially declare a person 'disappeared' after five years of absence.⁶⁶ The government was empowered to appoint the required number of public prosecutors for the Enforced Disappearance Prevention and Redress Tribunal, based on recommendations from the NHRC.⁶⁷ However, the new parliament has not approved the ordinance and the government has said it will be reintroduced in parliament as one that is *"more contemporary, more welfare-oriented and more effective in ensuring justice"*.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Daily Star on X platform, 18 December 2025. <https://x.com/dailystarnews/status/2001632891160400247>

⁶⁷ Daily Star, 18 December 2025. Govt approves ordinance allowing official 'disappeared' status after 5 years, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/govt-approves-ordinance-allowing-official-disappeared-status-after-5-years>

⁶⁸ The Daily Star, 6 April 2026. Enforced Disappearance: Ordinance flawed, there will be a stronger bill, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/enforced-disappearance-ordinance-flawed-there-will-be-stronger-bill-4144641>

The Interim Government also withdrew its long-standing reservation on Article 14 (1) of the UN Convention Against Torture (CAT) so that the victims and their families could more easily access the compensation process.⁶⁹

During the period of the Interim Government, the filing of charges against 28 persons, including the previous Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, with regard to enforced and involuntary disappearances, was commendable.⁷⁰ However, in May 2025, several international organisations raised concerns about the lack of inclusive stakeholder consultation and the fact that the current draft of the Enforced Disappearance Prevention and Redress Ordinance 2025 fails to adhere to international standards, in terms of potential violations of the right to a fair trial and international law.⁷¹

9. Economic Justice

The extant economic challenges - high inflation, rising unemployment and growing income inequality paved the way for youth unrest, even

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The July uprising was sparked by the quota reforms and achieving economic justice was crucial to the whole struggle. Therefore, addressing the numerous issues pertaining to the economy that is spiralling down, including stabilising the economy, addressing the issue of high inflation and creating avenues of employment for young persons are altogether a great responsibility for the newly elected government.⁷³ It should also proceed with the recovery of the billions of monies allegedly siphoned off during the Hasina

⁶⁹ The Business Standard, 29 January 2026. Bangladesh to lift reservation on UN anti-torture convention, clears path for victim compensation, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/bangladesh-lift-reservation-un-anti-torture-convention-clears-path-victim-compensation>

⁷⁰ HRW, 09 October 2025. In Bangladesh a step toward Justice, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/10/09/in-bangladesh-a-step-toward-justice>

⁷¹ HRW, 15 May 2025. Joint Statement on Bangladesh’s draft enforced Disappearance Prevention and Redress Ordinance, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/05/15/joint-statement-bangladeshs-draft-enforced-disappearance-prevention-and-redress>

⁷² Vivekananda International Foundation, 6 January 2025. Bangladesh in 2024: A year of political turmoil and transformation, <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2025/january/06/Bangladesh-in-2024-A-Year-of-Political-Turmoil-and-Transformation>; The Diplomat, 16 October 2024. Hunger drives mass uprising in Bangladesh, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/10/how-hunger-drives-mass-uprisings-in-bangladesh/>; The Daily Star, 9 January 2025; What makes Bangladesh’s economy more troubled to progress? <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/open-sky/news/what-makes-bangladeshs-economy-more-troubled-progress-3794746>; The Conversation.com, 22 July 2025. Bangladesh sees small glimmers of economic hope a year after longtime autocrat ousted in people’s revolt, <https://theconversation.com/bangladesh-sees-small-glimmers-of-economic-hope-a-year-after-longtime-autocrat-ousted-in-peoples-revolt-256756>

⁷³ Al Jazeera, 3 December 2025. Bangladesh’s economy is not collapsing but undergoing a necessary reset, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2025/12/3/bangladeshs-economy-is-not-collapsing-but-undergoing-a-necessary-reset>

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regime, thereby continuing the efforts of the Interim Government.⁷⁴

Conclusion

In order to create a tangible and concrete shift to address the continuing violence that the country has faced since independence, the implementation of proactive legal policy changes and institutional reforms is essential. The positive measures initiated by the Interim Government such as the implementation of the reforms suggested by the 11 commissions, providing compensation to victims and the families of persons who were forcibly disappeared, and the establishment of an office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Bangladesh (initially for 3 years), are some of the critical initiatives that the elected government needs to effectively engage with.

SAHR believes that these steps sincerely taken and continued, could lead to the elimination of the challenges of a culture of violence and impunity, creating a conducive environment for the promotion and protection of human rights and the democratic process.

The removal of an autocratic leader, while significant, is only the first step toward dismantling entrenched systems of repression and rebuilding institutions on democratic foundations. The limitations of the reform

process, the persistence of authoritarian practices and the brittleness of institutions have all been evident during the previous year.⁷⁵ Furthermore, mending social divisions that have long fueled violence, intolerance and exclusion requires a strong political will and a clear focus to achieve the results demanded by the people. At present it is the obligation of the new government to pave the way for a genuine democratic transition.

So far, an immense sacrifice has been made by the people of Bangladesh to build a 'New Bangladesh', grounded in equality, inclusiveness and democratic accountability. Even though the post-transition period was marked by heightened insecurity, a weakening of law and order and entrenched cycles of vengeance that deepened social divisions - free and fair elections, devoid of major violations, have already taken place.⁷⁶ It is equally important to involve the youth in this significant endeavour of writing a new social contract that would lead to the achievement of the people's aspirations.

In light of these developments, it is imperative that the newly elected government of Bangladesh takes seriously the aspirations and expectations of its citizens, for security, justice and inclusive democratic governance. The transition offers a critical opportunity to restore public trust, strengthen the rule of law and protect the rights of the people - particularly those who are most vulnerable and marginalised.

⁷⁴ Transparency International, UK, 11 June 2025. Returning Bangladesh's missing billions, <https://www.transparency.org.uk/news/returning-bangladeshs-missing-billions>; The Interim Government formed 11 inquiry teams to investigate corruption allegations against the family members of Sheikh Hasina and 10 major industrial groups, including S Alam, Beximco, Bashundhara, and Summit. The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) led the investigation, with support from other agencies like the NBR and CID.

⁷⁵ Constitutionnet.Org, 16 May 2025. Bangladesh's Constitutional Reforms: Caught between Democratic Hopes and Authoritarian Resilience, <https://constitutionnet.org/news/voices/bangladeshs-constitutional-reforms-caught-between-democratic-hopes-and-authoritarian>

⁷⁶ Nearly 400 former ministers, members of parliament, and other Awami League officials have been named in over 1,170 cases, which also include hundreds of unnamed individuals, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/07/30/bangladesh-year-since-hasina-fled-rights-challenges-abound>

SAHR has drawn attention to the aforementioned concerns, in order to highlight the gaps between public expectation and governance in practice, in order to strongly urge the newly elected government to address these concerns.

Ultimately, this transitional moment presents a rare and decisive opportunity. It is incumbent upon the new government to respond to the aspirations of its citizens with courage, integrity and a clear vision - laying the foundations for a truly inclusive, accountable and democratic Bangladesh.

Therefore, SAHR calls on the newly elected Government of Bangladesh to:

1. Take immediate and effective steps to restore law and order across the country, by strengthening the judiciary through effective reforms.
2. Establish an independent body for police accountability as recommended by the Police Reforms Commission.
3. Execute impartial investigations into all cases of extrajudicial killing and the use of excessive force by the security forces at peaceful protests, and bring the perpetrators to justice in trials aligned with international standards for fair trials.
4. Take stern action against vigilante justice and mob violence and build people's confidence so that they are free of anxiety and fear.
5. Halt arbitrary mass arrests and ensure that the due process of the law is followed at every step, from detention to imprisonment.
6. Ensure the creation of a conducive environment for HRDs and journalists to engage in their activities without being intimidated and with no unwarranted harassment of them or their family members, and promptly take punitive action with due process, against offenders.
7. Review and revise the Cyber Protection Ordinance (CPO), Criminal Defamation under the Penal Code, and other laws and provisions that repress freedoms of expression and association and align them with Article 19 of the ICCPR and other relevant international human rights standards.
8. Revise the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act (FDRA) to free voluntary activism from administrative and bureaucratic complications.
9. Continue strengthening avenues of redress for victims, their families and the families of those who suffered enforced and involuntary disappearance, and ensure non-recurrence by establishing the required laws and policies.
10. Abolish the death penalty and amend the statute of the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT).

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11. Strengthen the National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh (NHRCBD) and the Information Commission to be fully fledged independent institutions aligned with the relevant international standards.
12. Consult and collaborate with civil society to promote public awareness regarding the effective implementation of reforms to facilitate the smooth functioning of the public institutions
13. Urgently implement improved laws and policies that ensure the smooth functioning of public institutions and enhance public trust in them.
14. Address the issues in the ailing economy, enabling justice for the people, especially the youth.
15. Facilitate the empowerment of the second-tier of political and civil society leadership with accountability, in consultation with the stakeholders.



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