

- JUSTICE
- Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture
- Refugee Council
- Refugee Legal Centre
- UN High Commissioner for Refugees

2. GEOGRAPHY AND ECONOMY

2.1. Located in southern Asia, the People's Republic of Bangladesh is bordered almost entirely by India. In 1999, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reported that there were some areas where the exact border with India was disputed. [1]. The other borders are a small frontier with Burma in the southeast, and the coastline along the Bay of Bengal in the south. [1]

2.2. According to the 1991 census the four largest cities were Dhaka, (the capital city), Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi. [1]

2.3. Bangladesh had an estimated population of 127 million in 1999 [13] and covers almost 57,000 square miles of land, [1]

2.4. In 1999, the CIA reported that Bengalis comprise 98 per cent of the country's population, with the remaining 2 per cent comprising 250,000 Biharis and less than 1 million people of tribal extraction. The majority religion is Muslim at 88.3 per cent, with the remainder comprising 10.5 per cent Hindus and 1.2 per cent others. [13]

2.5. The state language of Bengali is spoken by about 95 per cent of the population. [1] However Biharis speak Urdu, and the tribal populations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts use various dialects. English is also used in commerce and administration. [3a]

2.6. According to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in the UK, growth and inflation over the past few years have been reasonable, with growth at around 6 per cent. However, the FCO has commented that substantial economic challenges lie ahead - Bangladesh is highly dependent on donors (who financed 44 per cent of the fiscal deficit in 2000/1) and fiscal resources will need to be redirected toward reducing poverty. The FCO understands that the new Government that came to power in October 2001, appears to be committed to economic reform. [7b]

3. HISTORY

3.1. Please see the Chronology of Events in Annex A. For further history please refer to the Europa World Year Book. [1]

4. STATE STRUCTURES

4.1. CONSTITUTION

4.1.1 A new Constitution for the People's Republic of Bangladesh came into effect on 16 December 1972. The 1972 Constitution based its fundamental principles on nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism. The Constitution aims to establish a society free from exploitation in which the rule of law, fundamental Human Rights and freedoms, justice and equality are to be secured by all citizens. [1]

4.1.2. Arbitrary arrest or detention, discrimination based on race, age, sex, birth, caste or religion, and also forced labour are all prohibited under the Constitution. Subject to the law, every citizen has freedom of movement, assembly and association. The Constitution also aims to guarantee freedom of conscience, speech, press and religious worship. [1]

4.1.3. The Constitution was amended in 1977 to replace Islam with secularism. A further amendment in 1988 established Islam as the state religion. [1]

4.1.4. In August 1991 the Jatiya Sangsad approved an amendment, restoring the Prime

Minister as executive leader (under the previous system both the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers were answerable to the president). Apart from the Ershad-imposed period of martial law from 24 March 1982 until 10 November 1986, the Constitution has remained in place. [1]

4.2 POLITICAL SYSTEM

President

4.2.1. The President is constitutional Head of State and is elected by Members of the Bangladeshi Parliament, for a term of five years. [1]

4.2.2. The President has control of the armed forces and is responsible for appointing the Prime Minister and other ministers, as well as the Chief Justice and other judges. The President also has executive authority, which he exercises either directly or through subordinate officers in accordance with the Constitution. The Council of Ministers aid and advise the President. [1]

Parliament (the 'Jatiya Sangsad')

4.2.3. The Jatiya Sangsad consists of one Chamber. Members of the Jatiya Sangsad are directly elected on the basis of universal adult franchise from single territorial constituencies. Persons aged eighteen and over are entitled to vote. [1] 300 members are elected for a five-year term in single seat constituencies [16]

4.2.4. Women have been free to contest any of the 300 legislative seats in the Jatiya Sangsad that are subject to national elections. [2]

4.2.5. Until April 2001, there were a further 30 legislative seats, reserved specifically for women. Women were appointed to these 30 seats by majority vote in the Jatiya Sangsad. [2]

4.2.6. Critics of the reservation system felt that reserving the 30 seats tended to act to enhance the ruling party's majority rather than to empower women. [2]

4.2.7. In April 2001, the Constitutional provision that provided for the 30 seats, expired. [2]

4.2.8. In August 2001, both the Awami League and the BNP agreed in principle to reserve 60 women's seats instead of only 30, and to change the system so that these seats were to be filled by direct election. [2]

4.2.9. However, after the General Election in October 2001, a Government-sponsored bill to extend the reservation system could not be passed without a Constitutional amendment, which would have required a two-thirds majority. This was not possible because of the Opposition Awami League's parliamentary boycott. [2]

4.2.10. Seats are not specifically reserved for other minority groups, such as tribal people. [2]

4.3 JUDICIARY

4.3.1. Under the Constitution all citizens are equal before the law and have a right to its protection. [1]

4.3.2. The court system has two levels: The lower courts and the Supreme Court. Both hear civil and criminal cases. [2]

4.3.3. The lower courts consist of magistrates, who are part of the executive branch of

government, and session and district judges, who belong to the judicial branch. [2]

4.3.4. The Supreme Court is divided into two sections, the High Court and the Appellate Court. The High Court hears original cases and reviews cases from the lower courts. The Appellate Court has jurisdiction to hear appeals of judgments, decrees, orders, or sentences of the High Court. Rulings of the Appellate Court are binding on all other courts. [2]

4.3.5. Trials are public. The law provides the accused with the right to be represented by counsel, to review accusatory material, to call witnesses, and to appeal verdicts. [2]

4.3.6. State-funded defense attorneys rarely are provided, and there are few legal aid programmes to offer financial assistance. In rural areas, individuals often do not receive legal representation. In urban areas, legal counsel generally is available if individuals can afford the expense. However, sometimes detainees and suspects on Police remand are denied access to legal counsel. Trials that are underway are typically marked by extended adjournments whilst many accused people remain in prison. [2]

4.3.7. People may be tried in absentia, although this rarely is done. There is no automatic right to a retrial if a person convicted in absentia later returns. Absent defendants may be represented by state-appointed counsel, but may not choose their own attorneys, and, if convicted, may not file appeals until they return to the country. [2]

4.3.8. A major problem of the court system is the overwhelming backlog of a million cases. Because of this, the Ministry of Law initiated a pilot programme in Dhaka, Chittagong and Comilla offering Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in some civil cases, whereby citizens have the opportunity to have their cases mediated by people with a background in law before filing their cases. According to Government sources, the pilot programme has been very successful, and is popular among citizens in the areas concerned. [2]

4.3.9. ADR by traditional village leaders, which is regarded by some people to be more transparent and swift, is popular in rural communities. However, this can also be subject to abuse. [2]

4.3.10. Trials conducted under the SPA, the PSA, and the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act are similar to normal trials, but are tried without the lengthy adjournments typical in other cases. Under the provisions of the PSA and the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, special tribunals hear cases and issue verdicts. Cases under these laws must be investigated and tried within specific time limits, although the law is unclear as to the disposition of the case if it is not finished before the time limit elapses. [2]

4.3.11. In September 1996 the then Government established an "expert committee" within the law ministry to develop proposals to further separate the judiciary from the executive. [3d]

4.3.12. The US State Department reported in 2002, that on 21 June 2001, the Supreme Court reconfirmed an earlier 12-point ruling regarding the procedures for a 1997 High Court order to separate the judiciary from the executive. The 12-point ruling declared which elements of the 1997 order could be implemented without requiring a Constitutional amendment. The Supreme Court ordered the Government to implement those elements within 8 weeks. [2]

4.3.13. On 5 August, Ishtiaq Ahmed, (law advisor to the caretaker Government that had been convened to oversee national elections) announced that the judiciary would be separated from the executive by promulgating an ordinance. [2]

4.3.14. In January 2001 the High Court ruled illegal all fatwas, or expert opinions on Islamic law. The ruling resulted in violent public protests. The Supreme Court later stayed the High Court's decision. [2]

4.4 INTERNAL SECURITY

4.4.1. The Home Affairs Ministry controls the Police and paramilitary forces, which have primary responsibility for internal security. The Police are therefore accountable to the executive. [2]

4.4.2. According to the US State Department, Governments frequently use the Police for political purposes. Police often appear reluctant to pursue investigations against people associated with the ruling party. [2]

4.4.3. The US State Department goes on to say that there is widespread Police corruption and lack of discipline, that Police officers commit serious Human Rights abuses for which they are seldom disciplined and they routinely employ torture and other abuse during arrests and interrogations. This may consist of threats, beatings and, occasionally, the use of electric shock. [2]

4.4.4. The US State Department report on Human Rights for the year 2001 states that in 1998 the Deputy Commissioner of the Dhaka Police detective branch publicly defended the use of physical coercion against suspects, saying that the practice was necessary in order to obtain information. [2]

See Women and Children and Torture

4.5 LEGAL RIGHTS/DETENTION

4.5.1. The Constitution states that each person arrested shall be informed of the grounds for detention, provided access to a lawyer of his choice, brought before a magistrate within 24 hours, and freed unless the magistrate authorizes continued detention. [2]

4.5.2. The Constitution specifically allows for "preventive detention", in matters involving National Security, but with specified safeguards. [2] * National Security legislation includes the SPA, the PSA and Section 54, - see the sections on these.

4.5.3. The US State Department says that in practice authorities frequently violate Constitutional provisions, even in non-"preventive detention" cases. The US State Department says that in April 1999 the High Court criticized the Police force for rampant abuse of detention laws and powers. [2]

4.6 PRISONS AND PRISON CONDITIONS

4.6.1. Prison conditions are extremely poor for the majority of the prison population. [2]

4.6.2. One Human Rights organization reported that 72 people died in prison or Police custody during the year. According to credible sources, poor conditions were at least a contributing factor in many of these deaths. [2]

4.6.3. Most prisons are overcrowded and lack adequate facilities. Government figures indicate that the existing prison population of roughly 66,550 is 278 per cent of the official prison capacity. [2]

4.6.4. Of those, approximately 25 per cent of those detained had been convicted and 71 per cent were awaiting trial or under trial. [2]

4.6.5. In some cases, cells are so crowded that prisoners sleep in shifts. The Dhaka Central Jail reportedly houses more than 9,775 prisoners in a facility designed for fewer than 3,000 people. [2]

4.6.6. A 1998 judicial report noted that the physical condition of jails is poor, and food is unhygienically prepared. Drugs are abused widely inside the prisons. [2]

4.6.7. The treatment of prisoners in the jails is not equal. There are three classes of cells: A, B, and C. Common criminals and low-level political workers generally are held in C cells, which often have dirt floors, no furnishings, and poor quality food. The use of restraining devices on prisoners in these cells is common. Conditions in A and B cells are markedly better; A cells are reserved for prominent prisoners. [2]

4.6.8. A new prison facility in Kashimpur, north of Dhaka, opened in September. [2]

4.6.9. In general the Government does not permit prison visits by independent Human Rights monitors. Government-appointed committees of prominent private citizens in each prison locality monitor prisons monthly, but do not release their findings. District judges occasionally also visit prisons, but rarely disclose their findings. [2]

4.7. MEDICAL SERVICES

4.7.1. Government Hospitals and General Practitioners are available throughout Bangladesh and facilities are easily available. [7a]

4.7.2. In Government institutions, medical treatment is undertaken for free or in some cases, for a very nominal fee. Treatment is on the same lines as in the countries of the West. [7a]

4.7.3. Bangladesh has a large number of multinational pharmaceutical companies like Glaxo, Aventis and Novartis. These companies produce much the same drugs as those produced in the West. [7a]

4.7.4. Tuberculosis and Asthma are common diseases of the sub-continent and treatment for these in Bangladesh is therefore widely and easily available. The treatment is normally successful. Asthma is a common disease in Bangladesh due to high pollution levels. This disease can be treated by any General Practitioner for a small fee. If the case is complicated it can be treated in hospitals and clinics. The Institute and Hospital for Chest Diseases in Mohakhali, Dhaka, deals with any kind of Chest Diseases. [7a]

4.8 EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

4.8.1. Bangladesh made universal primary education between the ages of 6 and 10 years mandatory in 1991, but it has not yet been able to implement the law fully. [2]

4.8.2. According to Education Ministry statistics reported by the US State Department report on Human Rights for the year 2001 in 2001, more than 80 per cent of children between the ages of 6 and 10 years were enrolled in school and enrollment of boys and girls was roughly equal. [2]

4.8.3. According to the US State Department in 2001, the Government has said that approximately 70 per cent of all children complete grade 5. However, attendance rates drop steadily with age [2]

4.8.4. To serve the maximum number of children with limited facilities, most schools have two shifts. As a result, most children in grades one and two spend two and a half hours a day in school; children in grades 3 to 5 are in school for four hours. [2]

4.8.5. Government efforts are supplemented by local non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) such as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), and foreign organisations such as UNICEF and the ILO . [2]

4.8.6. The Government provides incentives for rural female children between the ages of 12 and 16 years to remain in school. These incentives have been effective in increasing the number of girls in school. [2]

5. HUMAN RIGHTS

5.1 HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

Overview

5.1.1. The Human Rights record of Governments in Bangladesh has reportedly been poor in many significant areas. Governments have respected citizens' rights in some areas, whilst continuing to to commit serious abuses in others. [2]

5.1.2. The Authorities have tended to be defensive about international criticism regarding Human Rights problems. However, there is dialogue with international organisations and foreign diplomatic missions regarding such issues. [2]

5.1.3. In the past, governments have put pressure on individual Human Rights advocates, including filing charges against them that are known to be false, delaying the issue of re-entry visas for international Human Rights activists for long periods, harassment by the intelligence agencies and threats from activists of the ruling party. Missionaries who advocate Human Rights have also faced similar problems. [2]

Freedom of Speech and the Media

5.1.4. The Constitution provides for freedom of speech, expression, and the press, subject to "reasonable restrictions" in the interest of security, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency and morality, or to prohibit defamation or incitement to an offence. [2]

5.1.5. However, there are numerous examples of Governments limiting these rights in practice. [2]

The Press

5.1.6. The Press, numbering hundreds of daily and weekly publications, is a forum for a wide range of views and newspaper ownership and content are not subject to direct Governmental restriction. [2]

5.1.7. While most publications support the overall policies of the Government, several newspapers report critically on government policies and activities, including those of the Prime Minister. [2]

5.1.8. However, if a Government chooses, it can influence journalists through financial means. Government-sponsored advertising and allocations of newsprint imported at a favorable tariff rate are central to many newspapers' financial viability and consist of the largest source of revenue for many newspapers. [2]

5.1.9. In allocating advertising through the Department of Films and Publications, the Government states that it considers circulation of the newspapers, wage board implementation, objectivity in reporting, coverage of development activities, and "attitude towards the spirit of Bangladesh's War of Liberation." [2]

5.1.10. In the past, commercial organizations often were reluctant to advertise in newspapers critical of the Government due to fear of Governmental or bureaucratic retaliation; however, this appears to no longer be the case. [2]

5.1.11. The Government owns and controls virtually all radio and television stations with the exception of a few independent stations, such as Ekushey Television (ETV) and

Radio Metrowave. [2]

5.1.12. The activities of the Prime Minister occupy the bulk of prime time news bulletins on both television and radio, followed by the activities of members of the Cabinet. Opposition party news gets little coverage. [2]

5.1.13. As a condition of operation, both private stations are required to broadcast for free, some Government news programmes and speeches by the Prime Minister and President. In 1998 a Governmental committee recommended measures for authorising autonomy for radio and television broadcasts. [2]

5.1.14. On 12 July 2001, the Jatiya Sangsad approved two bills granting autonomy to state-run Bangladesh Television (BTV) and Bangladesh Betar (Bangladesh Radio). Even with the passage of these laws, the public still believes that there is no real autonomy for BTV and Bangladesh Radio. [2]

5.1.15. In addition to an official Government-owned wire service, there is one privately owned wire service affiliated with a major international company. [2]

5.1.16. Governments generally respect academic freedom. Although teachers and students at all levels are largely free to pursue academic assignments, research on extremely sensitive religious and political topics is forbidden. [2]

Freedom of Religion

5.1.17. The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion but also stipulates the right (subject to law, public order, and morality) to practice the religion of one's choice, and Governments respect this provision in practice. However, although the Government is secular, religion exerts a powerful influence on politics, and Governments are sensitive to the Muslim consciousness of the majority of Bangladeshi citizens. [2]

5.1.18. Approximately 88 per cent of the population is Muslim. [2] 10.5 per cent are Hindus [13] and there are also small groups of Buddhists, Christians and people who follow tribal religions. [1]

5.1.19. Religious organisations are not required to register with the Government. However, all non-Governmental organisations (NGO's), including religious organizations, are required to register with the NGO Affairs Bureau if they receive foreign money for social development projects. The Authorities have the legal ability to cancel the registration of an NGO or to take other action against it; such powers are rarely used and have not affected NGO's with religious affiliations. [2]

5.1.20. Religion is taught in schools, and children have the right to be taught their own religion. Some claim that many Government-employed religious teachers of minority religions are neither members of the religion they are teaching nor qualified to teach it. Therefore, in practice schools with few religious minority students often work out arrangements with local churches or temples, which direct religious studies outside school hours. However, transportation may not always be available for children to attend religion classes away from school. [2]

5.1.21. The law permits citizens to proselytise. However, strong social resistance to conversion from Islam means that most missionary efforts by Christian groups are aimed at serving communities that have been Christian for several generations or longer. [2]

5.1.22. The Government allows various religions to establish places of worship, to train clergy, to travel for religious purposes, and to maintain links with co-religionists abroad. Foreign missionaries may work in the country, but their right to proselytise is not protected by the Constitution. Some missionaries face problems in obtaining visas or renewing visas, which must be renewed annually. [2]

5.1.23. Some members of the Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist minorities continue to perceive, and experience, discrimination toward them from the Muslim majority. [2]

5.1.24. The Bangladesh Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikya Parishad (BHBCOP) - or Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist and Christian Unity Council - is a non-political organisation founded in 1988. Its main objective is to reinstate secularism as one of the four principles of the Constitution. [7c]

Freedom of Assembly and Association

5.1.25. The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly, subject to restrictions in the interest of public order and public health; however, Governments frequently limits this right. [2]

5.1.26. Awami League as well as BNP Governments have limited the freedom of assembly and movement, particularly for political opponents. [2]

5.1.27. The Criminal Procedure Code allows Governments to ban assemblies of more than four people. [2]

5.1.28. Governments sometimes use bans to prohibit rallies for security reasons, but many independent observers believe that such explanations are usually a pretext. Supporters of the ruling party will frequently schedule their own rallies for the same venue and time as scheduled opposition rallies and meetings, thus providing the Government with a basis for imposing a ban for security reasons. [2]

Employment Rights

5.1.29. Forced labour is prohibited under the Constitution [1]

Trafficking of People

5.1.30. Trafficking in women and children for the purpose of prostitution and at times for forced labor remain serious problems in Bangladesh, particularly in the southern region of Barisal, due to easy access to India and other countries in Asia. [2]

5.1.31. According to the US State Department, there are credible reports that Police have facilitated or been involved in the trafficking of women and children [2] Female victims of husbands' repression are particularly vulnerable.

5.1.32. Traffickers with promises of a high salary also deceive guardians suffering poverty, whose dependants are sold into prostitution for a price relating to their physical condition and appearance. The price increases once they reach the other countries of the sub-Continent, and those considered to be exceptionally beautiful are sent to Gulf States or Arabian contacts where a handsome amount of money can be fetched. [12g]

5.1.33. The Bangladesh National Women Lawyer's Association (BNWLA) conducts awareness programmes aimed at alerting poor people to the dangers of trafficking through leaflets, stickers, and posters. The BNWLA also provides legal assistance to trafficking victims, and initiates legal action against traffickers. The BNWLA runs a shelter home for trafficked women and children that provides health care, counseling, and training. The Center for Women and Children (CWCS) has networks to monitor trafficking across the country, conducts awareness meetings, and has a pilot project to make Police aware of the rights of women and children. [2]

Freedom of Movement

5.1.34. The Constitution guarantees every citizen freedom of movement subject to the law. However, Governments have, on occasion, restricted this right, usually for political reasons. [2]

5.1.35. Citizens generally are able to move freely within the country and to travel abroad, to emigrate, and to repatriate. [2]

5.1.36. Bangladeshi passports are invalid for travel to Israel. [2]

5.2. HUMAN RIGHTS - SPECIFIC GROUPS

WOMEN

5.2.1. Under the 1972 Constitution women are guaranteed fundamental rights. Any form of discrimination on the basis of sex is forbidden [3b] and there is a special commission to identify any gender bias against women. [12]

5.2.2. However, a United Nations' document in 1998 commented that for the most part, women remain in a subordinate position in society, [12]

5.2.3. Although legislative measures have been introduced to guarantee the rights of women and to protect them from various forms of violence, Governments have, over the years, failed to act effectively to protect women's basic freedoms. [12]

5.2.4. The Ministry of Women's Affairs is responsible for co-ordinating policies and programmes to reduce inequalities between men and women and to rescue women from exclusion. [12]

Violence against Women

5.2.5. Violence against women is difficult to quantify because of unreliable statistics, but recent reports have indicated that domestic violence is widespread. The Government, the media, and women's rights organizations have fostered a growing awareness of the problem of violence against women. [2]

5.2.6. A report released by the U.N. Population Fund in September 2000 asserted that 47 per cent of adult women reported physical abuse by their male partner. Much of the violence against women is related to disputes over dowries. [2]

5.2.7. According to a Human Rights organisation, there are 7 Government-run and 13 privately-run large shelter homes available for use by women who are victims of violence. Some smaller homes also are available for victims of violence. However, these are insufficient to meet victims' shelter needs. As a result, the Government often holds women who file rape complaints in "safe custody", usually in prison. [2]

"Safe custody"

5.2.8. "Safe custody" frequently results in further abuses against victims, discourages the filing of complaints by other women, and often continues for extended periods during which victims are often unable to gain release [2]

5.2.9. Women share facilities with people imprisoned for criminal offences. Whilst women may initially consent to this arrangement, it is often difficult for them to obtain their release later, or to gain access to family or lawyers. [2]

5.2.10. The US State Department has stated that there have been reports in recent years of Police officers raping women in safe custody, but there were no reports that this occurred during the year 2001. [2]

Women and Rape

5.2.11. The law prohibits rape and physical spousal abuse, but it makes no specific provision for spousal rape as a crime. [2]

5.2.12. According to one Human Rights organization, 622 women and girls were raped during the year. Prosecution of rapists is uneven. Whilst some rapists receive sentences of "life imprisonment" (in practice generally twenty-two and a half years), other cases are settled by village arbitration councils, which do not have the authority to prosecute criminals and therefore issue only a fine. Many rapes go unreported. [2]

5.2.13. Incidents of rape also appear to have increased, notably in the south west of the country [4b] It was reported that 85 women and children were raped in the region during a seven-month period in 2000, with fifty per cent of these occurring in Jessore. It was alleged that most rapes cannot be proved due to inadequate medical tests and delays in Police investigations. Even when rape is proved through sufficient medical testing and investigations, perpetrators reportedly escape arrest as they are sheltered by influential elements of society. Others allegedly escape to India. [4b]

Vigilantism against women

5.2.14. Human Rights groups and press reports indicate that incidents of "vigilantism" against women--sometimes led by religious leaders--at times occur, particularly in rural areas. These include humiliating, painful punishments, such as the whipping of women accused of moral offences [2]

Acid attacks

5.2.15. Acid attacks are a growing concern. Assailants throw acid in the faces of numerous women and a small but growing number of men, leaving victims horribly disfigured and often blind. [2]

5.2.16. According to the Acid Survivors' Foundation, a local organization that offers assistance to acid attack victims, approximately 300 acid attacks occur each year. [2]

5.2.16. Nearly 80 per cent of acid attack victims are female; more than 40 per cent are under the age of 18. Even after extensive treatment in the country and abroad, victims remain severely scarred, making social reintegration very difficult. [2]

5.2.17. The most common motivation for acid-throwing attacks against women is revenge by a rejected suitor; land disputes are another leading cause of the acid attacks. Few perpetrators of the acid attacks are prosecuted. Often the perpetrator flings the acid in through an open window during the night, making cases difficult to prove. [2]

5.2.18. Of approximately 750 reported assaults with acid since 1998, 25 perpetrators have been found guilty. Of the 25 guilty verdicts, 9 perpetrators were sentenced to death. Sentences are commensurate with the extent of the victim's burns. The US State Department reported that Public Interest litigation against easy access to acid remained pending at the end of the year 2001. [2]

5.2.19. Two NGO's lead the effort to counter acid violence: Naripokkhkho ("Pro-Woman") and the Acid Survivors' Foundation. Between the two, their coordinated approach includes public awareness, case reporting, short- and long-term treatment, and legal justice. Societal support for both organisations in their attempts to combat acid violence is very strong. [2]

Education and Women

5.2.20. Women often are ignorant of their rights because of continued high illiteracy rates and unequal educational opportunities, and strong social stigmas and lack of economic means to obtain legal assistance frequently keep women from seeking redress in the courts. [2]

5.2.21. Many NGO's operate programmes to raise women's awareness of their rights, and to encourage and assist them in exercising those rights. [2]

5.2.22. Literacy rates are approximately 29 per cent for women, compared with 52 per cent for men. [2]

Religious discrimination against Women

5.2.23. Under the Muslim Family Ordinance, female heirs inherit less than male relatives do, and wives have fewer divorce rights than husbands. Men are permitted to have up to four wives, although this right is rarely exercised. [2]

5.2.24. Laws provide some protection for women against arbitrary divorce and the taking of additional wives by husbands without the first wife's consent, but the protections generally apply only to registered marriages. Marriages in rural areas sometimes are not registered because of ignorance of the law. Under the law, a Muslim husband is required to pay his ex-wife alimony for only 3 months, but again this is rarely enforced. [2]

Women and Employment

5.2.25. Employment opportunities have been stronger for women than for men in the last decade, which largely is due to the growth of the export garment industry in Dhaka and Chittagong. Eighty per cent of the 1.4 million garment sector workers are women. [2]

5.2.26. Programmes extending micro-credit to large numbers of rural women have also contributed to greater economic power for women. However, women still fill only a small fraction of other wage-earning jobs. According to a report by the Public Administration Reforms Commission publicized in October 2000, women hold only 12 per cent of government jobs, and only 2 per cent of senior positions. [2]

5.2.27. The percentage of women in politics or in Government jobs does not correspond to their percentage of the population. The US State Department says that Governmental policy to include more women in Government jobs has only had limited effect. In recent years, approximately 15 per cent of all recruits into the Government Service have been women. [2]

5.2.28. The US State Department says that according to a Governmental survey released in May 2001?, women comprise only 2.1 per cent of the workforce in the Home Ministry, and only 1.77 per cent of the workforce in the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. [2]

5.2.29. Eighty per cent of the 1.4 million garment sector workers are women. The garment and shrimp processing industries employ the highest number of female laborers. [2]

5.2.30. Forty-three per cent of women work in the agriculture, fisheries, and livestock sectors, but 70 per cent of them are unpaid family laborers. [2]

5.2.31. Many women work as manual laborers on construction projects as well, and constitute nearly 25 per cent of all manufacturing workers. [2]

5.2.32. Women also are found in the electronics, food processing, beverage, and handicraft industries. [2]

"Fatwas" against Women

5.2.33. The US State Department reports that on 3 February 2001, after the High Court ruled that all fatwas should henceforth be illegal, some NGOs organized a rally in Dhaka to applaud the ruling, hailing it as a victory for women and all who have suffered from fatwas. These NGO's transported women from rural areas into the city for the rally. Some Islamic groups, claiming that outlawing all fatwas was an attack on Islam, blocked the main roads into the city and tried to disrupt the rally. The Police arrested some leaders of the Islami Oikkyo Jote (IOJ) in connection with the resultant disorder. [2]

The Women and Children Repression Prevention Act

5.2.34. The Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, passed in January 2000, replaced an earlier law of the same name. The Act provided special procedures for people accused of violence against women and children. The new law calls for harsher penalties, provides compensation to victims, and requires action against investigating officers for negligence or willful failure in duty. People arrested under this Act cannot be granted bail during an initial investigation period of up to 90 days. [2]

5.2.35. Some Human Rights groups have expressed concern that a large number of allegations made under the Act are false, since the non-bailable period of detention is an effective tool for exacting personal vengeance. Typically, fewer than 3 per cent of detainees under this Act are convicted. If bail is not granted, the law does not specify a time limit on pre-trial detention. [2]

CHILDREN

5.2.36. Progress has been made in the area of child rights since Bangladesh ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, although in practice many children still do not have full access to their rights. [6]

5.2.37. The Authorities undertake programmes in the areas of primary education, health, and nutrition. These efforts are supplemented by local and foreign NGOs, such as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), the country's largest NGO, UNICEF and the ILO. [2]

5.2.38. These joint efforts have allowed the country to begin making significant progress in improving health, nutrition, and education. However, slightly more than half of all Bangladeshi children are still chronically malnourished. [2]

5.2.39. The US State Department reports that UNICEF is implementing a programme to provide education to 350,000 (primarily working) children in urban slum areas around Bangladesh in cooperation with the Non-Formal Education Directorate of the Government, and some NGO partners [2].

5.2.40. Because of widespread poverty, many children are compelled to work at a very young age. [2]

5.2.41. Thousands of children are allegedly employed by the garment industry, a major foreign currency earner. Young boys are also employed in areas such as brick fields, jute mills, motor garages, chemical industries, textile plants, tea plantations and construction. The service industry also employs them as porters, shoe shining boys and hotel and restaurant employees. Many are separated from their families and some, having escaped such an existence, have relayed accounts of torture by employers. Indifference to the plight of child employees has been attributed to connections between employers and local politicians and officials. [8a]

5.2.42. Children also earn money in domestic service and by prostitution. [2]

5.2.43. UNICEF has estimated that there are approximately 10,000 child prostitutes in Bangladesh. Other estimates have been as high as 29,000. [2]

5.2.44. Prostitution is legal, but only for those over 18 years of age and with Government certification. However, this minimum age requirement is commonly ignored by the Authorities, and is easily circumvented by false statements of age. [2]

5.2.45. Procurers of minors are rarely prosecuted, and large numbers of child prostitutes work in brothels. [2]

5.2.46. The US State Department has also commented that children who work in domestic service can work in conditions that resemble servitude. [2]

5.2.47. This labour-related child abuse occurs commonly at all levels of Bangladeshi society and throughout the country. Sometimes children are seriously injured or killed in workplaces. [2]

5.2.48. Reports from Human Rights monitors indicate that child abandonment, kidnapping, and trafficking for prostitution continue to be serious and widespread problems. [2]

5.2.49. By law, juveniles are required to be detained separately from adults; however, due to a lack of facilities in many areas, in practice many are housed with adult prisoners. [2]

5.2.50. The US State Department reports that in July 2001, according to Governmental statistics, 310 children were housed in jails along with their mothers, and 471 children under the age of 16 were in jail in connection with crimes they were accused of committing. [2]

5.2.51. Newspapers also reported 5 separate cases of children being tortured by their domestic employers; in one case a 10-year-old girl allegedly was beaten until she lost consciousness. [2]

Trafficking in Children

5.2.52. There is a widespread network of trafficking of children to India, Pakistan, the Middle East and South-East Asia. [3c]

5.2.53. The former Prime Minister reportedly succeeded in curbing the practice of child smuggling by increasing border surveillance. [10]

5.2.44. Legislation concerning Women and Children includes:

Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929

Dowry Prohibition Act 1980 (amended 1982)

Cruelty to Women (Deterrent Punishment) Act 1983

Family Court Ordinance 1985 (amended 1984) [3b]

Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 1995 [2]

Bangladesh has also ratified the following international treaties:

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the
Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others

ETHNIC GROUPS

Biharis

5.2.45. Biharis are Muslims of non-Bengali ethnicity who emigrated to what was formerly East Pakistan during the 1947 partition of British India. Most supported Pakistan during Bangladesh's 1971 War of Independence. [2] They can apply for Bangladeshi citizenship, [3c] although Bangladesh has no legal obligation to grant them citizenship and permanent local integration. [9b] They have, however, declined to accept Bangladesh citizenship and have asked to be repatriated to Pakistan. [2]

5.2.46. Until 16 December 1971 Bihari Muslims had been Pakistani citizens. Many with the means to do so left for what is now Pakistan through illegal smuggling chains. A process of repatriation began in 1973 when Z. Ali Bhutto was Pakistani Prime Minister. A three-point criterion was established to determine eligibility, which included those domiciled in West Pakistan, federal government employees and members of divided families. [15a]

5.2.47. Pakistan allowed more than 120,000 Biharis to move to Pakistan in 1973, [9a] and by 1982 the number of officially repatriated Biharis had reached 169,000. Financial constraints nonetheless hindered the repatriation process. However this alone was not the only factor obstructing the Biharis' repatriation to Pakistan. Opposition came from the Pakistani nationalist Sindhis and also from a section of the Punjabis.

5.2.48. In September 1991 Pakistan did agree to initiate a process of repatriation and rehabilitation of 250,000 Biharis. Some refugees travelled to Pakistan from Bangladesh in January 1993, [1] but this amounted to only 325 families before funding constraints suspended the process. [8c]

5.2.49. In 1995 newspaper reports had indicated that Pakistan no longer intended to accept the Biharis. However in June of that year the embassy of Pakistan in Washington advised the US Committee for Refugees that those reports were untrue. [9a]

5.2.50. According to the US State Department report on Human Rights for the year 2001, approximately 300,000 Bihari Muslims live in various camps throughout the country [2] However an organisation calling itself the Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee (SPGRD) has estimated the total number to be 500,000. With current growth rates, there are reports that the Bihari population could reach one million within the next ten years. [8c]

5.2.51. The status of the Biharis remains unresolved. [3c] Indifference on the part of successive governments of Bangladesh and Pakistan on the issue of repatriation to Pakistan has served to increase the plight of the "stranded Biharis". [8c]

5.2.52. Since Bangladesh's independence therefore the Biharis have remained in what were supposed to be temporary camps. An entire generation has known of no other existence than in the camps. [2]

5.2.53. Biharis are not technically refugees but nonetheless still face many of the problems that refugees would, therefore the U.S. Committee for Refugees includes them in populations that they consider to be in "refugee-like circumstances". [9b]

5.2.54. Biharis are now becoming more concerned with how they live rather than where they live. A more pragmatic attitude appears to be developing regarding repatriation to Pakistan, with Bihari groups advocating integration becoming more active. Many are now saying that they do not want to move to Pakistan but to live normal lives in Bangladesh, the only home they have ever known. [9b]

5.2.55. Most Bihari children do not attend school and some send their children out to work to help the family survive. [2]

5.2.56. Living conditions in the camps are very poor, although Biharis are not restricted to the camps. Some Biharis have moved out and are living and working alongside local people, although some people regard Biharis as foreigners and do not want them living among Bangladeshis. [9b]

Chakmas

5.2.57. Chakmas are one of the main tribal groups living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). [9a]

5.2.58. The Chakmas had fled from Bangladesh to India in 1986 to escape harassment by the Bangladeshi military and Muslim settlers in their native CHT region. [9a]

5.2.59. In May 1992 the Bangladesh and Indian governments agreed a process of repatriation. However, the refugees (fearing persecution by the Bangladesh security forces) proved reluctant to move. [1]

5.2.60. Following negotiations between the Indian and Bangladesh governments and the Chakma refugees in early 1994, the process of repatriation commenced in mid-February. [1]

5.2.61. Although there was no organized Chakma repatriation during 1996, nearly 3,000 Chakmas repatriated on their own initiative according to the Bangladesh government. The Government then in power, said that it provided the returnees cash grants for shelter construction, food and agricultural loans. [9a] At the end of 1997 an estimated 31,000 refugees were still in camps in India awaiting repatriation. [10b]

Rohingyas

5.2.62. Rohingyas are Muslims from the northern Burmese state of Arakan [2]

5.2.63. Approximately 251,000 Rohingyas crossed into Bangladesh in late 1991 and 1992, fleeing repression. The Government then in power effectively categorised them as illegal economic migrants and turned back as many people as possible at the border. [2]

5.2.64. The Rohingyas who were allowed to stay in Bangladesh were accommodated in camps where they suffered physical abuse, and coercion by camp administrators trying to secure their return to Burma. [2]

5.2.65. In April 1999, the UNHCR urged the Bangladeshi authorities, to allow any Rohingyas who could not return to Burma to be allowed to work in the country, benefit from local medical programmes, and send their children to local schools. The authorities refused these requests. [2]

5.2.66. The US State Department report on Human Rights for the year 2001 has reported that since 1992 approximately 232,000 Rohingyas have returned voluntarily to Burma, 7,700 have died, and more than 20,800 refugees remain in two camps administered by the Bangladeshi authorities in cooperation with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). [2]

5.2.67. The US State Department report on Human Rights for the year 2001 estimates that nearly 22700 Rohingyas have left the camps and are living amongst local Bangladeshi citizens, but says that other sources estimate that this figure is more than 100000. Those Rohingyas that have left the camps, live in precarious circumstances and with no formal documentation. [2]

5.2.68. The US State Department report on Human Rights for the year 2001 says that more than 32,200 children have been born to Rohingya parents. [2]

5.2.69. Bangladesh and Burma are still engaged in discussions about Rohingya repatriation. [2]

Ahmadis

5.2.70. In the past, the Ahmadis (or Ahmadiyas), whom many mainstream Muslims consider heretical, have been the target of attacks and harassment. [2]

5.2.71. According to the US State Department report for Human Rights in the year 2001, an Ahmadiya mosque in Kushtia which mainstream Muslims captured in 1999 remains under Police control, preventing Ahmadiyas from worshipping. [2]
In October 1999, a bomb killed 6 Ahmadiyas and injured more than 40 others who were attending Friday prayers at their mosque in Khulna; the case was still unresolved at the end of 2001. [2]

POLITICAL ACTIVISTS

5.2.72. Armed clashes between student groups of different political parties or of different factions within a particular party often result in prolonged closures of colleges and universities in Bangladesh. [2]

5.2.73. The situation on public university campuses remains volatile, seriously inhibiting the ability of students to receive a university education and of teachers to teach. [2]

5.2.74. According to the US State Department, Campus violence has little to do with ideological differences, and more to do with extortion rackets run by non-student party activists, including those based on physical control of dormitories. [2]

5.2.75. As a result of widespread violence and campus closures, it can take nearly 6 years to earn a 4-year degree. However, several private universities that were established during the 1990's are not affected by student political violence. [2]

JOURNALISTS

5.2.76. In the past, journalists have pressed for the repeal of the Official Secrets Act of 1923. According to the Act, a citizen must prove why he or she needs information before the Government will provide it. By placing the burden of proof on the citizen, the Official Secrets Act protects corrupt government officials from public scrutiny, hindering transparency and accountability of government at all levels. [2]

5.2.77. The press, numbering hundreds of daily and weekly publications, is a forum for a wide range of views. While most publications support the overall policies of the Government, several newspapers report critically on government policies and activities, including those of the Prime Minister. [2]

5.2.78. In addition to an official government-owned wire service, there is one privately owned wire service affiliated with a major international company. [2]

5.2.79. Newspaper ownership and content are not subject to direct government restriction. However, if the Government chooses, it can influence journalists through financial means. Government-sponsored advertising and allocations of newsprint imported at a favorable tariff rate are central to many newspapers' financial viability. [2]

5.2.80. Government-sponsored advertising is the largest source of revenue for many newspapers. In allocating advertising through the Department of Films and Publications, the Government states that it considers circulation of the newspapers, wage board implementation, objectivity in reporting, coverage of development activities, and "attitude towards the spirit of Bangladesh's War of Liberation." [2]

5.2.81. In the past, commercial organizations often were reluctant to advertise in newspapers critical of the Government due to fear of government or bureaucratic retaliation; however, this appears to no longer be the case. [2]

5.2.82. The Government owns and controls virtually all radio and television stations with the exception of a few independent stations, such as Ekushey Television (ETV) and Radio Metrowave. [2]

5.2.83. The activities of the Prime Minister occupy the bulk of prime time news bulletins on both television and radio, followed by the activities of members of the Cabinet. Opposition party news gets little coverage. [2]

5.2.84. As a condition of operation, both private stations are required to broadcast for free some government news programmes and speeches by the Prime Minister and President. In 1998 a government committee recommended measures for authorizing autonomy for radio and television broadcasts. [2]

5.2.85. On July 12, Parliament approved two bills granting autonomy to state-run Bangladesh Television (BTV) and Bangladesh Betar (Bangladesh Radio). Even with the passage of these laws, the public still believes that there is no real autonomy for BTV and Bangladesh Radio. [2]

5.2.86. Government intrusion into the selection of news remained a pervasive problem. Many journalists at these stations exercised self-censorship out of regard for what they felt were the government's wishes. [2]

5.2.87. Journalists and others potentially are subject to incarceration when criminal libel proceedings are filed by private parties. Ruling party M.P.'s filed separate criminal libel suits against several newspapers after articles were published that the politicians viewed as false and defamatory. The journalists in all cases received anticipatory bail from the courts, and none of the cases moved to trial. Sedition charges remained pending, and those people accused remained on bail. [2]

5.2.88. Virtually all print journalists practice self-censorship to some degree, and commonly are reluctant to criticize politically influential personalities in both the Government and the opposition; however, some journalists do make such criticism. Many journalists cite fear of possible harassment, retaliation, or physical harm as a reason to avoid sensitive stories. Violent attacks on journalists and newspapers, and efforts to intimidate them by government leaders, political party activists, and others frequently occur [2]

5.2.89. Attacks by political activists on journalists also are common during times of political street violence, and some journalists were injured in Police actions. [2]

5.2.90. Feminist author Taslima Nasreen, whose latest book was banned in 1999, remains abroad after being freed on bond whilst criminal charges against her for insulting religious beliefs remain pending. [2]

5.2.91. A government Film Censor Board reviews local and foreign films, and may censor

or ban them on the grounds of state security, law and order, religious sentiment, obscenity, foreign relations, defamation, or plagiarism. The Board did not ban any locally produced Bangla films during the year. However, the Board banned the screenings of several imported English-language movies for their pornographic content. Video rental libraries provide a wide variety of films to their borrowers, and government efforts to enforce censorship on these rental films are sporadic and ineffectual. The Government does not limit citizens' access to the Internet. [2]

5.2.92. Foreign publications are subject to review and censorship. Censorship most often is used in cases of immodest or obscene photographs, perceived misrepresentation or defamation of Islam, and objectionable comments about national leaders. [2]

5.3 HUMAN RIGHTS - OTHER ISSUES

Corruption

5.3.1. The Official Secrets Act of 1923 can protect corrupt government officials from public scrutiny, hindering the transparency and accountability of the Government at all levels. [2]

5.3.2. There is widespread Police corruption and lack of discipline. Police officers committed numerous serious Human Rights abuses and were seldom disciplined, even for the most egregious actions. [2]

5.3.3. Efforts to improve governance and economic growth through reform have been unsuccessful, and were blocked by bureaucratic intransigence, vested economic interests, endemic corruption, and political polarization. The lower judiciary is subject to executive influence and suffers from corruption. [2]

5.3.4. Police corruption remains a problem and there were credible reports that Police facilitated or were involved in trafficking in women and children
A bank officer from Chittagong who spent 15 years in prison awaiting trial on corruption charges was finally released. If convicted, his maximum sentence would have been no more than 10 years. [2]

5.3.5. There also is corruption within the legal process, especially at lower levels. These conditions, and the corruption encountered in the judicial process, effectively prevent many people from obtaining a fair trial or justice. However, the Labor Court's overall effectiveness is hampered by a serious case backlog, and in the past there have been allegations that employers have corrupted some of its deliberations. [2]

5.3.6. The existing small corps of labor inspectors continues to be ineffective against all labor problems because of inefficiency and corruption. [2]

5.3.7. Enforcement by the Labor Ministry's industrial inspectors is weak, due both to the low number of labor inspectors, and to endemic corruption and inefficiency among inspectors. Due to a high unemployment rate and inadequate enforcement of the laws, workers demanding correction of dangerous working conditions or refusing to participate in perceived dangerous activities risk losing their jobs. [2]

Torture

5.3.8. The Constitution prohibits torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading punishment. However, according to the US State Department report on Human Rights for the year 2001, Governments rarely convict or punish those responsible for torture. [2]

5.3.9. Human Rights Watch (HRW)has, in the past, claimed that laws to combat law and

order problems have served to increase the number of torture victims in Bangladesh. [5]

5.3.10. HRW further claimed that the poor are the least protected against becoming torture victims, whilst those with political connections to successive ruling parties are the most protected. It reported that some poor people had been tortured at the behest of landlords or local leaders in return for a bribe. However, HWR also claimed that local political leaders are the most frequent torture victims. [5]

Domestic servants

5.3.11. In the past, the Authorities have brought criminal charges against employers who abuse domestic servants; however, many impoverished families settle for financial compensation. [2]

5.3.12. The Bangladesh Domestic Workers Association (BDWA) was formed to oversee the rights and security of domestic employees. The association found that fifteen domestic helps were tortured to death in July and August 1999 alone. Of these, three were burnt to death and three housemaids were killed following rape. Young maids are also forced into prostitution, and it is claimed that during the same period over three hundred were trafficked out of the country. [12f]

5.3.13. Housemaids are the main victims in terms of Human Rights abuse. In the event of male members of the employer's family forcing the housemaid into sexual relations with them, either through pressure or even rape, it is the maid who is punished by the family. Victims are also deprived of justice, with the lack of evidence and witnesses making prosecutions difficult. Many victims also fear reprisal. [12f]

ANNEX A

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

Source: BBC [6] - unless otherwise stated

1947 - British colonial rule over India ended. A largely Muslim state comprising East and West Pakistan is established, either side of the new country of India.

1949 - The Awami League was established to campaign for East Pakistan's autonomy from West Pakistan.

1970 - The Awami League, under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won an overwhelming election victory in East Pakistan. The government in West Pakistan refused to recognise the results, leading to rioting.

26th March 1971 - The Awami League proclaimed the independence of the province of East Pakistan. The new country was called Bangladesh. Just under 10 million Bangladeshis fled to India as troops from West Pakistan were defeated with Indian assistance.

1972 - Sheikh Mujibur Rahman - known as "Sheikh Mujib" became Prime Minister of Bangladesh. He began a programme of nationalising key industries in an attempt to improve living standards, but with little success.

1974 - Severe floods devastated much of the grain crop, leading to an estimated 28,000 deaths. A national state of emergency was declared. There was political unrest.

1975 - Sheikh Mujib became President of Bangladesh.

August 1975 - Sheikh Mujib was assassinated in a military coup. Martial law was imposed.

1976 - The military banned trade unions.

1977 - General Zia Rahman assumed the Presidency. Islam was adopted in the Constitution.

1979 - Martial law was lifted following elections, which Zia's Bangladesh National Party (BNP) won.

1981 - General Zia was assassinated during an abortive military coup.

1982 - General Ershad assumed power in an army coup. He suspended the Constitution and political parties.

1983 - Ershad's proposal that all schools should teach Arabic and the Koran led to demonstrations. Limited political activity was permitted. Ershad became President.

1986 - Parliamentary and Presidential elections. Ershad was elected to a five-year term. He lifted martial law and reinstated the Constitution.

1987 - State of emergency declared after opposition demonstrations and strikes.

1988 - Islam became the state religion. Floods cover up to three-quarters of the country. Tens of millions are made homeless.

1990 - Ershad stepped down following mass protests.

1991 - Begum Khaleda Zia, widow of President Zia, became Prime Minister. The Constitution was changed to render the position of President ceremonial. The Prime Minister then had primary executive power. A cyclonic tidal wave killed up to 138,000 people.

1996 - Two sets of elections eventually saw the Awami League win power, with Sheikh Hasina Wajed, the daughter of Sheikh Mujib, becoming Prime Minister.

1997 - The opposition BNP began a campaign of strikes against the Awami League government.

1998 - Two-thirds of the country was devastated by the worst floods ever. Fifteen former army officers were sentenced to death for involvement in assassination of Sheikh Mujib in 1975.

September 2000 - Sheikh Hasina criticised military regimes in a UN speech, prompting the Pakistani leader General Musharraf to cancel talks with her. Relations were strained further by a row over a leaked Pakistani report on the 1971 war of that led to Bangladeshi independence.

December 2000 - Bangladesh expelled a Pakistani diplomat for comments on the 1971 war. The diplomat had put the number of dead at 26,000, whereas Bangladesh maintained that nearly three million people were killed. Bangladesh wanted Pakistan to apologise for alleged genocide it said Pakistani forces were guilty of during the war.

April 2001 - Seven people were killed in a bomb blast at a Bengali New Year concert in Dhaka. Sixteen Indian and three Bangladeshi soldiers were killed in the worst border clashes between the two countries.

April 2001 - The High Court confirmed the death sentences on 12 ex-army officers for killing Sheikh Mujib.

June 2001 - A bomb killed ten people attending Sunday mass at a Roman Catholic church in Baniarchar town. A bomb at the Awami league office near Dhaka killed 22

people. Parliament approved a Bill providing protection for Sheikh Hasina and her sister Sheikh Rehana

July 2001 - Hasina stepped down, handing power to a caretaker government under Constitutional provisions for the convening of national elections. Sheikh Hasine is the first Prime Minister in Bangladesh to complete a full term of office.

September 2001 - At least eight people are killed and hundreds injured as two bombs exploded at an election rally in south-western Bangladesh.

October 2001 - Hasina lost the election to Khaleda Zia's BNP and its three coalition partners.

November 2001 - The new BNP-led administration repealed the law which guaranteed lifelong security to Sheikh Hasina and her sister.

December 2001 - Government increased the price of some fuels by as much as 90 per cent in an effort to balance the country's budget.

ANNEX B

POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS

Awami League

Founded 1949. Currently headed by former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Advocates socialist economy and secular state; pro-Indian. [1]

Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Dal (Bangladesh Nationalist Party)

Founded 1978 (by merger of groups supporting Ziaur Rahman). [1]

Democratic League

Founded 1976. Conservative. [1]

Freedom Party

Founded 1987. Islamic. [1]

Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ)

Jamaat-e-Islami

Founded 1941 (Islamic fundamentalist). [1] Opposed to Bangladesh's independence in the 1971 civil war with Pakistan. [22] The party was banned after independence but got its rights back after General Zia (the late husband of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia) allowed them and other fundamentalist parties to enter politics after the first AL led government of Bangladesh had banned them from politics. The party is a strong cadre-based party, yet lacks mass support as electoral results have shown. [22]

Jatiya Party (National Party)

Founded 1983 as Jana Dal; reorganized 1986, when National Front (founded 1985) formally converted itself into a single pro-Ershad grouping. Advocates nationalism, democracy, Islamic ideals and progress. [1] Linked with seven other smaller parties to agitate against the (AL) government on 15 December 1998. Formed new anti-government alliance on 20 December 1998 with leaders of BNP and JI. [5i] On 30 December 1998 Anwar Hossain Manju, Communications Minister, was sacked from the Jatiya Party's presidium, from the

post of its vice-chairman and the party's membership, for violating party discipline and making outrageous statements. [4k] Former Prime Minister Kazi Zafar Ahmed, who was expelled from the party on 5 June 1997 [11f] returned to the Jatiya Party. [6d] However in November 1999 he was sentenced in absentia to fifteen years imprisonment for embezzlement. [19a]

Gained 14 seats in the October 2001 general election although two other factions of the Jatiya Party also contested - the Jatiya Manju faction who gained one seat and the Jatiya Naziur faction who formed part of the BNP-led coalition. [16]

STUDENT MOVEMENTS

Bangladesh Chhatra League-BCL (Sha-PA)

Affiliated to Awami League. [11c]

Gonotantrik Chhatra League

Affiliated to Democratic League. [11c]

Islami Chhatra Shibir

Affiliated to Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat). [11c]

Jatiya Chhatra Samaj

Affiliated to Jatiya Party. [11c]

Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD)

Affiliated to Bangladesh Nationalist Party. [11c]

PROSCRIBED ORGANIZATIONS

Biplobi Communist Party (before 1971 known as the Communist Party of East Pakistan)

Maoist movement. Fought against both Pakistan army and Awami League during independence struggle. By mid-1970s largely suppressed by State; revived 1980s. [11a]

Purba Bangla Sarbohara Party ('East Bengalis Who Have Nothing')

Radical Maoist movement; emerged during lead-up to independence. Seeks communist revolution by violent means. Responsible for the assassination of police, officials and merchants. [11a]

Swadhin Bangabhumi Movement ('Free Land of Bengal')

Hindu separatist movement. Founded in Calcutta by former Awami League MP, who fled to India in August 1975. Seeks separate state in south-west Bangladesh (where there is a large Hindu minority). Responsible for attempted take-over of Bangladesh High Commission in Calcutta in 1984. [11a]

Shanti Bahini ('Peace Force')

Armed wing of the Parbattya Chittagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), a tribal insurgency which operated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Founded in 1972 by two brothers, Shantu and Manobendra Larma. Stood for political independence for the Chittagong Hills Tracts, and drew support from Chakma tribes. [11a] However, following the Peace Accord of 2 December 1997, bShantu Larma reportedly declared an

end to the Shanti Bahini. [4j] The group is now considered to have disbanded, having surrendered their arms and had criminal cases against them dropped as part of the Peace Accord. [7k]

ANNEX C

PROMINENT PEOPLE

AHMED Shahabuddin

Current president. [1]

Motiur Rahman Nizami

ERSHAD, General Hossain Mohammed

Came to power following coup in March 1982; resigned December 1990. Joined Jatiya Party in 1986. [1]

RAHMAN, Sheikh Mujibur (Mujib)

Bangladesh's first Prime Minister; assassinated August 1975. [1]

RAHMAN, Ziaur (General Zia)

Assumed presidency April 1977; assassinated May 1981. [1]

Sheikh Hasina

Daughter of late Sheikh Mujibur. Former Awami League Prime Minister. [1]

ZIA, Begum Khaleda

Leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. []

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